Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Chief Joseph-Snohomish No. 3 Access Road Project

Project No.: P03099

Project Manager: Donna Martin, TELF-TPP-3

Location: Douglas County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance; B1.24 Property transfer

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to maintain the existing access road network between line miles 1 and 14, and between line miles 30 and 35 on the Chief Joseph-Snohomish No. 3 transmission line. Safe and reliable access roads are essential for BPA crews to maintain its high-voltage transmission network, inspect the transmission line rights-of-ways for impairments and vegetation management actions, and safely restore power during emergency situations.

BPA access roads are typically 14-feet-wide, two-track, compacted dirt or gravel roads. About 7 miles of existing access roads would receive improvement actions and about 12 miles of existing access roads would receive reconstruction actions. Improvement and reconstruction maintenance activities include light- to heavy-blading; adding base rock, subbase, and surface rock; recontouring; reinforcing roadsides for stability in slide-prone areas; and compacting road surfaces. Several new spur roads, totaling about 0.5 mile in length, would be constructed between the existing access road network and isolated transmission line structures.

To maintain the existing access road network, about 12 rock drain dips and about 28 rubber and rock water bars would be maintained, improved, or installed new to manage stormwater runoff by directing water off the roadways and into adjacent vegetation for infiltration. Two new fords would be installed at two ephemeral drainages to maintain reliable vehicle access. Existing culverts would be cleaned out and maintained to ensure proper function; seven existing culverts would be replaced with larger diameter and/or longer length culverts to improve water flow under the access roads. About 1 mile of ditches would be maintained or installed new to move stormwater runoff away from the roads.

Six new gates would be installed, and existing gates would be repaired or upgraded to limit unauthorized vehicle access into the transmission line rights-of-way. Vegetation would be mowed along about 3 miles of established access roads that have become overgrown. Four areas totaling about 12 acres have been designated as temporary material and equipment staging areas.

General equipment used for this type of access road work includes excavator, loader, bulldozer, backhoe, grader, auger, vibratory roller, dump truck, flat-bed tractor-trailer, and mower/vegetation trimmer.

A 29-acre parcel of land located immediately west of BPA's Chief Joseph Substation would be acquired by BPA from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the purpose of potential future substation expansion.

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]

REBBECCA HILL

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Becky Hill
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

KATEY GRANGE

Digitally signed by KATEY GRANGE
Date: 2025.06.13 11:04:01 -07'00'

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

[1] BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to DOE's own regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021, to meet its 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: Chief Joseph-Snohomish No. 3 Access Road Project

Project Site Description

The project site is located between line miles 1 and 35 of the Chief Joseph–Snohomish No. 3 transmission line, located in Douglas County, Washington. The project site contains two geographically distinct components, a northern component (Chief Joseph Substation to line mile 13) and a southern component (line miles 30-35). No work is proposed between these two components.

The northern component includes lands managed by Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (with conservation easements for the pygmy rabbit), BLM, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), private lands with active wheat production fields, and rural residences. The Columbia River and the Chief Joseph Dam are located about half a mile north of the Chief Joseph Substation. The southern component includes Washington State Daroga State Park, a residential golf community, expansive apple orchards, and some private lands in active agriculture production.

Perennial, intermittent, and ephemeral streams are located in both components. The stream segments located within the project site do not support resident or anadromous fish populations. Four wetlands, totaling about 20,200 square feet (0.46 acres), were delineated within the project site.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated Section 106 consultation on February 1, 2021, with the following consulting parties: Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Confederated Tribes of Bands of the Yakama Nation, BLM – Spokane District, USACE Seattle District Regulatory Branch, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Officer (DAHP).

On August 2, 2023, BPA issued a Determination of Effect report with a No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties conclusion to the above-mentioned consulting parties. On that same day, DAHP emailed a concurrence with the No Adverse Effect determination. The BLM Spokane Office forwarded the report, also on August 2, to the Wenatchee Field Office for review, stating that the Wenatchee Field Office would be in communication with BPA should they have any questions/concerns.

On August 7, 2023, BPA sent the Determination of Effect report to Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and on August 8, DNR emailed a concurrence with BPA's methods and findings in the report.

