

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Avista Bluebird Substation Interconnection to Grand Coulee-Bell No. 5

Project No.: P04646 (L0485)

Project Manager: Lisa Casey, TEPP-3

Location: Spokane County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.7 Electronic equipment; B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to connect BPA's 230-kilovolt (kV) Grand Coulee-Bell No. 5 transmission line to Avista Corporation's (Avista's) new 230-kV Blue Bird Substation. BPA would also install communications equipment within the control houses at BPA's Bell Substation and Grand Coulee Switchyard and would update SERR-SCADA software at Dittmer and Munro Control Centers.

The project would accommodate a request by Avista to interconnect its Bluebird Substation to BPA's Grand Coulee-Bell No. 5 transmission line near structure 71/2 in Spokane County, Washington. Avista would construct, own, and maintain Bluebird Substation and the associated transmission lines connecting to BPA's Grand Coulee-Bell No. 5. At the point of interconnection, Avista would construct two new transmission structures (71/1A and 71/2A), which would be owned and maintained by BPA. BPA would have operating rights for three 230-kV circuit breakers at Bluebird Substation, for a contiguous path between Grand Coulee-Bluebird-Bell.

Avista would construct two new, approximately 140-foot-tall, distressed steel monopole transmission structures (71/1A and 71/2A) within BPA's existing Grand Coulee-Bell No. 1 right-of-way. The new structures would be assembled onsite, lifted into place with a crane, and bolted to either drilled pier foundations or micropile foundations, depending on final design. Site preparations would include a new, approximately 40-foot by 80-foot gravel landing constructed at the base of each structure, for a total permanent ground disturbance area of approximately 6,400 square feet (0.15 acre). Temporary ground disturbance would extend approximately 13,600 square feet (0.31 acre) beyond the landings. Following completion of construction, Avista would reseed temporarily disturbed areas. No access road work would be required.

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 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

Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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 Evaluation

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 site is located within BPA's existing Grand Coulee-Bell No. 5 transmission line right-of-way near structure 71/2 on private property in Spokane County, Washington (Township 26 North, Range 41 East, Section 20). Ground disturbance would occur in an area characterized by a variety of common native and non-native grasses and herbs, including Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), tall tumble mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*), and St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*). Soils mapped within the project site include the Speigle-rock outcrop complex and Rockly-Fourmound complex, neither of which are hydric. No wetlands are present within the project site, and the closest surface water is approximately 700 feet to the northeast. Outside of the transmission line right-of-way, the surrounding area is primarily characterized by undeveloped open grasslands and scattered stands of ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menzeisii*) interspersed with rural residential properties.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: On March 3, 2025, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- Spokane Tribe of Indians
- Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)

Background research and field surveys were conducted within the Area of Potential Effects (APE). BPA determined that a historic-period agricultural site identified within the APE is not eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Although Grand Coulee-Bell No 5 is eligible for inclusion in the NRHP, BPA determined that the proposed action would not adversely affect the eligibility of the transmission line. Therefore, on August 20, 2025, BPA determined per §36 CFR 800.5(b), that the proposed action would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA Project No.: WA 2021 025; DAHP Log No.: 2025-02-01273). Concurrence with BPA's determination was received from the Spokane Tribe of Indians on August 20, 2025, and from DAHP on August 21, 2025. No other comments were received from the consulting parties.

Notes:

- Implement the Post Review Discovery Procedure in the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during implementation. Discontinue all ground-disturbing activity in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: The proposed action would cause up to approximately 6,400 square feet (0.2 acre) of permanent soil productivity loss from the construction of two new gravel landings and up to approximately 13,600 square feet (0.3 acre) of temporary soil disturbance beyond the landing footprints where maneuvering vehicles and equipment would result in minor soil compaction and rutting. Temporarily disturbed soils would stabilize as vegetation is reestablished and would eventually return to pre-existing conditions following completion of the proposed action. The proposed action would not impact geology.

Notes:

- Avista would be responsible for implementing sediment control measures in accordance with federal, state, and local stormwater regulatory requirements.

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

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: The proposed action would permanently remove up to approximately 6,400 square feet (0.2 acre) and would temporarily crush, strip, or bury up to approximately 13,600 square feet (0.3 acre) of common native shrub and grass species and non-native cheat grass. Temporarily disturbed areas would be seeded and would eventually return to near pre-existing conditions following completion of the proposed action. No special-status plant species, including plants listed under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), were identified within or near the project site.

Notes:

- Avista would be responsible for reseeding temporarily disturbed areas with a regionally-appropriate seed mix, in accordance with applicable federal, state, and local regulations.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount (up to 0.3 acre) of potential wildlife habitat would be lost during construction. Minor and temporary wildlife disturbance could occur from elevated noise and human presence during construction. It is expected that most wildlife species that could be present would be able to avoid the project site during construction and would likely reoccupy temporarily disturbed areas once vegetation is re-established. No special-status wildlife species, including wildlife listed under the federal ESA, were identified or are expected to occur within or near the project site.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water bodies, floodplains, or fish-bearing streams are located within or near the project site. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact water bodies and floodplains and would have no effect on special-status fish species or habitats.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present within or near the project site. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground excavation would not reach depths to ground water, and standard construction BMPs would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would occur within an existing transmission line right-of-way and would be consistent with the existing land use at the site. The proposed action would not impact adjacent land use, and the project site is not located in a specially-designated area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would result in a perceptible change in the appearance of the project site. During construction, the presence of construction equipment and general construction activities, including vegetation disturbance, would cause temporary visual impacts. The new transmission structures would be approximately 140 feet tall and would be constructed within an existing transmission line right-of-way. This visual change would be consistent with the existing visual quality of the area. The project site is not located in a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would cause a minor and temporary increase in dust and emissions in the local area. Standard construction BMPs would suppress dust. There would be no long-term change in air quality following completion of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would result in minor and temporary noise from vehicles, equipment, and general construction activities, which could intermittently exceed current ambient conditions. Construction noise could be audible from residential properties located near the project site. However, noise impacts would be temporary and intermittent and would only occur during typical working hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). There would be no long-term change in ambient noise following completion of the proposed action.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All standard safety protocols would be followed throughout implementation of the proposed action to minimize risk to human health and safety. Therefore, the proposed action would not be expected to impact human health and 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: The proposed action would occur within BPA's existing transmission line easement. Avista has notified and been in coordination with the underlying landowner and would continue to coordinate as necessary throughout the proposed action.

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

Signed:

Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist