

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: FY26 Snohomish Vegetation Management

PP&A No.: 6750

Project Manager: Jacob Grinolds – TFBV- SNOHOMISH

Location: Chelan, King, and Snohomish Counties, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 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: BPA proposes to maintain low growing vegetation communities in specific, localized areas in and adjacent to the Chief Joseph-Monroe No 1 and Chief Joseph-Snohomish No 3 rights-of-way (ROWs) located in the same transmission line corridor in Chelan, King, and Snohomish Counties, Washington. Vegetation management needs were assessed, and Vegetation Control Cut Sheets were created for the right-of-way corridors and associated access roads along these transmission facilities. Portions of these ROWs analyzed in this Categorical Exclusion are identified in the table below.

Transmission Line	Spans
Chief Joseph-Monroe No 1	64/5 to 121/5
Chief Joseph-Snohomish No 3	80/3 to 121/6

To comply with Western Electricity Coordinating Council standards, BPA proposes a combination of hand cutting, mowing, herbicidal treatment, and cutting danger trees to manage and maintain vegetation with the goal of removing tall-growing vegetation that is currently or will soon become a hazard to the transmission line (a hazard is defined as one or more branches, tops, and/or whole trees that could fall or grow into the minimum safety zone of the transmission line(s) causing an electrical arc, relay, and/or outage). The overall goal of BPA is to establish and maintain low-growing plant communities along the right-of-way to control the development of potentially threatening vegetation. Work would be done consistent with BPA's long-established vegetation management program and all herbicide(s) and adjuvant(s) mixture selections would follow the minimization measures identified in the BPA List of Approved Herbicide Environmental Standards & Procedures (ESP)# E-VGM-004.

The corridors in the proposed project area measure approximately 62 miles in length. Localized areas within an approximate 1,761 acres, 4 miles of access roads, and 6 structure sites of existing transmission line and access road rights-of-way would be initially treated in fall 2025 to fall 2026.

Herbicides would be selectively applied in accordance with their label instructions and BPA-listed buffer distances using spot treatment (stump or stubble treatment, basal treatment, and/or spot foliar) or localized treatments and cut stubble treatments) with chemicals approved by BPA to ensure that the roots are effectively controlled - preventing new sprouts - and selectively

eliminating vegetation that interferes with the operation and maintenance of transmission infrastructure. A follow-up treatment of re-sprouting target vegetation would be conducted by summer 2026. Additional vegetation management may be necessary in subsequent years of the vegetation management cycle in discrete areas of noxious weeds, or where BPA personnel discover vegetation that poses a hazard to the transmission line

In addition, BPA proposes to remove approximately 200 danger trees (DT) in, or adjacent to, the ROW and to remove limbs or top from approximately 45 trees in, or adjacent to, the ROW. Tree clearing would not be concentrated and occur in multiple, discrete locations within the 62 miles of rights-of-way. Trees and limbs would be hand cut to maintain the root system and all tree debris would be disposed of onsite, along the ROW, using on-site cut, lop and scatter, or chipping/mulching techniques.

No new access roads, skid trails, decking or staging areas would be needed for the work.

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 1021.102 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; 90 FR 29676, July 3, 2025 [Interim Final Rule]) and *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures* (dated June 30, 2025), BPA has determined the following:

- 1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B and C of 10 CFR 1021;
- 2) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion; and
- 3) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal (see attached Environmental Evaluation).

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.¹

/s/ Kylie Porter

Kylie Porter

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Date: October 17, 2025

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 the interim final rule to revise DOE NEPA regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021 and NEPA Implementing Procedures (dated June 30, 2025), 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: FY26 Snohomish Vegetation Management

Project Site Description

The work area is located in the Eastern Puget Uplands, Eastern Puget Lowlands, North Cascades Lowland Forests, North Cascades Subalpine/Alpine, North Cascades Highland Forests, and Wenatchee/Chelan Highlands. Eastern Puget Uplands and Lowlands are characterized by a mild maritime climate and coniferous forests that are affected by the rain shadow from the Olympic Mountains. The North Cascades Lowland Forests, Subalpine/Alpine, Highland Forests, and Wenatchee/Chelan Highlands are composed of high, rugged mountains and ranges in climate from a dry continental climate in the east and a mild, maritime, rainforest climate in the west.

The work areas are existing transmission line rights-of-ways that are on private land, tribal land, Washington State Parks, Department of Natural Resources, Skykomish National Forest and Leavenworth National Forest.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Pursuant to its responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR 800, BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, Snoqualmie Indian Tribe, Stillaguamish Tribes of Indians, and Tulalip Tribes on 9/17/2025. All concurred with the APE and the determination of no adverse effect on 10/17/2025. No other responses were received within 30 days.

In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA will require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

Notes:

Pre-work survey or monitoring is required on:

- Chief Joseph-Monroe No 1 at 68/1-68/2, 78/1-78/2, 83/2-84/1, 84/2-85/5, 88/3-88/4, 89/5-89/6, 95/4-95/5, 100/2-100/4
- Chief Joseph-Snohomish No 3 at 101/2-101/4, 101/5-103/3

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed vegetation management actions do not result in ground disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Site-specific treatment would be applied to maintain existing low-growing plant communities. Project activities would be limited to the already impacted transmission line and access road rights-of-way and would not substantially alter existing plant communities. Existing naturalized grasses and woody shrubs are present on the entire ROW and are expected to naturally seed into the areas that would have lightly-disturbed soil predominantly located on the ROW roads. Based on the ESA Review, BPA obtained a species list and made a determination of "No Effect" to whitebark pine. No impacts to state or federally sensitive species are anticipated because there are none present in the project area.

