

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Big Bend Electric Cooperative LaPorte Substation Interconnection

Project No.: P03640

Project Manager: Lisa Casey, TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Franklin County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities; B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to modify its 115-kilovolt (kV) Benton-Franklin No. 1 and No. 2 transmission lines between structures 13/1 and 13/3 in Franklin County, Washington. The project is in response to a Line Load Interconnection Request (L0455) from Big Bend Electric Cooperative (BBEC) to interconnect its proposed 115-kV LaPorte Tap line and 115/12.5-kV LaPorte Substation.

To accommodate the interconnection, BPA would:

- Replace three existing 60-foot-tall, wooden H-frame transmission structures (13/1, 13/2, and 13/3) and associated structural/electrical components (e.g., cross arms, insulators, guy anchors, etc.) on Benton-Franklin No. 1. The new 75-foot-tall, wooden H-frame structures would be installed in approximately the same locations with the exception of structure 13/3, which would be relocated approximately 30 feet ahead-on-line.
- Replace one existing 60-foot-tall, wooden H-frame transmission structure (13/2) and associated structural/electrical components (e.g., cross arms, insulators, guy anchors, etc.) on Benton-Franklin No. 2. The new 75-foot-tall, wooden H-frame structure would be installed in approximately the same location.
- Install two new line disconnect switches on new lattice steel switch structures adjacent to structures 13/1 and 13/3 on Benton-Franklin No. 1.
- Install jumpers from Benton-Franklin No. 1 to the proposed LaPorte Tap line.
- Reroute approximately 150 feet of an existing gravel access road to accommodate the relocation of structure 13/3.
- Install new revenue metering equipment within a metering rack inside the LaPorte Substation control house.

Replacing the structures would require excavating and removing the existing wood poles, auguring existing or new holes to the appropriate depth, and then positioning the new wood poles

in the holes. Excavated soil would be used for backfill or spread evenly around the bases of the structures. Equipment could include an excavator, boom truck, bucket truck, truck-mounted auger, dump truck, and roller compactor as well as light duty vehicles.

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

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

July 7, 2023

Date

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: Big Bend Electric Cooperative LaPorte Substation Interconnection

Project Site Description

The project site includes portions of BPA's existing right-of-way (ROW) for the Benton-Franklin No. 1 and No. 2 transmission lines from structures 13/1 to 13/3 in Franklin County, Washington (Township 10 North, Range 29 East, Sections 24 and 25). All work would occur entirely within the existing ROW in areas that are either graveled or vegetated with low-growing common grasses, forbs, shrubs, and weeds. A perennial stream flows through the ROW between structures 13/2 and 13/3, and freshwater emergent wetlands are adjacent to the stream. No water bodies or wetlands are present within areas of ground disturbance, which are limited to upland terraces on either side of the stream. The project site is on private property where BPA has an existing transmission line easement. Outside of the ROW, the surrounding area is primarily characterized by agricultural, industrial, and commercial land uses.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On April 17, 2023, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation and Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). BPA conducted background research and an intensive field survey of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). The Benton-Franklin No. 1 and No. 2 transmission lines are considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. However, the proposed undertaking would neither alter the integrity of the transmission lines, nor diminish any of the standards under which they are considered eligible. No other historic or cultural resources were identified within the APE. Therefore, on May 12, 2023, BPA determined that the proposed undertaking would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: WA 2019 095; DAHP Log No.: 2023-04-2573-BPA). Concurrence was received from DAHP on May 12, 2023. No other comments were received.

Notes:

- Implement inadvertent discovery protocols in the unlikely event that cultural material is encountered during the implementation of this project. BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would cause soil disturbance from excavation to remove and install transmission structures, grading and laying gravel for the relocated access road, and soil compaction and rutting due to vehicle and equipment use. Excavated soils would be temporarily stored onsite, and then either backfilled and returned to original contours or deposited around the bases of the new wood poles. Temporarily disturbed soils would stabilize as vegetation is reestablished and would eventually return to pre-existing conditions following completion of the proposed action. Standard construction best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to minimize soil erosion, sedimentation, and fugitive dust. The proposed action would not impact geology.

Notes:

- Reseed disturbed areas during the appropriate time period for germination with a native, regionally-appropriate seed mix, or as agreed upon with the underlying landowners.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would crush, strip, or bury low-growing common grasses, forbs, shrubs, and weeds. Disturbed areas would be reseeded and would eventually return to pre-existing conditions following completion of the proposed action. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status plant species near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat is present.

Notes:

- Reseed disturbed areas during the appropriate time period for germination with a native, regionally-appropriate seed mix, or as agreed upon with the underlying landowners.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary disruption of normal wildlife behavior and wildlife displacement could occur from elevated noise and human presence during construction. However, there would be no permanent impacts to wildlife habitat, and temporarily disturbed or displaced wildlife would likely reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed action. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status wildlife species near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat is present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A perennial stream flows through the ROW between structures 13/2 and 13/3. No in-water construction activities would occur, and standard construction BMPs would prevent indirect impacts to the stream. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status fish species near the project site, and no suitable special-status fish habitat is present.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Freshwater emergent wetlands associated with a perennial stream are present between structures 13/2 and 13/3. All ground disturbance would occur within upland terraces on either side of the stream, and standard construction BMPs would prevent indirect impacts to adjacent wetlands.

Notes:

- Limit the operation of vehicles and heavy equipment at structures 13/2 and 13/3 to the minimum area necessary to safely complete construction to avoid impacting wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbance is unlikely to reach depths to groundwater and no new wells or other uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would be consistent with the existing transmission line ROW land use and would not impact surrounding agricultural, industrial, and commercial land uses. The project site is not located in a specially-designated area.

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 approximately 15 feet taller than the existing structures and would be relocated in one case (structure 13/3). The new disconnect switches and relocated access road would be new and permanent fixtures on the landscape. These permanent changes would be minor relative to the scale of the existing structures and equipment and would be consistent with the existing visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would produce minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions in the local area. There would be no long-term change in air quality following completion of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would result in minor and temporary noise from the use of vehicles, heavy equipment, and power tools during construction, which could be audible from nearby industrial and commercial properties. Noise impacts would be temporary and would only occur during daylight hours (approximately 7 AM to 5 PM). There would be no permanent change in ambient noise following completion of the proposed action.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would be completed by transmission line maintenance professionals trained in proper techniques and equipment use. The project would not

generate or use hazardous materials and would not create conditions that would increase risk to human health and safety. Therefore, no impacts to human health and safety are expected as a result of the proposed action.

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 entirely within BPA's existing easement areas. 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 July 7, 2023
Walker Stinnette Date
Environmental Protection Specialist