Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 Phase II Impairment Remedies and Access Road Improvements; Spans 6/1, 10/5, 12/5, 32/2, 33/6, 49/3, 54/1, 56/2, 56/4, 61/3, 62/1, 64/3, and 72/1

PP&A No.: 4,221

Project Manager: Gerri Colburn – TEPF-CSB-2

Location: Kootenai and Bonner counties, Idaho; and Sanders County, Montana

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 - Routine Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to remedy impairments to the Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 transmission line at thirteen locations along the line. BPA owns and operates the Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 high-voltage transmission line, which runs from Lancaster Substation in Kootenai County, Idaho, to Noxon Substation, in Sanders County, Montana. The line is supported by steel lattice structures. BPA has identified thirteen impairments to the line that need to be remedied as soon as possible. Impairments are locations where the distance between the ground surface and the energized conductor does not meet safety and reliability standards. The impairments are located within spans in line mile and structure number 6/1, 10/5, 12/5, 32/2, 33/6, 49/3, 54/1, 56/2, 56/4, 61/3, 62/1, 64/3, and 72/1 of the transmission line, as it trends eastward from Lancaster Substation. At these locations, BPA proposes to excavate the ground impairment using heavy machinery. The ground would be excavated and regraded to blend with existing contours. Exposed soils would be seeded and mulched. Excess material would be spread on-site in the transmission right-of-way, seeded, and stabilized or hauled away for off-site disposal. Proposed excavation volumes at the impairment sites range from 3 cubic yards to 315 cubic yards. In total, approximately 1,250 cubic yards of material would be excavated from work locations totaling approximately 0.9 acres. The work sites would be seeded with a climate appropriate native seed mix, mulched, and monitored to ensure that the sites remain stabilized and revegetate.

In addition to the impairment excavation, BPA proposes to improve access roads to support the work. BPA access roads are typically 12 to 14 feet in width and comprised of dirt, two track roads, or compacted rock. Proposed road work would include approximately two miles of improvements, which consists of light blading and addition of rock; 500 linear feet of reconstruction, which consists of heavier blading and addition of rock; and 800 linear feet of new road surface. BPA would also construct six new graded and rocked landings around transmission line structures, to allow for safe access for continued maintenance of the transmission line. Landing size ranges from 100 ft. by 50 ft., to 60 ft. by 50 ft. in dimension.

All work would be conducted within the existing high-voltage corridor and on existing easements. Equipment generally used for this work includes an excavator, backhoe, blader, dump trucks,

roller-compactor, and light duty trucks. The work would be completed in late summer and fall of 2024.

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/ *Aaron Siemers*
Aaron Siemers
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ *Sarah T. Biegel*
Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer Date: *May 31, 2024*

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: Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 Phase II Impairment Remedies and Access Road Improvements; Spans 6/1, 10/5, 12/5, 32/2, 33/6, 49/3, 54/1, 56/2, 56/4, 61/3, 62/1, 64/3, and 72/1

Project Site Description

The proposed action is located in the Columbia Mountains/Northern Rockies ecoregion of northern Idaho and western Montana. The ecoregion is characterized by rugged mountains and intermontane valleys, with many of the same coniferous tree species present that comprise the forests west of the Cascade Mountains, including red cedar, western hemlock, and subalpine fir. The Project Area is located on privately-owned land, as well as four work locations within the National Forest lands, including the Idaho Panhandle National Forest and Kootenai National Forest. Land use surrounding the Project Area ranges from agricultural, private timber, and rural residential, to public conservation and timber lands of the National Forest.