Notes:

- BPA would treat noxious grass on easement at the request of USFS.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In general, the project would have a small impact to wildlife and habitat related to temporary disturbance associated with elevated equipment noise (chain saws and mowers) and human presence. Typically, this temporary disturbance would last less than an hour in any particular treatment segment. With the use of cut, lop, and scatter tree debris disposal, some small animal habitat would be created. Wildlife is anticipated to use adjacent habitat and return to the treatment area soon after the completion of work.

Based on the ESA review conducted, BPA made a determination of:

- "No Effect"- Mt. Rainier white-tailed ptarmigan, northwestern pond turtle, yellow-billed cuckoo, and Canada lynx critical habitat.
- "Not likely to Adversely Affect"- Canada lynx, gray wolf, North American wolverine, northern spotted owl populations and critical habitat, and bull trout populations and critical habitat.
- "Likely to Adversely Affect"- marbled murrelet populations and critical habitat.

Consultation for affected species occurred in Spring of 2022 and resulted in the "Biological Assessment for Canada Lynx, Grizzly Bear, Bull Trout, Monarch Butterfly, Northern Spotted Owl, and Marbled Murrelet- Chief Joseph – Monroe No. 1 Periodic Vegetation Management" and associated Biological Opinion (USFWS Reference:2022-0012394).

Conservation measures required in the BA and environmental review are noted in the cutsheets to ensure they are implemented by vegetation management crews.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Streams in the project area with documented presence of ESA-listed fish, designated critical habitat for one or more species, and/or identified as Essential Fish Habitat have been noted in the Vegetation Control Cut Sheet. Appropriate herbicides would be used

within these locations according to label instructions and applicable ESA consultation minimization measures, including buffer distances. No ground disturbance would occur and root systems would be left intact to prevent sedimentation. Any effects to ESA-listed anadromous fish are covered by BPA's programmatic Biological Assessment and associated Biological Opinion with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Endangered Species Act Section 7 Programmatic Conference and Biological Opinion and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation for Standard Local Operating Procedures for Endangered Species to Administer Maintenance or Rebuild Projects for Transmission Line and Road Access Actions Authorized or Carried Out by the Bonneville Power Administration in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho (WCR-2014-1600, September 22, 2016).

For bull trout, no herbicide would be used within 100 feet of streams with identified bull trout presence, stream and riparian vegetation would be left alone if within 10 feet from stream where possible (except noxious weeds); and to preserve shade conditions, BPA would selectively cut only trees that are currently violating or have the ability to violate clearance standards within the next 3 years.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands may be present in the treatment areas. Herbicides would not be applied within wetlands and a buffer up to 100 feet would be established depending on treatment type, potential toxicity, or label advisory for ground or surface water. In those locations with wetlands, appropriate herbicides (mainly Garlon 3A) would be used up to the water's edge, but not over water. No ground disturbance, filling, or excavating of wetlands would occur.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No use of groundwater is proposed. Herbicide applications would be applied by licensed applicators and would follow label instructions to minimize the potential for groundwater contamination. Further, herbicides would not be applied within 50 feet of known groundwater wells and water sources.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur. No specially-designated areas are present in the work areas. No disruption to the use of USFS, tribal land, Washington State Parks and Department of Natural Resources managed lands would occur because vegetation management actions would be short in duration, would be localized, and would not occur in active use areas. USFS and WDNR were notified of the planned work and provided acknowledgement in September.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be performed within existing transmission line right-of-way. Vegetation management activities and techniques would be similar to what has occurred during prior prescribed management cycles; therefore, there would be a negligible change to the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have a limited, temporary impact on air quality from a small amount of vehicle and hand tool emissions and dust generated during vehicle movement.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary noise from vehicles and hand equipment that would occur intermittently and last a few hours in each area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would remove potential vegetation hazards to the transmission lines, thus reducing outages and wildfire risk. BPA approved herbicides would be applied by licensed applicators in accordance with the label instructions to limit the potential for public or worker exposure. Trees would be cleared by contractors who are qualified to work around electrical facilities to minimize the risk of trees falling into the lines and causing injury or wildfire. BPA has coordinated with land managers to ensure public safety during vegetation management work. Crews have safeguards in place to ensure public safety while performing work in areas with public use. Safeguards can include performing work at low usage times, posting signage and designating lookouts.

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 Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, Snoqualmie Indian Tribe, Stillaguamish Tribes of Indians, and Tulalip Tribes, Washington State Parks, Department of Natural Resources, Skykomish National Forest and Leavenworth National Forest. No special measures or requirements were identified for treatments on USFS, tribal land, Washington State Parks and Department of Natural Resources managed lands. Letters, on-site meetings, emails, and phone calls would be used to notify landowners approximately three weeks prior to commencing vegetation management activities. Door hangers would also be used at properties where special treatments are anticipated. Any additional measures proposed by landowners or land managers through ongoing communication would be incorporated into the vegetation management plan during project implementation.

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

Signed: /s/ Kylie Porter

Kylie Porter

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: October 17, 2025