

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 River Crossing Structure Replacements (*Update to previous CX issued on May 31, 2024*)

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): B1.3 Routine maintenance, B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to remove and replace transmission structures and to remove and restring conductor and fiber optic cable on the 115-kilovolt (kV) Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 transmission line near Ellensburg, Kittitas County, Washington. Observed and modeled flooding of the Yakima River necessitates removal of three existing wood transmission structures and replacement with two taller, tubular steel transmission structures to allow for a longer span across the river. In addition, the conductor and fiber optic cable have reached the end of their functional capacities. Therefore, the project is required to ensure system safety and reliability by addressing long-term flooding and erosion concerns and preventing potential damage to the conductor and equipment. This CX has been updated to include the proposed removal of one black cottonwood tree (*Populus trichocarpa*) currently located near structure 4/2.

The existing wood transmission structures 3/9 and 4/2 would be replaced with new tubular steel transmission structures, and structure 4/1 would be removed entirely. In the proposed configuration, structure 3/9 and structure 4/2 would be relocated back-on-line (BOL) approximately 35 feet and 70 feet, respectively. Each new structure would consist of three individual, 180-foot-tall steel poles spaced 18 feet apart and mounted on separate 11-foot diameter drilled pier footings. The new structures would be 85 to 120 feet taller than the existing structures, which would allow for a longer span of approximately 2,200 feet across the Yakima River. The steel poles would be manufactured with a dulling finish to reduce the reflectivity of the galvanized steel and thereby reduce visual contrast with the surrounding landscape.

Prior to construction, temporary gravel landing areas would be established around structures 3/9 and 4/2, and a small section of existing fencing near structure 4/2 would be temporarily removed. To install the new transmission structure footings, holes would be excavated with an auger drill. Reinforcing steel would be set in place and then concrete would be poured to form the footings. The steel poles would be assembled onsite, lifted into place with a crane, and bolted to the footings. Existing structures would be removed by excavating around the bases of the wood poles and lifting the poles out of the ground with a crane or boom truck. Existing guy anchor rods would be cut approximately 1 foot below the ground surface and the remaining in-ground portions retired in place. Any remaining holes would be backfilled to ground level with clean backfill material. All

transmission structures in line mile 4 (7 structures total) would be renamed to reflect the removal of structure 4/1 (i.e., existing structure 4/2 becomes new structure 4/1, existing structure 4/3 becomes new structure 4/2, etc.). Personnel would mobilize to each structure to remove and replace the structure number signage, which would not require any ground disturbance. Removing and replacing the transmission structures could temporarily disturb approximately 22,500 square feet (0.52 acre) total. The total permanent footprint for the new structures, including buried counterpoise, would be approximately 6,000 square feet (0.14 acre).

BPA would remove and restring approximately 3,700 feet (0.70 miles) of conductor and fiber optic cable from existing structure 3/8 to existing structure 4/3 (future structure 4/2). The pulling and tensioning (P/T) equipment that would be used to remove and restring conductor and fiber would be staged ahead-on-line (AOL) from structure 3/8 and BOL from structure 4/3 (future structure 4/2). Staging and operating the P/T equipment could temporarily disturb approximately 60,000 square feet (1.4 acres), and there would be no permanent ground disturbance.

Work areas would be accessed via the existing access road network. Materials and equipment would be staged at the work areas and in an approximately 30,000 square foot (0.69 acre) previously-disturbed area near structure 3/8 that has already been used for similar purposes during previous projects. All excavated material, temporary landing area gravel, and decommissioned poles, hardware, conductor, and fiber would be removed from the site and disposed of at approved locations according to applicable local, state, and Federal regulations. BPA would repair and/or replace any damaged access roads and/or fencing, in-kind. Following completion of construction, temporarily disturbed areas would be revegetated with either native vegetation or a pasture seed mix, depending on the preference of the underlying landowner.

The proposed action would temporarily disturb a total area of up to approximately 112,500 square feet (2.60 acres); the total permanent disturbance area would be approximately 6,000 square feet (0.14 acre). Site preparation is anticipated to begin in early June 2024 and conclude with site restoration in late September 2024. The drilled pier footings would be installed over the course of approximately three weeks beginning in early July 2024. The majority of construction, including erecting new transmission structures, stringing conductor and fiber, and removing existing structures, is scheduled for approximately two weeks in late August and early September.

The black cottonwood tree has the potential to encroach upon the minimum clearance distance to the Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 conductor and would limit the ability of construction crews to safely maneuver and operate vehicles and equipment during replacement of structure 4/2. Personnel would climb the tree and cut it into sections using hand tools. Each section would then be allowed to fall to the ground or gently lowered to the ground using rigging. Woody debris would be chipped and/or scattered onsite and allowed to decompose naturally or would be removed from the site entirely, depending on landowner preference. Temporary ground disturbance would occur within the same construction footprint associated with replacement of structure 4/2, and there would be no permanent ground disturbance associated with this activity.

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.

Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
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 River Crossing Structure Replacements (Update to previous CX issued on May 31, 2024)

Project Site Description

The project site includes BPA's existing Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 transmission line ROW from structure 3/8 to structure 4/3 as well as two P/T sites and one material and equipment staging area near Ellensburg, Kittitas County, Washington (Township 17 North, Range 18 East, Sections 11, 14, and 15). Work would occur on private property and the Schaake Property, which is managed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The majority of ground disturbance, including all temporary landing areas and transmission structure removal and replacements, would occur entirely within the existing ROW, while the P/T sites and staging area could 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. Privately-owned lands are currently used for grazing cattle and consist primarily of common pasture grasses and weeds. The Schaake Property is undergoing habitat restoration and therefore consists of plant communities with a relatively high proportion of native species. 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 approximately 100 feet from structure 3/9 and approximately 150 feet from structure 4/1. Outside of the ROW, the surrounding area is primarily characterized by rural residential and agricultural land uses.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

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 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 the Post Review Discovery Procedure in the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during implementation. Discontinue all ground-disturbing activity 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 up to approximately 112,500 square feet (2.60 acres) of temporary soil disturbance from laying gravel to create temporary landing areas, removing and installing transmission structures, operating vehicles and equipment, and staging materials. Installation of the new transmission structure footings would cause approximately 6,000 square feet (0.14 acre) of permanent soil loss through the installation of footings or permanent structures. Standard construction best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to minimize soil erosion, sedimentation, and fugitive dust. Temporarily disturbed soils would stabilize as vegetation is reestablished and would eventually return to pre-existing conditions following completion of the proposed action. The proposed action would not impact geology.

Notes:

- Remove all excess excavated material and gravels used in the construction of temporary landing areas for disposal off-site at an approved location according to applicable local, state, and Federal regulations.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed action would temporarily crush, strip, or bury up to approximately 112,500 square feet (2.60 acres) and would permanently remove approximately 6,000 square feet (0.14 acre) of low-growing, grasses, forbs, and weeds. On the Schaaque Property, the proposed action would impact a plant community with a relatively high proportion of native species, given that the site is undergoing habitat restoration. Vegetation impacts on private property would occur in areas consisting primarily of common pasture grasses and weeds that are routinely grazed. In addition, one black cottonwood tree currently located near structure 4/2 would be removed. Standard construction BMPs would be implemented to stabilize soils, re-establish vegetation, and minimize the spread of noxious weeds. Temporarily disturbed areas would eventually return to near pre-existing conditions following completion of the proposed action. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status plant species, including plants listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat would be permanently impacted.

Notes:

- Revegetate with native, regionally-appropriate seed mix or a pasture seed mix, depending on the preference of the underlying landowner.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Minor and temporary wildlife disturbance could occur from elevated noise and human presence during construction and from temporary habitat impacts. Given the project site's proximity to the Yakima River, bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) could occur in the area. However, no known nest sites are located near the project site, and construction would occur in June through September when the likelihood of nest abandonment and vulnerability of nestlings is low. It is expected that most wildlife species, including bald eagles, would likely be tolerant to construction activity given ongoing surrounding land uses. In addition, most wildlife species would likely be able to avoid construction areas and would reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed action. Permanent wildlife impacts would be negligible. No other special-status species or wildlife species protected under the Federal ESA are expected to occur near the project site.

Notes:

- Complete a nest survey prior to tree removal. If nests are identified, BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the nest until it can be inspected and assessed by BPA.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Portions of the project site, including structures 4/1, 4/2, 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 ESA, 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.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: No wetlands that would be directly impacted by the proposed action are present within the project site. Wetlands are located approximately 100 feet from structure 3/9 and approximately 150 feet from structure 4/1. Vehicles and equipment would not be permitted in these areas. Standard construction BMPs would prevent indirect impacts to off-site wetlands.

Notes:

- Limit the operation of vehicles and equipment to the existing gravel access roads and temporary landing areas, to the greatest extent practicable.
- Install temporary fencing near structure 3/9 to prevent vehicles and equipment from entering the nearby wetland and to prevent sediment from migrating into the wetland.
- Control sediment discharge when dewatering excavations for structure footings, as necessary. Pumped water containing sediment would be disposed of according to applicable local, state, and Federal regulations.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground excavation could reach depths to groundwater given the project site's location within the Yakima River floodplain and proximity to wetlands. 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 when dewatering excavations for structure footings, as necessary. Pumped water containing sediment would be disposed of according to applicable local, state, and Federal regulations.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could temporarily impact residential and agricultural land uses due to construction noise, access restrictions, increased construction traffic, and ground disturbance. BPA has coordinated with the underlying private landowner to minimize temporary land use impacts. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation property is not managed for public use, so temporary land use impacts would be minimal. The proposed action would not permanently change land uses, and 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 and gravel landings, would cause temporary visual impacts. The existing wood transmission structures would be replaced with new steel transmission structures that would be 85 to 120 feet taller and would be visible from nearby properties, including private residences. The structures would not be visible from public viewing areas. BPA has notified the underlying private landowner of the size and appearance of the new structures. The new structures would be manufactured with a dulling finish to reduce light reflection and visual contrast with the surrounding landscape and to minimize the visibility from nearby residences. The new structure on the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation property would not be located in a visually-sensitive 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: The proposed action would result in minor and temporary noise from the use of vehicles and equipment and general construction activities, which could intermittently

exceed current ambient conditions. Construction noise could be audible from rural residential and agricultural 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 proposed action.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All standard safety protocols would be followed throughout implementation of the proposed action to 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 properties where BPA has already acquired rights from the underlying landowners. BPA has notified and been in coordination with underlying landowners, and would continue to coordinate with landowners as necessary throughout the proposed action. 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:

Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist