# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

**Proposed Action:** Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 Transmission Line Upgrades

**Project No.:** P03455

**Project Manager:** Gerri Colburn, TEPF-CSB-2

**Location:** Kittitas County, Washington

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to correct impairments and to replace conductor and fiber on the 115-kilovolt (kV) Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 transmission line near Ellensburg, Kittitas County, Washington (Township 17 North, Range 18 East, Sections 11, 14, and 15). The transmission line is impaired to the ground between structures 3/7 and 3/9, and the conductor and fiber optic cable have reached the end of their functional capacities. Therefore, the project is required to bring the transmission line into compliance with the National Electrical Safety Code (NESC), ensure system safety and reliability, and prevent potential damage to the conductor and equipment.

The following specific actions are proposed:

- Replace six existing wood-pole transmission structures in approximately the same locations from structure 3/3 to structure 3/8. Existing structures would be replaced in-kind, replaced with three-pole structures, and/or raised approximately 10 to 15 feet. BPA could also replace buried counterpoise, as necessary if it is damaged during the structure replacements.

- Replace existing or install new 28-inch square anchor plates, rods, and guy wires at five structures (structure 3/5 would not be guyed).

- Install two temporary wood, H-frame guard structures on either side of I-90 between structures 3/6 and 3/7. The temporary guard structures would be removed after conductor stringing is complete.

- Remove and restring approximately 2,300 feet of conductor from Clymer Substation to structure 3/8 and approximately 6,100 feet of fiber optic cable from structure 3/2 to structure 4/3. The conductor and fiber replacements would require three pulling and tensioning (P/T) sites.

- Acquire temporary construction easements, where needed.

In total, the proposed action would temporarily disturb up to approximately 3.5 acres, and would permanently disturb no more than approximately 0.1 acres. Temporary disturbance would include

minor crushing, stripping, or burying low-growing grasses and soil excavation to remove and install transmission structures. To complete the project, BPA would use heavy equipment, including excavators, cranes, boom trucks, and bucket trucks, as well as light-duty pickup trucks and power tools. A drone could be used to string conductor and fiber, if required. Materials and equipment staging and P/T sites would be located in previously-disturbed areas and/or alongside transmission structure work areas. BPA would deploy wetland matting to access structures 3/2 and 3/3, and no access road work or landing pad construction would be required. The proposed action would be completed within approximately 16 days.

**Findings:** In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) of the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (57 FR 15144, Apr. 24, 1992, as amended at 61 FR 36221-36243, Jul. 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996, 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011), BPA has determined that the proposed action:

1) fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D (see attached Environmental Checklist);
2) does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal; and
3) has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

*/s/ Walker Stinnette*
Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

*/s/ Sarah T .Biegel* *May 22, 2023*
Sarah T. Biegel Date
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

# Categorical Exclusion Environmental Checklist

This checklist documents environmental considerations for the proposed project and explains why the project would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources and would meet other integral elements of the applied categorical exclusion.

**Proposed Action:** Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 Transmission Line Upgrades

## Project Site Description

The project site includes BPA's existing Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 transmission line right-of-way (ROW) from structure 3/2 to structure 4/3 as well as three P/T sites and two materials and equipment staging areas near Ellensburg, Kittitas County, Washington (Township 17 North, Range 18 East, Sections 11, 14, and 15). The majority of work areas, including all transmission structure replacements and temporary guard structure installations, would occur entirely within the existing ROW, while the P/T sites and staging areas may partially extend off-ROW in some cases. All ground-disturbing activities would occur in areas that are either graveled or vegetated with low-growing common grasses, forbs, and weeds that are grazed or regularly mowed as part of routine transmission line maintenance. The Yakima River flows through the ROW between structures 3/9 and 4/1, and portions of the project site are located within the River's floodplain. Wetlands were identified at structures 3/2 and 3/3. Work would occur on private property and on public lands owned or managed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Schaake Property), Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) (Mattoon Lake), and Washington Department of Transportation in areas where BPA has, or would acquire, transmission line and construction easements. Privately-owned lands are currently used for grazing cattle, while the Schaake Property is undergoing habitat restoration and Mattoon Lake is managed for public recreation. Outside of the ROW, the surrounding area is primarily characterized by rural residential, agricultural, and recreational land uses.

## Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

### 1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On January 13, 2023, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation – Columbia-Cascades Area Office
- Washington Department of Transportation
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)

BPA conducted background research and an intensive pedestrian and subsurface survey of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). The Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 transmission line is considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. However, the proposed undertaking would neither alter the integrity of the transmission line, nor diminish any of the standards under which it is considered eligible. No other historic or cultural resources were identified within the APE. Therefore, on March 20, 2023, BPA determined

that the proposed undertaking would result in result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: WA 2022 144; DAHP Log No.: 2023-01-00298-BPA). Concurrence was received from DAHP on March 21, 2023.

Notes:

- Implement an Inadvertent Discovery Plan (IDP) in the unlikely event that cultural material is encountered during the implementation of the proposed project. BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds to ensure integrity of site and materials until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties. Contact one of the BPA environmental leads and/or the BPA archaeologist for further instruction.

## 2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed action could cause no more than approximately 0.1 acres of permanent soil impacts and approximately 3.5 acres of temporary soil disturbance. Temporarily disturbed soils would stabilize as vegetation is reestablished and would eventually return to pre-existing conditions following completion of the project. To minimize soil compaction and rutting, vehicles and heavy equipment would either be operated on the exiting gravel access roads and landings or on temporary wetland mats, to the greatest extent practicable. Standard construction best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to further minimize soil erosion, sedimentation, and fugitive dust and to properly dispose of excess soils.

Notes:

- Cut off existing guy wire anchors 1 to 2 feet below grade and retire the remaining in-ground portions of the anchors in place.
- Limit the operation of vehicles and heavy equipment to the existing gravel access roads and landing pads and deploy temporary wetland mats around structures 3/2 and 3/3 and in other areas, as appropriate.
- Re-contour and stabilize disturbed areas and revegetate with native, regionally-appropriate seed mix(es) in consultation with the underlying landowner/manager.

## 3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could permanently remove no more than approximately 0.1 acres of vegetation and could temporarily crush, strip, or clear up to approximately 3.5 acres of vegetation. Vegetation disturbed by the proposed action would consist of common grasses, forbs, and weeds that are currently grazed or regularly mowed as part of routine transmission line maintenance. To minimize vegetation disturbance, vehicles and heavy equipment would either be operated on the exiting gravel access roads and landings or on temporary wetland mats, to the greatest extent practicable. Standard construction BMPs would be implemented to stabilize soils, re-establish vegetation, and minimize the spread of noxious weeds. There are no known special-status plant species or habitats present at the project site.

Notes:

- Re-contour and stabilize disturbed areas and revegetate with native, regionally-appropriate seed mix(es) in consultation with the underlying landowner/manager.

## 4. Wildlife (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could temporarily impact wildlife through habitat loss or modification, construction noise, and incidental mortality from ground disturbance (primarily among small burrowing mammals). Given the project site's proximity to the Yakima River, bald eagles could occur in the area. However, no known nest sites are located near the project site, and construction would occur in late May when the likelihood of nest abandonment and vulnerability of nestlings is low. Most wildlife species, including bald eagles, would be able to avoid construction areas and would likely be tolerant to human activity given ongoing surrounding land uses. Permanent wildlife impacts would be negligible as temporarily disturbed habitat would revegetate following completion of the project. No other special-status species or wildlife species protected under the Federal ESA are expected to occur near the project site.

## 5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Portions of the project site, including structures 3/7, 3/8, and 4/3, are situated within the floodplain of the Yakima River. The transmission line ROW crosses the Yakima River, which supports species protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act, including bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). The Yakima River is designated critical habitat for both species. No construction activities would occur within a water body, and standard construction BMPs would prevent indirect impacts to water bodies and special-status fish.

Notes:

- Control sediment discharge using a silt sack or vacuum truck when dewatering excavated pole holes, as necessary. Pumped water containing sediment would be disposed of according to applicable local, state, and Federal regulations.
- Install structure 3/3 with pole wraps and culvert footings, if required, to prevent leachate from entering groundwater, wetlands, and nearby water bodies.