The proposed action would occur within, and immediately adjacent to, BPA rights-of-way (ROWs) and access roads for the Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 transmission line. BPA does not own the property on which the transmission lines are located, but rather has easement rights to operate and maintain the transmission lines and access roads. The cleared transmission corridor is approximately 200 ft. wide, and the Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 line shares the corridor with a non-BPA line. Vegetation in the corridor is periodically managed to remove tall-growing tree species and promote low-growing grasses and shrubs. The topography ranges from relatively flat, to hilly to mountainous in those areas within the Idaho Panhandle National Forest, typical of the Northern Rockies. Elevation in the proposed work locations generally ranges around 2,300 to 2,600 ft. On the western side of the work area, closer to Lancaster Substation and the town of Post Falls, Idaho, land use is generally agricultural and rural residential, while toward the eastern work area, as the line follows the southern side of the Clark Fork River Valley and Lake Pend Oreille, work sites are generally more remote, and are on National Forest, rural residential, or private timber lands. Several fish-bearing waterways are present near the project area, such as Cedar Creek, the Clark Fork River, and Rock Creek. Wetlands are also present near planned excavation locations. The Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bear recovery zone is present north of the project area, on the eastern portion of the project.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Pursuant to its responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, BPA evaluated the proposed project and developed an Area of Potential Effects (APE). On July 17, 2022, BPA initiated consultation on the proposed undertaking with the

Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Kalispel Tribe of Indians, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Spokane Tribe of Indians, United States Forest Service – Idaho Panhandle National Forest and Kootenai National Forest, the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (MT SHPO), and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office.

BPA conducted background research with Idaho and Montana state cultural resource databases, followed by an intensive field survey of the APE. Background research identified 10 previously recorded historic-era archaeological resources within one mile of the APE. On April 6, 2023, BPA made a determination that the project would have no adverse effect to historic and cultural resources and received comment back from MT SHPO. BPA submitted an amended report to the consulting parties on June 1, 2023. There were no additional comments.

On February 7, 2024, BPA submitted an amended APE map to the consulting parties, indicating the addition of one work area. There were no changes to BPA's determination, and no comments were received.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently 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: Excavation and soil disturbance would be required to excavate ground impairments at those locations with ground clearance issues. Maximum excavation depth would be approximately 5 to 10 feet. Upon project completion, disturbed soils would be seeded with a native erosion control seed mix and stabilized with straw or hydro-mulch. Excess soils would be spread on site and stabilized with seed and straw.

Notes:

- Work site footprints would be minimized as much as possible to avoid soil disturbance.
- Upon project completion, disturbed, un-rocked soils would be stabilized with native erosion control grass seed and mulched with straw, or hydroseeded.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Local plants would be disturbed at the impairment excavation locations as equipment is mobilized and the ground is excavated. Vegetation would also be disturbed in those locations where excess material is spread. However, work area footprint would be limited to the existing transmission right-of-way corridor and minimized as much as possible at the work site locations. Upon project completion, the area would be re-graded to match existing contours and seeded with a native seed mix.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on December 4, 2023. No ESA-listed plants or habitat are present in the project area; therefore, the project would have "No Effect" on ESA-listed plant species.

BPA reviewed available data sources, and no special-status state species are documented in the project area. BPA also consulted with Idaho Panhandle National Forest and Kootenai National Forest staff on the project activities, and no special-status plants were identified in the proposed project area.

Notes:

- Work site footprints would be minimized as much as possible to avoid impacts to local plants.
- Upon project completion, disturbed, un-rocked soils would be stabilized with native erosion control grass seed and mulched with straw, or hydroseeded.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Local wildlife such as small to midsized mammals and birds could be disturbed by project activities, assuming they are present in the project area. However, disturbance would be temporary, and the surrounding landscape provides ample habitat and cover for displaced animals.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on December 3, 2023. BPA discussed the proposed project and potential effects to protected species with Montana and Idaho USFWS field staff on December 19, 2023. Due to potential effects to species protected under the ESA, on February 13, 2024, BPA developed a Biological Assessment for the project and submitted it to USFWS with a request for informal consultation under Section 7 of the ESA. BPA determined that the project "May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" North American wolverine, grizzly bear, and Canada lynx. BPA determined that the project would have "No effect" on yellow-billed cuckoo and "would not result in jeopardy" to the proposed species monarch butterfly. After technical review and resubmittal of the BA on April 17th, on May 31st, 2024, BPA received a Letter of Concurrence from USFWS, concurring with BPA's determination.

