

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Chenowith-Goldendale No. 1 Impairment Repair

Project No.: P04870

Project Manager: Lisa Casey, TEPP-3

Location: Wasco County, Oregon and Klickitat County, Washington

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 improve grid reliability on 23 miles of the Chenowith-Goldendale No. 1 115 kV transmission line in Wasco County, Oregon and Klickitat County, Washington. The improvement consists of the installation of electrical shunts on mid-span splices on the conductor and compression fittings at dead end structures at approximately 48 locations.

Work locations at the mid-span splice locations and structures would be accessed by a bucket truck using the existing access road system. No access road improvement, grading, vegetation removal, or other potentially ground-disturbing work would be required to conduct the impairment repairs.

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), 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.

Jeremy Doschka
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.

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Project Site Description

The project area is located on BPA transmission line rights-of-way between The Dalles, Oregon and Goldendale, Washington. Approximately 10 miles of the project area is located within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The majority of the transmission line corridor is located on private lands and also crosses through the Columbia Hills Historical State Park and Columbia Hills Natural Area Preserve, which are both administered by the Washington Department of Natural Resource (WDNR) in Washington, and United States Army Corps of Engineers-managed property in Oregon. The dominant land use on private lands is cattle grazing and agriculture. Topography in the project area ranges from steep slopes and ravines associated with the Columbia Hills near the Columbia River to a mix of flat or gentle rolling hills in the northern portion of the project area. Vegetation is predominantly grasslands with scattered trees and shrubs in some areas and low, rocky outcrops near the Columbia River. No work locations are located within wetlands.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA has reviewed the proposed activities and has determined that this type of activity does not have the potential to cause effects to historic properties, per 36 CFR 800.3 (a) (BPA CR Project No.: WA 2024 072). Ground disturbance is limited to driving vehicles on established access roads and landings, consistent with routine transmission line operations and maintenance activities. Therefore, no impacts to cultural resources would occur.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities would not result in any ground disturbance, therefore, the proposed project would not impact geology or soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The activities would not impact any federal special-status species. Some minor crushing of existing vegetation could occur along the edges of access roads or surrounding transmission line structures.

There are isolated state special-status plant species known to occur on or adjacent to BPA access roads on WDNR lands between structures 9/3 and 9/7 on the Chenoweth-Goldendale transmission line. BPA has coordinated with WDNR personnel regarding the timing and locations of proposed work and avoidance measures would be implemented to ensure no state special-status species would be impacted.

Notes: WDNR personnel would flag locations of state special-status plants or be onsite during project activities to direct vehicles around special-status plants to avoid impacts.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: There are no documented occurrences of any Federal or state special-status wildlife species near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat is present. Minor, intermittent noise associated with project activities has the potential for temporary disturbance to nearby wildlife species.

Notes: If any protected MBTA-listed active nests are found on any of the BPA structures, the work at that location would be delayed until the environmental lead confirms that the nest is unoccupied.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not require in-water work or ground disturbance that could produce sediment that could enter nearby waterways.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands have been identified in the project area and no ground disturbing project activities would occur.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Spill prevention measures would be utilized during project activities. No ground disturbing activities would be proposed.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Portions of the project area are located in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area that are designated as Urban Area, and three General Management Areas: Open Space, Agricultural, and Agricultural-Special. The proposed work would be considered routine transmission line maintenance and would fall under the BPA savings provision of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act. Project information was shared at the Annual Coordination Meeting with the US Forest Service and CRGNSA on November 12, 2024.

In Washington, portions of the project area are located within the Columbia Hills State Historical Park and the Columbia Hills Natural Area Preserve, which are both administered by the WDNR.

In Oregon, the project area is located on land managed by the United States Army Core of Engineers. No land use changes would occur from this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The installation of the shunts would have minimal impacts to visual quality of the conductor and would be visually consistent with the existing conductor.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would generate a small amount of dust and vehicle emissions from work vehicles accessing the work locations.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project activities would generate minor noise and would be short-term duration during daylight hours.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers would follow all standard safety protocols. Activities would not impact human health or 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: All activities would be coordinated with landowners prior to work beginning. BPA has coordinated with the US Forest Service for work in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and the US Army Corps of Engineers and WDNR for federal and state lands.

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

Signed:

Jeremy Doschka
Environmental Protection Specialist