## 6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Wetlands were identified near structures 3/2 and 3/3. To minimize wetlands disturbance from the operation of vehicles and heavy equipment, BPA would deploy temporary wetland mats. Removal and replacement of structure 3/3 would temporarily disturb approximately 0.25 acres, and there would be no permanent disturbance. Therefore, the proposed action is authorized under Nationwide Permit 57 – Electric Utility Line and Telecommunications Activities, and no pre-construction notification would be required. Standard construction BMPs would prevent indirect impacts to off-site wetlands.

Notes:

- Cut off existing guy wire anchors 1 to 2 feet below grade and retire the remaining in-ground portions of the anchors in place.
- Limit the operation of vehicles and heavy equipment to the existing gravel access roads and landing pads and deploy temporary wetland mats around structures 3/2 and 3/3 and in other areas, as appropriate.
- Control sediment discharge using a silt sack or vacuum truck when dewatering excavated pole holes, as necessary. Pumped water containing sediment would be disposed of according to applicable local, state, and Federal regulations.
- Install structure 3/3 with pole wraps and culvert footings, if required, to prevent leachate from entering groundwater, wetlands, and nearby water bodies.

## 7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Excavation at structure 3/3 could reach depths to groundwater given that the structure is located within a wetland. BPA could temporarily dewater excavated pole holes, if required to install the new wood pole and guy anchors. Standard construction BMPs would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers. The proposed action would have no permanent impact on groundwater or aquifers.

Notes:

- Control sediment discharge using a silt sack or vacuum truck when dewatering excavated pole holes, as necessary. Pumped water containing sediment would be disposed of according to applicable local, state, and Federal regulations.
- Install structure 3/3 with pole wraps and culvert footings, if required, to prevent leachate from entering groundwater, wetlands, and nearby water bodies.

## 8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed action could temporarily impact nearby residential, recreational, and agricultural land uses due to construction noise, access restrictions, increased construction traffic, and ground disturbance. Recreational activities at Mattoon Lake (primarily fishing and boating) could be temporarily and intermittently restricted within the 16-day construction period to maintain public safety. No other public lands are managed for public use. The proposed action would not permanently change land uses, and the project site is not located in a specially-designated area.

Notes:

- Deploy flaggers and/or signage around construction sites near Mattoon Lake to reduce conflicts with recreational users.
- Coordinate with WDFW to schedule construction near Mattoon Lake to minimize impacts to recreational users.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would cause a perceptible change in the appearance of the project site. During construction, the presence of construction equipment and general construction activities, including vegetation disturbance, would cause temporary visual impacts. Although existing transmission structures would be replaced with similar structures in approximately the same locations, new transmission structures would be three-pole rather than existing two-pole and/or would be 10 to 15 feet taller than the existing structures in some cases. These permanent changes would be minor relative to the scale of existing structures and would be consistent with the existing visual quality of the area.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would cause a minor and temporary increase in dust and emissions in the local area. Standard construction BMPs would suppress dust. There would be no long-term change in air quality following completion of the proposed action.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, use of vehicles and equipment and general construction activities could produce noise at levels higher than current ambient conditions. The proposed project site is in a rural area primarily surrounded by rural residential, agricultural, and recreational land uses. Construction-related noise could be audible from properties located near the transmission line. Noise impacts would be temporary and intermittent and would only occur during typical working hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). There would be no long-term change in ambient noise following completion of the project.

**12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All standard safety protocols would be followed throughout project construction, and standard construction BMPs would minimize risk to human health and safety. Therefore, the proposed action would not be expected to impact human health and safety.

## Evaluation of Other Integral Elements

The proposed project would also meet conditions that are integral elements of the categorical exclusion. The project would not:

**Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.**

Explanation: N/A

**Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.**

Explanation: N/A

**Disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases.**

Explanation: N/A

**Involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those of the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institutes of Health.**

Explanation: N/A

## Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: The proposed action would occur on property where BPA has, or would acquire, an easement from the underlying landowner. BPA would notify and coordinate with underlying landowners prior to the start of construction. No additional landowner notification, involvement, or coordination would be required.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed: */s/ Walker Stinnette* *May 22. 2023*
Walker Stinnette Date
Environmental Protection Specialist