BPA reviewed available data sources, and no special-status state species and/or habitat is documented in the project area. BPA also consulted with Idaho Panhandle National Forest and Kootenai National Forest staff on the project activities, and no special-status, non-ESA listed species were identified in the proposed project area for additional protection.

Notes:

- During construction, BPA and BPA's contractors would implement all the conservation measures developed during the ESA consultation process.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are several fish-bearing waterways in the general project area, including Canyon Creek and Cedar Creek in line miles 32 and 34, Elk Creek in line mile 61, the Clark Fork River in line mile 63, and Rock Creek in line mile 72. Rock Creek is listed as designated critical habitat for bull trout. No in-water work is planned, and no direct significant impacts to waterbodies and floodplains are anticipated.

BPA proposes to clear a ground impairment in line mile 72, approximately 100 feet from the Rock Creek ordinary high-water mark.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on December 3, 2023. Due to potential effects to species protected under the ESA, on February 13, 2024 BPA developed a Biological Assessment for the project and submitted it to USFWS with a request for informal consultation under Section 7 of the ESA. BPA determined that the project "May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" bull trout and bull trout designated critical habitat.

On May 31st, 2024, BPA received a Letter of Concurrence from USFWS, concurring with BPA's determination.

Notes:

- During construction, BPA and BPA's contractors would implement all the conservation measures developed during the ESA consultation process.
- The project would obtain a construction general NPDES permit under Section 402 of the Clean Water Act prior to ground disturbance.
- Stormwater best management practices would be implemented during construction, and sites would be monitored to ensure revegetation goals are met.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Several wetlands and waterways are present in the project area. In an effort to avoid direct impacts to wetlands, BPA conducted a wetland and waterway delineation to identify all wetland and waterway boundaries in the project area. A total of eight wetlands were identified during the survey. Wetland types include riverine, slope, and depressional. In total, approximately 3 acres of wetlands are within the general project area. However, no proposed project excavation locations are located in wetlands, and no direct impacts to wetlands are proposed.

Notes:

- During construction, BPA and BPA's contractors would identify wetland boundaries in the field to ensure that no inadvertent impacts occur.
- The project would obtain a construction general NPDES permit under Section 402 of the Clean Water Act prior to ground disturbance which would reduce the risk of stormwater discharge to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No excavation would extend to depths that would impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project work sites are located on private lands, including rural residential, National Forest lands, and private forested lands. Primary land use is high-voltage transmission corridor. The proposed project would not alter existing land use and is not located in a specially-designated area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation of ground impairments would remove existing vegetation and soils, resulting in disturbed rocks and soils. Excess material would be spread in an upland area. However, all disturbed soil cuts and fills would be re-contoured to match existing grades as much as possible, seeded with a native seed, and mulched to restore vegetation. Therefore, the proposed project would not significantly change the existing visual character

of the area, which is dominated by the high voltage transmission corridor and transmission structures, and would remain so after project completion.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor, local impacts to air quality would occur due to construction activity and vehicular traffic; however, impacts would be temporary and insignificant. Work areas are generally located in remote places, without many human receptors.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction activity would generate noise. However, impacts would be local and relatively minor. All project activity would occur during daylight hours, and work areas are generally located in remote places, without many human receptors.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have benefits to human health and safety, as the purpose of the project is to restore safety and reliability clearance standards currently affected by the line impairments.

Notes:

- Prior to the start of the project, work crews would identify and discuss the job hazards and safety concerns, and follow all BPA and OSHA safety procedures during construction.

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: BPA would coordinate project activities with landowners and land managers at proposed work locations and would continue to coordinate during construction and site restoration. BPA communicated project scope and schedule with Idaho Panhandle National Forest and Kootenai National Forest during the planning and permitting process. BPA would continue to coordinate with USFS during construction, as necessary.

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

Signed: /s/ *Aaron Siemers*
Aaron Siemers
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: *May 31, 2024*