

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Okanogan County Electric Cooperative Fiber at Winthrop Substation

Project No.: LURR20260019

Project Manager: Jamie Murray, TERR-KALISPELL

Location: Okanogan County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights-of-way; B4.7 Fiber optic cable

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to allow Okanogan County Electric Cooperative (the “Co-op”) to trench and install a fiber optic cable at BPA’s Winthrop Substation in Winthrop, Okanogan County, Washington. The Co-op proposes to excavate a trench from the edge of Chewuch Road West and enter the BPA fee-owned Winthrop Substation parcel, trenching and installing a fiber optic communication cable through the graveled driveway to the fence of the Co-op’s substation which is adjacent to the BPA substation fence. The trench would be dug with a small excavator and would be about 24-inches-deep by 24-inches-wide and would extend for about 266 feet in total. The Co-op would also connect the fiber line to their substation equipment. Work may take up to 5 days, and there would be no need for the Co-op to enter the BPA substation fence. Co-op personnel would dispose of any excess excavated material as determined by BPA Pollution Prevention and Abatement staff.

BPA authorizes the use of and manages its fee-owned lands pursuant to its authority under sections 2(e) and 2(f) of the Bonneville Project Act. 16 U.S.C. § 832a(e)-(f).

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 the current *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Procedures*, 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.

Michael J. O'Connell
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Evaluation

This evaluation 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: Okanogan County Electric Cooperative Fiber at Winthrop Substation

Project Site Description

The Winthrop Substation is near Winthrop, Washington with surrounding land cover that is a mix of scrub/shrub, and grass/herbaceous vegetation, and where the ecosystem is classified as Intermountain Basins Big Sagebrush Desert Shrubland. The substation is sited on a low overlook adjacent to the Chewuch River, which is 0.4 mile to the east of the substation. The nearest surface water feature is intermittent and nearly 0.2 mile from the substation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA determined that under the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106, the project would not affect historic properties, and on January 20, 2026, submitted to the consulting parties a combined initiation and determination package for the Okanogan County Electric Cooperative Fiber at Winthrop Substation project. The contacted parties were: Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation. On January 21, 2026, DAHP concurred with BPA's delineation of the Area of Potential Effects (APE) and concurred with the Determination of No Historic Properties Affected, stipulating an unanticipated find plan be applied to the project implementation. The 30-day response period to the combined initiation and determination expired on February 20, 2026, with no other responses from the other parties.

Notes:

- If cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, halt work in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed 24-inch-deep trench through the Winthrop Substation's driveway would not affect underlying geology or soils due to the substrate being leveled engineered fill for most of the trench profile. Excavated fill would be used to backfill the trench.

Notes:

- There would be no soil disposal anticipated; however, if there is a need to dispose of excess soil or other excavated materials, alert the BPA pollution prevention staff representative assigned to coordinate on material testing and approved disposal options.

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

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: There is potential for a state-listed endangered plant in the project vicinity, Columbia crazyweed, and two state-sensitive plants, many-headed sedge and prostrate povertyweed. However, all three species are typically found in close proximity to surface water and associated with riparian or lakeshore habitat and thus would be unlikely to occur in close proximity to the Winthrop Substation which is on dry, raised land. There could be some injury to the common vegetation bordering the Chewuch Road and substation driveway intersection where the fiber would enter the BPA parcel, but this would be a small area and would be crushed, not within the excavation area.

Notes:

- Do not cut or destroy vegetation. Where gravel or pavement cannot be utilized, equipment and work materials shall be placed on top of vegetation without cutting or mowing.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Federally listed species under the Endangered Species Act are known to occur in the vicinity. There is Northern spotted owl critical habitat about 3 miles to the west, and Canada lynx critical habitat over 4.5 miles to the east. There would be no effect on Canada lynx although there have been nearby sightings. Any lynx dens that may be in the general vicinity would be far enough removed from any work at the substation such that breeding lynx would not be disturbed. Northern spotted owls have no breeding habitat that would be affected, and the species' preferred forage habitat is the same: closed canopy forest. Golden eagles may utilize the area around the substation for hunting but there are no nests within the 2-mile breeding buffer, thus there would be no effect from the project on breeding. Any disturbance to foraging golden eagles would be short-lived and not affect the health of individuals. Bald eagles are known to the area and have previously had active nests in the vicinity. There are no currently active nests inside a 660-foot breeding disturbance threshold around the substation; therefore, the short-lived work may only temporarily disturb the bird during foraging and would not affect breeding or the health of individuals. There would therefore be no little to no effect to sensitive wildlife, and common wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by noise from the work but would not be affected other than temporary and slight behavior adjustment.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The work would be limited to the Winthrop Substation graveled driveway and the Co-op's fenced facility adjacent to the substation. The excavation may temporarily raise the amount of unprotected soil prone to erosive forces, but it would be short-lived and isolated. Because there are no water bodies, floodplains, or fish in proximity, there would be no potential for adverse effects to these resources.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands in close proximity to the substation, therefore there would be no effects to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The excavation for the fiber line would be 24-inches-deep and thus would not have potential to breach groundwater sources or aquifers because the site is on a terrace in a dry landscape. There would be no effects to groundwater and aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is consistent with the land use of the BPA fee-owned parcel underlying Winthrop Substation where BPA hosts the Co-op's substation.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be at ground level so equipment and vehicles would only be visible to passersby during the short duration of active work (anticipated to be 5 or fewer days) and would not affect visual quality after active work.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would produce short lived, localized increases in vehicle and equipment exhaust that would quickly dissipate with the cessation of work. The project would raise no concerns over air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Only localized and temporary increases in noise that would not rise to nuisance level or greater would be expected from the project due to the minor excavation involved in gravel and fill.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The installation of the fiber line would be performed by trained professionals that would be required to adhere to BPA safety standards while working on BPA fee-owned property. The project would be staffed with at least a minimum number of professionals with the expertise to work around energized substation facilities to keep all potentially affected workers out of harm's way.

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 Co-op would be responsible for providing traffic control as needed for the local road adjacent to the substation entrance. BPA owns the land at Winthrop Substation, and the BPA Realty organization is processing the Co-op's application for the fiber installation. There are no other coordination efforts required.

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

Signed:

Michael J. O'Connell
Environmental Protection Specialist