No other responses were received by BPA. Therefore, Section 106 Consultation concluded on September 8, 2023.

Notes:

- An Inadvertent Discovery Protocol would be provided to the construction contractor prior to construction.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is primarily comprised of Chelan ashy fine sandy loam (3 to 15 percent slope), Quincy fine sand (0 to 30 percent slopes), Simsfield-Ellisforde-DelRio soils (0 to 15 percent slopes), and Torriorthents (very steep). These soils are moderately-drained to excessively drained soils. Best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented, including reseeding disturbed areas to reduce the likelihood of soil migrating offsite. Therefore, impacts to geology and soils are expected to be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Vegetation surveys were performed in 2024, and no federally-listed plant species or habitats were documented within the project area. BPA determined the project would have no effect on ESA-listed plant species and a No Effect Memorandum documents this determination. However, five special-status species were observed during vegetation surveys.

A population of least bladdery milkvetch (Washington [WA] Sensitive [SEN], BLM-SEN, State Rank Imperiled) was observed growing directly in the bed of the existing access road on WDFW-managed land, and a population of Whited's fuzzy-tongue beardtongue (WA-Threatened and State Rank Imperiled) was observed on private lands, also growing directly in the bed of the existing access road.

Two populations of gray stickseed (WA-SEN, State Rank Critically Imperiled) were observed on private lands near transmission structures and along the access roads. Eleven populations of Whited's halimolobos (WA Review List 1) were observed on WDFW, DNR, and private lands adjacent to access roads. Six populations of Grand Coulee owl's-clover (WA Review List 1) were observed on DNR and private lands. Five of the six populations occurred adjacent to transmission line access roads, while the sixth occurred in an area of native vegetation within, and directly adjacent to, a proposed access road corridor.

Special-status plant populations would be avoided during construction, to the extent practicable. However, portions of some special-status species (i.e., least bladdery milkvetch and Whited's fuzzy-tongue beardtongue) growing in the access road prism may not be able to be avoided. BPA communicated the populations' locations and proposed construction schedule to the landowners and managers, so there is an opportunity for the landowner to salvage, relocate, or harvest seeds for future propagation.

Showy milkweed, which does not have special status, was recorded during surveys for its association with the monarch butterfly, a proposed threatened species under the ESA.

Construction activities would permanently disturb about 2.2 acres of vegetation including about 2 acres of *Bromus tectorum* Ruderal Grassland habitat.

Construction activities would temporarily disturb about 13.5 acres of vegetation, including about 6.5 acres of Bromus tectorum Ruderal Grassland, about 2.2 acres of *Artemisia tridentata* (ssp. *tridentata*, ssp. *xericensis*)/*Pseudoroegneria spicata* Shrub Grassland, and about 2 acres of *Pseudoroegneria spicata–Poa secunda* Grassland.

With the avoidance of special-status plant populations to the extent practicable, salvage/seed collection opportunities presented to underlying landowners and managers for those populations that BPA cannot avoid, and implementation of vegetation-related BMPs (e.g., clean construction equipment, vehicles, clothing and boots to reduce the likelihood of relocating weeds and plant materials, revegetated disturbed areas with regionally appropriate native seed mixes, use weed-free aggregate sources) impacts to plants are expected to be low.

Notes:

- Obtain an environmental monitor for construction activities near the locations of the special-status plant populations.
- Install “Sensitive Area” signage, fencing, and/or flagging around the known populations of special-status plants populations, and restrict vehicles and equipment to designated and BPA pre-approved routes and work areas.
- Restrict construction activities to the minimum required work area possible given safety and construction requirements, to limit disturbance of native vegetation communities.
- Avoid spreading disturbed/excavated soils in native plant communities and special status species habitat (sensitive areas) to the extent practicable
- Cut or crush vegetation rather than blading or clearing areas that would remain vegetated, when feasible.
- Revegetate disturbed areas on public lands with a native, pollinator-friendly seed mix (when feasible) developed in coordination with land managers (i.e., BLM, WDFW, and WDNR) following completion of construction. On private land, revegetate with a native seed mix appropriate for the region or a ground cover seed mix, depending on landowner preference.
- Coordinate with WDNR to implement vegetation-related mitigation measures, per the provisions of the Memorandum of Agreement between WDNR and BPA for *Managing Impacts to State Lands from BPA Transmission Line and Access Road Easements*.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Wildlife surveys were performed in 2024; no federally-listed wildlife species or habitats were documented within the project area. BPA determined the project would have no effect on ESA-listed wildlife species, such as the gray wolf and the pygmy rabbit (Columbia Basin DPS) because these species are unlikely to occur in the project area based on available habitat and communications with WDFW. A No Effect Memorandum documents this determination.

Fires in 2020 impacted much of the available big sagebrush habitats within the project area. While the Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse (WA-Endangered [E] and BLM-SEN) and greater sage-grouse (WA-E and BLM-SEN) were not observed during 2024 surveys, these species and leks have been previously recorded within a half mile of the project area and some suitable habitat remains in the project area. As such, it is assumed that these grouse species are present within remaining suitable habitats (i.e., non-burned, intact shrub-steppe habitat) of the project area.

Other special-status species observed during surveys include the bald eagle (BLM-SEN) and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act [BGEPA]), Brewer’s sparrow (BLM-SEN), golden eagle (BGEPA and WA-Candidate [C]), and sage thrasher (BLM-SEN and WA-C).

Additional species observed during surveys include, but are not limited to, osprey, common poorwill, sage thrasher, common raven, red-tailed hawk, mule deer, coyote, American badger, and the yellow-bellied marmot. Red-tailed hawk nests were observed near structure 7/2 and 1/1 in a tower associated with another transmission line. A common raven nest was observed near structure 10/4. Culvert maintenance work would occur during the dry season, when water is not present, such that aquatic wildlife species would not be impacted. The project may have temporary noise and disturbance impacts to local wildlife species related to construction equipment noise and human presence.

Project activities would permanently impact about 2.3 acres of disturbed (e.g., burned) shrubland habitat, about 0.2 acres of big-sage shrub-steppe habitat, and about 0.1 acre of disturbed grassland habitat. Project activities would temporarily disturb about 15.5 acres of habitat comprised of disturbed shrubland (about 6 acres), disturbed grassland (about 7 acres), and big sage shrub-steppe (2.3 acres).

The habitats impacted by the project are small in quantity and largely composed of previously disturbed habitat types or are habitats that are otherwise abundant in the region. With the implementation of timing restrictions and other wildlife-related mitigation measures, the impacts to wildlife and habitats are expected to be low.

Notes:

- Limit construction activities to the non-breeding season for most bird species (including hawks and eagles, the breeding season spans February 1 to August 15). If activities must occur when a nest is known to be active, project activities would conform to established guidelines regarding bird nests, including nest buffers and protective zones.
- Identify active bird nests in construction work areas prior to conducting construction activities that may occur during the breeding season, if possible, and clearly mark active nests for avoidance by construction equipment and personnel.
- Avoid construction work between structures 4/5 and 6/1 between March 15 to May 31. If construction work must occur during this timeframe, then lek clearance surveys would be conducted at those previously known lek locations prior to construction beginning. Daily construction activities would be restricted to operating between 9am to 6pm.
- Limit vehicle speeds in the project area to no more than 10 miles per hour on unpaved access roads to reduce the likelihood of collision with wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project would avoid, and minimize to the maximum extent practicable, adverse aquatic impacts by performing necessary maintenance actions on the existing system of access roads and culverts, and would be expected to provide future benefits to water quality by preventing erosion and road washouts that could degrade downstream waters.

Larger diameter and/or longer length culverts would replace existing culverts at four ephemeral streams and three intermittent streams, and two new fords would be installed at two ephemeral drainages. Culvert maintenance activities (e.g., existing culvert clean out, in-kind culvert replacement, and maintaining inlet/outlet armoring) would be performed at two ephemeral, two perennial, and four intermittent streams.

The three culvert replacements at intermittent stream crossings near structures 2/3, 2/6, and 3/5 were authorized with terms and conditions under NWP 14 by the USACE Seattle District on March 31, 2025 (NWP authorization #NWS-2024-01075). The remaining work would be conducted under the Clean Water Act Maintenance Exemption (33 USC 1344) and Federal Regulations (33 CFR 323.4(a)(2)).

BPA would implement BMPs for erosion and sedimentation controls during construction activities, including use of erosion control devices (i.e. silt fencing, straw bales, etc.), to minimize sedimentation into the stream beds during project activities.

Disturbed areas would be reseeded with climate and regionally appropriate seed mixes and mulched with weed-free materials to minimize potential for erosion and sedimentation.

Therefore, the culvert replacement and maintenance work may provide a long-term net-benefit for the aquatic environment by improving habitat and hydrologic connectivity under the road prisms. No permanent or temporary impacts are expected to occur to fish or floodplains, and permanent (544 sq. ft.) and temporary impacts (417 sq. ft.) to jurisdictional streams are expected to be low.

Notes:

- BPA would adhere to the Terms and Conditions of the Nationwide Permit 14 and permit authorization #NWS-2024-01075.
- Activities below the ordinary high-water mark would only occur during the dry season when no water is present.

- Sediment and vegetative debris extracted from the culverts would be relocated to nearby upland locations (outside of the delineated streams) and spread onsite.
- Stormwater BMPs would be used during the project as needed to control runoff or erosion, and work areas would be stabilized upon completion of project activities.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Roadside vegetation mowing during the dry season is proposed at two wetlands (9/3 and 9/5) and maintenance activities (e.g., existing culvert clean out and maintaining existing inlet/outlet rock armoring) are proposed at a third wetland (4/4). The fourth wetland (12/1) would be avoided completely.

Sediment and vegetative debris extracted from within existing culverts would be relocated to nearby locations (outside of the delineated wetland boundaries) and spread onsite.

BMPs would be implemented, including the use of wetland mats, if necessary. Roadside mowing and performing maintenance activities at existing culverts would not contribute to wetland filling nor alter the function of the wetlands. Therefore, the proposed action would have no impacts to wetlands.

Notes:

- Wetlands would be marked as “Sensitive Areas” on project maps and in the field.
- Activities within the delineated wetlands would only occur during the dry season when no water is present.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No areas of shallow groundwater or aquifers are known to exist within the project area. Subsurface work would be limited to replacing existing culverts located within access roads. No hazardous materials beyond fuels and oils used in construction equipment would be used for the project, and spill remediation materials would be stored at the construction site to quickly contain any releases of oil or gas. Therefore, the proposed action would have no impacts to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Parcel number 29252610007 is about 39 acres in size. BPA’s Chief Joseph Substation is located on the eastern 9.9 acres of the parcel and owns it in fee. The remaining 29-acre portion of the parcel is currently under the jurisdiction of the USACE, who is actively relinquishing their managed portion of the parcel back to the BLM. BPA intends to submit an application to BLM for the withdrawal and transfer of the property to BPA’s jurisdiction and management. This land transfer would not impact the current uses of the parcel which already contains a portion of the substation and is under federal ownership.

There are no specially-designated areas within the project area and no changes to land use are proposed. Project locations are located within existing transmission line corridors and would not change existing land uses. Therefore, the proposed action would have no impacts to land use or specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed access road actions are consistent with the surroundings and would not significantly change the existing visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary vehicle and construction equipment emissions and fugitive dust would occur during construction. No new sources of emissions are anticipated once the project is constructed. Therefore, impacts to air quality are expected to be low.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: A portion of a golf course is located within the BPA rights-of-way while the residences of the golf resort are located about 1,700 feet north of the project area. Some project areas are located within Daroga State Park; however, the project area would be about 500 feet north of developed public use areas.

Minor and temporary vehicle and construction noise would occur during construction. Construction work would be limited to daytime hours, Monday through Friday on non-federal holidays to reduce noise to nearby receptors. Construction noise would only last for the duration of construction. Therefore, impacts to noise quality are expected to be low.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Contractors would follow BPA and OSHA safety standards and would submit a safety plan for BPA's review and approval prior to commencing construction work onsite. The project would not create any new safety hazards or use materials that could threaten human health and safety. No new impacts to human health and safety are anticipated.

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's Real Property Services team has been in communication with, and will continue to coordinate with, the following landowners: USACE, BLM, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington State Parks, Chelan County Public Utility District, and private landowners.

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

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Becky Hill
Environmental Protection Specialist