

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Kalispell FY19-21 Priority Poles

Project No.: P03956

Project Manager: Andrew Young – TEPL – CSB – 2

Location: Flathead and Lincoln Counties, Montana

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

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to perform in-kind replacement of ten wood pole structures and associated structural/electrical components (e.g. cross arms, insulators, guy anchors, etc.) along the Columbia Falls-Trego No.1 and Libby-Bonnors Ferry No.1 transmission lines. Replacement poles would be placed in or adjacent to existing holes following removal of current pole structures and may be re-augered to assure proper depth placement. Minor maintenance along existing access road prisms and landings is scheduled to be performed where necessary to facilitate safe access. No unauthorized construction activities would occur in any water body including streams, ponds, or wetlands. Access road maintenance may include blading, shaping, rocking, and construction of waterbars and drain dips.

Wood pole replacement locations are listed below:

Transmission Line	Structure	TRS	County, State
Columbia Falls-Trego No. 1	20/2, 20/3, 20/4, 20/5	T31N R23W SEC13	Flathead, MT
Libby-Bonnors Ferry No. 1	2/8	T31N R29W SEC32	Lincoln, MT
	11/7	T31N R31W SEC26	Lincoln, MT
	12/8, 13/1	T31N R31W SEC34	Lincoln, MT
	33/8	T31N R33W SEC7	Lincoln, MT
	44/8	T33N R34W SEC26	Lincoln, MT

The Federal Columbia River Transmission System Act directs BPA to construct, acquire, operate, maintain, repair, relocate, and replace the transmission system, including facilities and structures appurtenant thereto. (16 United States Code [U.S.C] § 838i(b)). The Administrator is further charged with maintaining electrical stability and reliability, selling transmission and interconnection

services, and providing service to BPA's customers. (16 U.S.C § 838b(b-d)). The Administrator is also authorized to conduct electrical research, development, experimentation, tests, and investigation related to construction, operation, and maintenance of transmission systems and facilities. (16 U.S.C § 838i(b)(3)).

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; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024), 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. ¹

/s/ Adrienne Wojtasz

Adrienne Wojtasz

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey C. Grange

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: March 4, 2025

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.

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Project Site Description

Proposed routine maintenance activities would be conducted along the Columbia Falls – Trego and Libby – Bonners Ferry transmission lines located in Montana. Proposed maintenance activities would be performed on the existing transmission line right-of-ways and access road easements, which are located in rural, non-developed and/or in rural, agricultural areas.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated Area of Potential Effect (APE) consultation with the Montana Historical Society, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and Kootenai Tribe of Idaho. The project area was surveyed by a BPA archaeologist. No cultural resources were identified during the survey and BPA determined that the project would have no adverse effects to historic properties. No responses were received.

Notes:

- In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, stop work in the vicinity and immediately notify the BPA environmental lead, archaeologist, and project manager.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Localized soil disturbance would occur during wood pole replacement and landing improvements. Standard construction control measures would be utilized as necessary.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minimal or no disturbance to vegetation is anticipated during structure replacements and landing improvements as the locations have been previously graveled and void of vegetation. There would be no effect to ESA-listed plant species. No impacts to state or federally sensitive species is anticipated. Project activities would be limited to the already impacted access road and transmission line right-of-ways and would not substantially alter existing plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: In general, the project would have a small impact to wildlife and habitat related to temporary disturbance associated with elevated equipment noise and human presence. Grizzly Bears are documented to occur near the project location in Montana. Project activities would occur during daylight hours, project members would follow applicable food storage requirements, overnight camping would not be allowed, and BPA personnel performing activities away from their vehicles would be instructed to carry bear spray and be trained in its proper use. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with a 'not likely to adversely affect' determination dated 2/13/2025 (FWS/R1/ES/IFWO/2024-0149968).

Notes:

- To avoid disturbance to grizzly bears during the fall and denning season, scheduled activities will be conducted between March 16 and October 15 in identified areas in the MIT, which overlaps grizzly bear recovery zones, and areas >1600 meters in elevation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Erosion control best management practices combined with the distance to the nearest waterbody (0.2 miles) would ensure that sedimentation would not enter into any waterbody.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are documented within the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No use of groundwater proposed. Maximum depth of disturbance would be about 12 feet below ground surface, which would not intersect with groundwater.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use. No specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be performed within existing transmission line right-of-ways and access roads. Replacement of the wood pole and associated components would be in-kind and replaced in or adjacent to the same location. Therefore, there would be a minimal change in the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

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

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary construction noise. Operational noise of the transmission line would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would allow safe and timely access to the transmission line which would help reduce outage times and maintain reliable power to the region.

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 coordinated with the underlying land managers and private landowners for this work.

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

Signed: /s/ Adrienne Wojtasz

Adrienne Wojtasz
Physical Scientist

Date: March 4, 2025