

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 Line Relocation

Project No.: P02609

Project Manager: Alla Kirsanova, TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Benton County, Washington

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

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to relocate a portion of the McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 transmission line near McNary Dam in Benton County, Washington. In its current configuration, the transmission line crosses a Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company (BNSF) railroad in two locations: between structures 2/9 and 2/10 and between structures 3/1 and 3/2. BNSF intends to expand the railroad from one track to two tracks. To accommodate the expansion and maintain conductor clearances, BPA would relocate the transmission line to the north side of the railroad, thereby removing the two railroad crossings altogether. Specifically, BPA would:

- Remove existing wooden H-frame transmission structures 2/8, 2/9, 2/10, and 3/1
- Replace existing wooden H-frame transmission structures 2/7 and 3/2 with wooden H-frame deadend structures with guy wires
- Remove existing conductor from structure 2/7 to structure 3/2
- Construct three new wooden H-frame transmission structures between structure 2/7 and structure 3/2
- String new conductor from the new structure 2/7 to the new structure 3/2
- Replace guy wires at structure 2/6
- Improve approximately 1,600 linear feet (0.3 miles) of existing access roads
- Construct approximately 900 linear feet (0.17 miles) of new access roads, approximately 27,500 square feet (0.63 acres) total of new gravel landings, and approximately 5,000 square feet (0.11 acres) total of new gravel pulling and tensioning (P/T) sites, and install one new gate

To remove the existing transmission structures, BPA would either cut the wooden poles and guy wire anchors at grade and retire the footings and anchors in-place or would excavate and remove the poles and anchors entirely, depending on the preference of the underlying landowner. Installation of the new structures, counterpoise, and guy wire anchors would require auguring or excavating a hole and then lifting and positioning the wood poles into place. The new wood pole structures would be approximately 80 to 90 feet tall. Personnel would mobilize to each new/replaced structure to update the structure number signage, which would not require any ground disturbance. Construction of new access roads and landing pads would require grading,

compacting the soils, and laying down gravel. To string new conductor, P/T sites (approximately 2,500 square feet each) would be established west of structure 2/7 and east of structure 3/2. The P/T site preparations would include grading, compacting the ground surface, and laying down gravel. Following completion of the project, the graveled P/T sites would likely remain, depending on the preference of the underlying landowner.

In total, the proposed action would cause up to approximately 1.3 acres of permanent ground disturbance and would temporarily disturb up to approximately 3.6 acres. Temporarily disturbed areas would be reseeded with a native, regionally-appropriate seed mix in coordination with the underlying landowner. Excavated soils would be temporarily stored on-site and then used for backfill or spread evenly around the bases of the structures. The project would require the use of light-duty vehicles, heavy equipment (i.e., backhoe, boom truck, bucket truck, grader, and P/T equipment), and power tools. Construction is anticipated to begin in mid-August and conclude in late September.

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: McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 Line Relocation

Project Site Description

The project site includes BPA's existing McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 transmission line and access road rights-of-way (ROW) from structure 2/6 to structure 3/2 as well as new transmission line and access road ROW to the north of the existing line near McNary Dam in Benton County, Washington (Township 5 North, Range 28 East, Sections 3 and 4). Work would occur on property managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). In its current configuration, McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 crosses McNary Road and the BNSF railroad in multiple locations. The project site is located in disturbed and degraded shrub steppe habitat within the Columbia Plateau ecoregion and is dominated by weedy and invasive species with a low density of common native shrub, grass, and forb species, such as sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), balsamroot (*Balsamorhiza spp.*), buckwheat (*Fagopyrum spp.*), and native bunchgrasses (*Poa spp.*). The Burbank and Quincy soil series are mapped within the project site, neither of which are hydric. No wetlands are present within the project site, and the closest surface water is the Columbia River, which is located over 500 feet to the south. Outside of the project site, the surrounding area is primarily characterized by undeveloped and degraded shrub steppe habitat and agricultural land uses.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On May 18, 2022, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN)
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR)
- Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon
- Nez Perce Tribe
- USACE – Walla Walla District
- BLM – Spokane District Office
- Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)

BPA conducted background research and intensive pedestrian and subsurface surveys of the BLM-managed portion of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). USACE conducted similar surveys of their own portion of the APE. In addition, the YN conducted a traditional cultural property (TCP) study for the APE. The pedestrian and subsurface surveys did not identify any archaeological or historic resources. The YN identified a TCP in the APE, and through consultation, the CTUIR noted that the project is within a Historic Property of Religious and Cultural Significance to an Indian Tribe (HPRCSIT). Both the TCP and the HPRCSIT are recommended eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP). BPA determined that implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in an adverse effect to historic properties. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between BPA and the

YN, the CTUIR, BLM, and DAHP was signed on July 17, 2024. BPA acted as the lead federal agency for BLM and USACE (USACE indicated that they did not need to sign the MOA).

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.
- The YN and the CTUIR will monitor construction activities, at their discretion, for the duration of the project.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would cause up to approximately 3.6 acres of temporary soil disturbance from removing, replacing, and constructing new transmission structures, access road work, and maneuvering vehicles and equipment during construction. Constructing new access roads, landing pads, and P/T sites and replacing and constructing new transmission structures would cause up to approximately 1.3 acres of permanent soil loss. 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.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would temporarily crush, strip, or bury up to approximately 3.6 acres and would permanently remove approximately 1.3 acres of vegetation that primarily consists of weedy and invasive species with a relatively low proportion of common native shrub, grass and forb species. Standard construction BMPs would be implemented to stabilize soils, re-establish vegetation, and minimize the spread of noxious weeds. Temporarily disturbed areas would be seeded and 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 impacted.

Notes:

- Revegetate with native, regionally-appropriate seed mix developed in coordination with the underlying landowners, if required.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary wildlife disturbance could occur from elevated noise and human presence during construction and from temporary habitat impacts. Suitable habitat for bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) is present. However, no known nest sites are located near the project site, and construction would occur in August through September when the likelihood of nest abandonment and vulnerability of nestlings is low. It is expected that most wildlife species, including bald and golden 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.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water bodies are present within the project site, and the project site is not located within a floodplain. Standard construction BMPs would be implemented to minimize soil erosion, sedimentation, and fugitive dust and thereby prevent indirect impacts to off-site water bodies, floodplains, and special-status fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present within or near the project site. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbance is unlikely to reach depths to groundwater. Standard construction BMPs would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers. 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 (i.e., increased construction vehicle traffic) could temporarily and intermittently impact traffic flow on McNary Road. BPA would implement standard construction BMPs to safely manage traffic, if required during construction. These impacts would be temporary and would only occur during daylight hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). The proposed action would permanently develop a transmission line and associated access roads in an area that is currently undeveloped shrub steppe habitat that is disturbed and degraded. This change in land use would be consistent with current surrounding 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 result in 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. The new transmission structures would be approximately the same height and appearance as the existing structures, although the total number of structures would be reduced by one. This visual change would be consistent with the existing visual quality of the area. The project site is not 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, equipment, and general construction activities, which could intermittently exceed current ambient conditions. Noise impacts would be temporary and intermittent and would only occur during typical working hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). There are no noise-sensitive land uses near the project site. 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 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