

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: North Bonneville-Troutdale No. 1 Insulator Replacement (*Update to Previous CX issued June 20, 2023*)

PP&A No.: 4908

Project Manager: Andrew Young, TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Clark and Skamania, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance Activities; B3.2 Aviation Activities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace insulators along the North Bonneville - Troutdale No. 1 230 kV and the North Bonneville-Ross No. 1 230 kV transmission lines within BPA's Longview District. Insulators would be replaced on structures between North Bonneville Substation and structure 21/5 on North Bonneville-Troutdale No. 1 and structure 21/4 on North Bonneville-Ross No. 1. BPA also proposes to replace the conductor between 11/4 and 12/6 of the North Bonneville-Ross No. 1 transmission line. This CX has been updated to address the use of helicopters for insulator replacement work.

Insulators, strings of bell shaped ceramic discs, would be replaced along the North Bonneville - Troutdale No. 1 and North Bonneville-Ross No 1 transmission lines. Using a line truck, linemen would access transmission towers and change out insulators. No new, reconstructed, or improved access road work would be required. No ground disturbance would be required for insulator replacements. Helicopter would also be used to support insulator replacements along the transmission lines. Landing zones would be established at existing cleared, graded locations adjacent to the transmission line corridor. In order to avoid potential effects to northern spotted owl, no helicopter operations would occur from North Bonneville Substation to structure 9/1 until after the nesting season, post September 30th and prior March 1st.

BPA transmission line maintenance (TLM) crews observed damage caused by a bullet hole to one of the conductors on North Bonneville-Ross No. 1, near structure 12/3. BPA electrical engineers reviewed photographs of the damage and determined that immediate repair is needed due to imminent failure, as only approximately 32 percent of the conductor's integrity remains. Therefore, BPA is proposing to replace the conductor to prevent threat to life or property that could occur if the conductor fails, which could cause a wildfire.

The permanent replacement of conductor between structures 11/4 and 12/6 (versus a shorter segment closer to the area of damage at 12/3) would result in the greatest benefit for long-term electrical system integrity, while also resulting in the least amount of ground disturbance. The landings at 11/4 and 12/6 would be used by crews to perform the conductor replacement work using standard repair equipment (i.e., bucket trucks).

Minor road work over a short road segment within right-of-way near structure 11/4 would be needed to complete the conductor replacement. TLM would use a grader or excavator to lightly blade the road in certain spots within right-of-way to remove the duff layer and to fill in any low spots. TLM crews would also use a brush mower to cut down vegetation at the landings to reduce wildfire risk from machinery. The conductor repair work is currently scheduled for June 2023.

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/ Katey C. Grange
Katey C. Grange Date: July 1, 2024
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.

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Project Site Description

The project runs between BPA's North Bonneville Substation in Skamania County, WA to an area north of Washougal, WA in Clark County along the North Bonneville-Troutdale No. 1 transmission line. It includes areas of rural forest land and urban housing. The eastern portion of the project is within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area in lands designated as (GMA) Urban Areas, (SMA) Forest. The eastern portion is characterized by steep, rocky slopes and dense forests. The western portion of the project is flatter terrain, more developed land, and urban housing. The project includes lands managed by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and United States Forest Service. Both have been coordinated with in advance of the proposed project.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project activities to replace the hardware (including insulators) and conductor would have no potential to cause effect. Under specific integrity issues for Design/Materials/Workmanship, the Multiple Property Documentation (MPD) references that normal, in-kind, repair work, such as the replacement of footings, replacement of conductors, insulators, spacers, guy wires, cross-arms etc. is considered normal maintenance that is part of functionality and does not affect integrity (Kramer 2012:47). The indicated activity would have no potential to cause effects to the historic transmission lines.

Overall, based on the information provided, BPA has determined, per 36 CFR 800.3(a)(1), that this undertaking is a type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: OR 2017 095).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur in the existing transmission line right-of-way and minimal ground disturbance would occur.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The majority of the project would occur on existing BPA access road footprint. However, some areas outside of existing access roads may need to be accessed. In that

case, vegetation would be crushed and left in place. There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed or Forest Service sensitive plant species in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA reviewed the project and potential effects to ESA-listed species in the project area. With the helicopter use timing between September 30th and March 1st outside of Northern spotted owl nesting season, BPA made a determination that the project would have “No Effect” to all listed and sensitive species in the surrounding area. Common wildlife impacts such as temporary disturbance could be possible, but wildlife would be expected to move to adjacent habitat during the temporary disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA reviewed the project and determined that no in water work would occur.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA reviewed the project and determined that no wetlands would be impacted.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No excavation or other project work would be at a depth or location that would potentially impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A portion of the project area is located within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA). All work would be performed within the ROW and land use would not change as a result of project activities. BPA coordinated with the USFS CRGNSA office on April 14, 2023. BPA received a response from the CRGNSA on May 1, 2023. No recreational impacts would be expected as a result of the project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Replaced insulators and conductor would be visually consistent with the existing structures and surrounding areas.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have no substantial impacts on air quality; however a small amount of vehicle emissions and dust may occur during construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours. The operational noise of the transmission line would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project activities would increase the safety and reliability of the transmission line.

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: All activities have been coordinated with landowners, including Washington State Department of Natural Resources, United States Forest Service Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area office.

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 – EPR-4

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: July 1, 2024