

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: UEC McNary to Wanapa Installation and Fiber Line Updates

Project No.: OR 2023 112

Project Manager: Nicole Cummings

Location: Umatilla County, OR

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights-of-way

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to allow Umatilla Electric Cooperative (UEC) to construct, operate, and maintain a new 5.6-mile-long 230-kV double circuit transmission line and accompanying pole towers on BPA fee-owned rights-of-way between the BPA McNary Substation to the UEC Wanapa Substation. The construction of the new 230-kV line would include the relocation, replacement, and installation of new conductor (0.86 miles), installation of 20 new steel pole structures with vertically stacked braced post insulators, transmission equipment, and new fiber optic cable (0.56 miles) installation and updates within BPA's fee-owned rights-of-way. To accommodate the request, BPA would grant UEC a temporary construction easement to allow for actions outside of the existing UEC right-of-way (ROW) and would modify the existing land use agreement to allow the UEC transmission line upgrade and installation. The proposed action on BPA property is part of a larger UEC project to expand the capacity of its system as well as increase operational efficiency, transmission reliability, and alleviate transmission congestion for UEC customers.

The following actions are proposed on BPA fee-owned property:

- Installation of 20 new transmission line steel pole structures which would include one monopole steel-pole structure, one three-pole steel structure, and eighteen H-frame steel pole structures. All new pole installations would consist of concrete drilled pier and direct embed foundations with concrete slurry (CLSM) backfill.
- Eleven temporary stage conductor pulling and tensioning (P/T) equipment areas.
- A temporary 100-foot by 100-foot work area at each pole-structure location (20 locations).
- Grading and rocking for a new 1,500-foot length by 12-foot-wide access road running east-west between new structures RW-7/MW-8 to RW-13/MW-12.
- Installation and updating of approximately 0.6 miles of new fiber optic cable which would require a temporary 3-foot-deep by 2-foot-wide trench (0.15 acres)
- Re-attach the new conductor and replace hardware at structure UM-35; the structure would not be removed or altered.

The anticipated temporary disturbance areas would include 20 structure work areas (approximately 5.0 acres) and eleven P/T sites (approximately 12.4 acres). Each structure work area would be centered on the 20 transmission structures and would be located entirely within existing BPA fee-owned rights-of-way. P/T equipment would be staged within BPA's ROW along structures MW-2, MW-3, RW-3/MW-4, RW-6/MW-7, RW-13/MW-12, MW-13, and RW-14. P/T sites for structures RW-6/MW-7, MW-12, and RW-13 would be centrally staged and located outside of BPA ROWs; however, these P/T work areas would partially overlap into existing BPA fee-owned property. P/T sites would consist of seven 300-foot semi-circle (11.4 acres) and four 100-foot by 100-foot (1.0 acres) work areas to conduct wire pulling activities. Ground disturbance at the structure work areas and P/T staging areas would include vegetation clearing and potentially minor grading to allow for vehicle access and to stabilize equipment. All areas of the project site would be accessed via existing access roads. In total, up to approximately 20 acres would be temporarily disturbed, and approximately 0.50 acres would be permanently disturbed within BPA's fee-owned ROW. All temporary disturbance areas would be restored to pre-construction conditions.

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.

Sylas Daughtrey
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
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 location of the site is on BPA fee-owned property south of BPA's McNary Substation in Umatilla, Umatilla County, Oregon. The legal parcel description is Township 5 North, Range 28 East, and Sections 9, 15, and 16. Ground disturbance would occur within the proposed transmission structure work areas, P/T staging areas, and access road proposal. The proposed site of construction is surrounded by existing transmission structures; low lying, maintained vegetation primarily of degraded shrub-steppe habitat characterized by common, low-growing grasses, forbs, and weeds, including kochia (*Kochia scoparia*), diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*) and cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*); and a low density of shrub species such as sagebrush (*Artemisia spp*) and rabbitbrush (*Ericameria spp*). The project area has previous ground disturbance which includes graveled, paved, or compacted soils. No hydric soils are classified within the project site and no wetlands or water bodies are mapped within or near the project area. Surrounding land uses consist of commercial and industrial properties incorporated with subverted and undeveloped shrub-steppe habitat.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would include ground-disturbing activities. However, BPA historian review has shown that the proposed project would have no potential to cause effect to historic properties or cultural resources.

On February 2, 2024, 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 Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon
- Nez Perce Tribe
- Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (Oregon SHPO)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

On behalf of UEC, Power Engineers (Power) conducted background research and an intensive field survey of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). The Power report did not identify any other historic or cultural resources eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places within the APE.

On May 10, 2024, BPA determined that the proposed undertaking would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: OR 2024 039; SHPO Case No. 24-0308). Oregon SHPO concurred with BPA's determination on June 7, 2024. No other responses were received.

Notes:

- In the event that cultural material is unexpectedly 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 a professional archaeologist.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Soil disturbance would occur at new steel pole installations, proposed trenching, and access road grading and rocking. New tower locations are in relatively flat areas with little risk of erosion and near areas that would not be adversely affected by sediments. Soil disturbance actions would involve vegetation and soil removal, soil compaction, construction vehicle access, minor to major grading of existing road prisms, and proposed access road installation. Best management practices (BMPs) such as wetting of topsoil would be implemented to prevent migration of fugitive dust, sedimentation, and soil erosion. The area is in gravelly soil that has already been graded and altered by past construction. Impacts to geology or soils are not expected to impact the current geology.

Notes:

Temporary stockpiling of excavated dirt, rock, or other organic matter in BPA's rights-of-way would only occur during the installation of the new fiber line.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No federally-listed, special-status species, or habitats exist within the project area. The work areas and staging areas outside of the McNary Substation yard (approximately 2.2 acres total) are comprised of bare earth from frequent vehicle and equipment disturbance, and vegetation such as bunch grasses, weedy species, and occasional rabbit brush. About 1.6 acres of vegetation would be temporarily disturbed, and less than 1,000 sf. of permanent vegetation removal would occur. Temporarily disturbed areas would be reseeded with regionally appropriate seed mixes. With the revegetation of disturbed sites, impacts to plants are expected to be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal or state special-status species or habitats at any of the sites that would be impacted by the project. If any active nests are found on the tower prior to the project activities, the work would be delayed until the nest is unoccupied. Workstation sites are located within well-established areas outside designated critical habitat. Temporary disturbance to non-sensitive wildlife may occur during work periods, but it is anticipated that wildlife would distribute to adjacent habitats and that noise disturbance would be consistent with ongoing operations of the sites.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No work would take place next to water bodies or floodplains. Ground-disturbing work would take place well away from the Columbia River and its tributaries such that construction would not lead to sediments or other material entering the water bodies. No impacts to water bodies, floodplains, or fish are expected.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would take place in dry upland areas. There are no wetlands at the existing communication site.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No areas of shallow groundwater or aquifers are known to exist within the project area. Subsurface work would be limited to auguring for new transmission structures and trenching for fiber optic cable installation. No hazardous materials beyond fuels and oils used in construction equipment would be used for the project. Spill remediation materials would be stored at the construction site to quickly contain any releases of oil or gas. No disturbance or impacts to groundwater and aquifers are expected.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no specially-designated areas within the project area. However, the proposed permanent change of the new access road would occur entirely on BPA fee-owned property and would not impact adjacent or current land use. BPA would draft a temporary land-use agreement during the construction period to allow access within BPA's fee-owned ROW. Once construction is completed, BPA would reserve an access easement within the ROW for future maintenance access for the proposed UEC 230kV transmission line with associated structures and equipment. The project area already contains several transmission lines and substation equipment. No impacts to specially-designated areas would occur.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some permanent changes in visual quality would occur due to the installation of steel pole transmission line structures; however, all work would take place within existing transmission line rights-of-way where several transmission lines already exist. Impacts to visual quality would be low.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor and temporary vehicle and construction equipment emissions and particulate fugitive dust would occur during construction; however, there would be no significant changes to air quality during or after construction. Air quality impacts are expected to be low.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor and temporary vehicle and construction noise would occur during construction of the project. Construction noise could temporarily impact residences located about 0.25 mile away from the project area; however, construction is not expected to contribute substantially to noise impacts at any surrounding residences. Construction noise would be limited to working hours during the day and would only last for the duration of

construction. Overall, noise impacts are expected to be low. Operation noise would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not create any new safety hazards or use materials that could threaten human health and safety. The proposed work would improve work areas and structural integrity of structures that support the Umatilla Electric network and operations. Construction would maintain reliable access for associated equipment. No impacts to human health and safety are anticipated.

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 is located on BPA fee-owned property. No 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:

Sylas Daughtrey
Environmental Protection Specialist