

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Schultz-Raver Access Road Improvement Project

PP&A No.: 5103

Project Manager: Donna Martin, TELF-TPP-3

Location: Kittitas, WA

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

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to repair about 3 miles of existing access roads and improve or replace 15 stream crossings along the Schultz-Raver and Rocky Reach-Maple Valley transmission line corridors at the locations specified in the Location Section of this document. Access road maintenance would include blading, shaping, grading and the addition of rock. Stream crossing replacements would be in-kind culvert replacements and ford repairs to improve drainage and access. Culverts that are currently broken or buried would be replaced in-kind to maintain flows and passage. One ford crossing would be upgraded to improve fish passage through the placement of streambed boulders that allows for both fish passage and vehicle crossing.

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
- 3) environmental effects of the proposal; and
- 4) 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.¹

/s/ Chad Browning

Chad Browning

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey C. Grange

NEPA Compliance Officer Date: December 23, 2024

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

¹ BPA is aware of the November 12, 2024, decision in *Marin Audubon Society v. Federal Aviation Administration*, No. 23-1067 (D.C. Cir. Nov. 12, 2024). To the extent that a court may conclude that the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA are not judicially enforceable or binding on this agency action, BPA has nonetheless elected to follow those regulations at 40 Code Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) §§ 1500– 1508, in addition to the US Department of Energy’s NEPA implementing procedures at 10 C.F.R. Part § 1021, to meet the agency’s obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 *et seq.*

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: Schultz-Raver Access Road Improvement Project

Project Site Description

The project area is confined to the immediate access roads within BPA's transmission lines or adjacent easements. This includes the improvement of 5 perennial stream crossings and 10 intermittent stream crossings, the maintenance and re-construction of approximately 3 miles of access road. The waterbody, Telephone Creek, with the proposed ford reconstruction is fish bearing. The project area encompasses access roads on the Schultz-Raver #1 500kV and Rocky Reach-Maple Valley #1 345kV transmission lines. Project area varies, but is mostly west/northwest of Cle Elum, WA. Land use in the surrounding area consists primarily of USFS-managed land in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. The fish-bearing waterbody in the project area is used for fishing and the surrounding lands are used for camping, hiking, and snowmobiling. Elevation (above mean sea level) within the project area ranges from approximately 2,200 to 3,000 feet.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe, the United States Forest Service (USFS) Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, the Washington State Department of Transportation, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) on January 31, 2023, and received response from Washington DAHP on January 31, 2023 and from the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe on February 1, 2023. BPA contracted an intensive archaeological pedestrian survey and subsurface testing. Six previously recorded archaeological resources within or near the APE were also revisited. BPA recommended that all of the archaeological resources are not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, and no further management is needed. BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no adverse effect to historic properties. DAHP concurred with this determination on April 5, 2024. No other responses were received.

Notes:

- In the vicinity of the isolated finds, road improvement activities would be confined to the existing access road prism.
- All work crews would have on hand and follow BPA's Post Review Discovery Protocol Document.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Localized soil disturbance would occur during access road maintenance and stream crossing improvements. Standard construction erosion control measures would be utilized as necessary.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal or State special-status plant species are recorded in the project area. Project activities would be limited to within the existing managed transmission line right-of-way and associated access roads. No new landings or roads would be constructed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wildlife in the project area are likely to experience temporary disturbance from elevated noise and human presence. This disturbance is anticipated to be temporary and wildlife would use adjacent habitat during the construction period. The proposed project is more than 0.5 miles from the nearest northern spotted owl biotic detection and most of the project area is within designated Spotted Owl critical habitat. All project activities would be confined to the existing transmission line right-of-way and existing access roads. No trees or potential habitat would be modified as a result. While the proposed work would occur between August 1st to August 31st to coincide with the in-water work window, all work would be at disturbance thresholds that have a stand-off distance of 0.25 miles. Further, the project area is within close proximity of I-90 and project noise thresholds would not exceed background levels and BPA determined that the project would have no effect to northern spotted owl. No other ESA-listed species are present within the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Permanent impacts up to 175 square feet of Telephone Creek to reshape/repair an existing ford crossing was approved by the Army Corps of Engineers on September 19, 2024, under Nationwide Permit (NWP) 14. Additionally, improvements to 14 other non-fish-bearing stream crossings would be in-kind replacements and, therefore, exempted from permitting under Clean Water Act Section 404(f). Coordination with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife determined that only Telephone Creek would require fish passage design. Work in all areas would occur within the in-water work window and be consistent with NWP-14 authorization. Work areas would be isolated with coffer dams and dewatered into sediment bags. Stream flow would be diverted downstream in all fish bearing streams.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No work is proposed that would potentially impact wetlands within the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project would adhere to appropriate best management practices to prevent ground water contamination should an inadvertent spill occur.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No specially-designated areas were identified within the project area. There would be temporary noise disturbance to nearby recreationists located near the work areas. Noise would be temporary and limited to 2-4 days per stream crossing. There would not be direct recreational disturbance and there would be ample alternate locations to recreate during project work. Land use would not change permanently as a result of project activities.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to visual quality. New structures would be consistent and in general vicinity of existing stream crossing structures and access roads.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have a small, temporary impact on air quality from vehicle emissions and dust generated during construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would help reduce outage times and maintain reliable power to the region by enabling access to transmission infrastructure for routine inspections and rapid response during emergencies.

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: Landowners and USFS have been notified and coordinated with through BPA realty.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed: /s/ Chad Browning

Chad Browning
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: December 23, 2024