

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 Danger Tree Management

**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; USFS NEPA procedures 36 CFR 220.6[e] as adopted July 23, 2024):** B1.3 Routine Maintenance; 2.(e)(12) Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres...

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to limb, top, or fell 16 danger trees and to remove one additional tree stump between structures 3/9 and 4/1 on the Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 transmission line near Ellensburg, Kittitas County, Washington. Danger trees have the potential to grow into, fall into, or be blown into the minimum clearance distance to the Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 conductor. Therefore, the proposed action is required to minimize the risk of flashovers and/or damage to the transmission lines and to remain compliant with Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC) transmission reliability standards.

Danger tree removal, limbing, and/or topping would be conducted by personnel climbing each tree and cutting 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. Removing the tree stump located near structure 4/1 would result in minor and localized soil disturbance. There would be no other temporary or permanent ground disturbance associated with the proposed action as no skidding or tree removal would be conducted, and all other tree stumps would remain in the ground. Ground crews would access each tree using the existing access road network with pickup trucks and walk in on foot where needed. The work is scheduled to occur in early fall.

**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 or USFS NEPA procedures 36 CFR 220.6[e] as adopted July 23, 2024) (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 Danger Tree Management

## **Project Site Description**

The project site includes an area within and just outside of BPA's existing Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 transmission line ROW from structure 3/9 to structure 4/1 near Ellensburg, Kittitas County, Washington (Township 17 North, Range 18 East, Sections 11 and 14). Work would occur on private property and the Schaake Property, which is managed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Minor ground disturbance would occur from removing the tree stump near structure 4/1, which is located in an area vegetated with low-growing common grasses, forbs, and weeds. No other ground disturbance would be required. The danger trees include 13 black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*) trees and 3 willow (*Salix sp.*) trees ranging in size from 5-inch to 39-inch diameter at breast height (DBH). 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 near the work areas, but no ground disturbance is proposed within a wetland. 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 for the proposed Ellensburg-Moxee No. 1 Line Impairment Project. The consulting parties included:

- 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)

On March 20, 2023, BPA determined that the impairment project 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. No additional comments were received from the consulting parties.

The danger tree work was proposed after BPA made its original effects determination, and some of the trees were identified outside of the original impairment project Area of Potential Effects (APE). Therefore, BPA conducted additional background research and an intensive pedestrian survey of the expanded APE. On July 31, 2024, BPA simultaneously re-initiated Section 106 consultation with the above parties and determined that the original effects determination remained appropriate; that the proposed danger tree clearing project would

result in no adverse effect to historic properties. Concurrence was received from DAHP on July 31, 2024. No additional comments were received from the consulting parties.

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: Minor and temporary ground disturbance would occur from removing the tree stump near structure 4/1. Temporarily disturbed soils would stabilize as pasture grasses are reestablished 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 limb, top, or fell 13 black cotton wood trees and 3 willow trees ranging in size from 5-inch to 39-inch DBH. The proposed action could crush low-growing common grasses, forbs, and weeds at the bases of the trees. 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.

## 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. 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, and habitat would not be modified in a way that would preclude future use of the project area. No other special-status species or wildlife species protected under the federal ESA are expected to occur near the project site.

Notes:

- Complete a visual survey for nests 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: The project site is situated within the floodplain of the Yakima River. The Yakima River supports species protected under the federal ESA, including bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and is designated critical habitat

for both species. The proposed action would not include any in-water work and would not require ground disturbance that could indirectly impact water bodies or special-status fish.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not require ground disturbance that could directly or indirectly impact wetlands located near the project site.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not result in ground disturbance that could reach depths to 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 would not require a change in land use, 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 minor change in the appearance of the project site and would not be overtly noticeable to 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 emissions in the local area from vehicle and equipment use. 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, which could intermittently exceed current ambient conditions. The noise could be audible from rural residential and agricultural properties in the area. 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: 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