

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Carriger Solar Interconnection Project

Project No.: P04517 / G0598

Project Manager: Erich Orth, TEPP-TPP-1

Location: Klickitat County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.7 Electronic equipment; B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities; B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities; B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights-of-way.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes installing substation equipment and fiber facilities on the Knight Substation parcel located near the City of Goldendale in Klickitat County, Washington. Further, BPA proposes to allow Carriger Solar LLC (Carriger) to install equipment and portions of Carriger's transmission structure on BPA fee-owned property. Depending on Carriger's transmission line design and tower types used, their new 500-kilovolt (kV) transmission line could require construction of guy lines and anchors on BPA fee-owned property to support the final overhead span into Knight Substation. The proposed action would occur entirely on BPA fee-owned property.

As part of the proposed action, BPA would:

- Install one new 500-kV circuit breaker and other substation equipment in an existing bay in the substation yard.
- Remove an existing steel structure.
- Replace or install new system control and data communication equipment on racks inside the Knight Substation control house and at the existing BPA-owned Dittmer and Munro Control Centers in Washington.
- Install four new 4-by-4-foot fiber optic communication cable (cable) vaults immediately west and outside the substation yard on BPA-owned property. The vaults would be constructed roughly 10 feet apart and connected via a cable trenched in 4-inch-diameter underground conduit. Installation of the new vaults would require excavation up to 7 feet deep.
- Install two new cable and conduit lines underground from the new vaults approximately 330 feet into the substation yard for routing into the control house. The conduit trench would be between 2 feet and 5 feet deep.
- Allow Carriger through a land use agreement to construct limited infrastructure on BPA fee-owned property to support communication linkages and Carriger's transmission line construction to interconnect to Knight Substation. The following Carriger Solar project elements are proposed to be constructed by Carriger on BPA-owned property:

- Install fiber optic communication cables in two of the new BPA-constructed vaults and connect the vaults to the BPA-installed cables.
- Install two new cable and conduit lines underground from the new vaults approximately 200 feet west to property owned by Carriger. The conduit trench would be between 2 feet and 5 feet deep.
- Install transmission line structure guy wire anchors. The plate anchors would require a hole 10 feet deep and 4 square feet. If needed, BPA would allow Carriger to install up to five guy wire anchors on BPA-fee owned property.

BPA construction crews would access work areas outside the yard through an existing gate and access road on the west side of Knight Substation. Construction activities performed by BPA would result in approximately 0.2 acre of temporary soil disturbance. BPA construction impacts would occur from new substation equipment, footings, and excavation to install new cable vaults and conduit inside and immediately adjacent to the outside of the Knight Substation rock yard. Approximately 64 square feet of existing vegetated area outside the substation fence would be permanently converted to impervious surface with the installation of the new cable vaults. Approximately 0.2 acre of temporary material laydown areas or construction staging areas would be located inside the Knight Substation or previously disturbed areas on BPA fee-owned property; use of these areas would not result in soil disturbance.

Carriger construction crews would access work areas on BPA fee-owned property using Carriger-owned roads, access easements on private property, or existing access routes at Knight Substation with BPA approval. Installation of guy wire anchors, cables, and conduit by Carriger could result in up to approximately 0.5 acre of temporary soil disturbance on BPA-fee-owned property.

The types of equipment used for the proposed action include, but are not limited to, cranes, excavators, bulldozers, dump trucks, vacuum trucks, and substation maintenance vehicles. Excess excavated material generated during construction would be hauled off site for disposal. No new access roads would be required. All temporarily disturbed soil resulting from the proposed action would be restored to original contours and reseeded with a restoration seed mix after construction of project is complete. These activities would support the interconnection of up to 160 megawatts (MW) of new solar generation to the BPA Knight Substation.

BPA plans to implement the Proposed Action consistent with its existing authorities. 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)). Further, 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)). Finally, BPA processes requests for interconnection and provides interconnection services under the terms of an open access transmission tariff adopted by the Administrator in accordance with section 212(i)(2)(A) of the Federal Power Act. (16 U.S.C § 824k(i)(2)(A)).

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.

Christopher H. Furey
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: Carriger Solar Interconnection Project

Project Site Description

The BPA Knight Substation was built in 2010 and is located within unincorporated Klickitat County roughly 4.5 miles northwest of Goldendale, Washington. The substation occurs at roughly 2,020 feet above mean sea level and is within Township 5N, Range 15E, Section 35. The surrounding area within one mile of Knight Substation is comprised mainly of agricultural lands, dispersed rural residential properties, undeveloped shrub/scrub lands and maintained BPA transmission line corridor right-of-way.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Ground disturbance from the proposed action would be primarily inside the existing Knight Substation electrical yard and previously disturbed substation footprint outside the yard on BPA fee-owned property. Therefore, BPA determined on January 6, 2025, that the proposed project would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: WA 2018 234; DAHP Log No. 2024-12-09083). Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) concurred on BPA's Area of Potential Effect (APE) on March 24, 2025, but requested further information about BPA's consultation efforts before concurring with the determination of effect.

BPA also received responses from the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation's Cultural Resources Program (YNCRP) on January 7, 2025, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWSRO) on February 5, 2025. BPA had separate conversations with the YNCRP and CTWSRO. On March 5, 2026, BPA sent DAHP a summary of its tribal consultation efforts, requesting its concurrence with the determination of effect. DAHP concurred with BPA's effect determination on April 1, 2026. No other comments were received.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds and the protocol in BPA's Post Review Discovery Procedure guidelines followed.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Installation of the cable vaults would permanently convert approximately 64 square feet of surface soils to impervious vault covers. Temporary soil disturbance from the proposed action would total approximately 0.7 acre. Temporary disturbance areas outside the substation yard would be returned to pre-existing conditions by restoring original contours and reseeded with a restoration seed mix after construction is completed. All disturbance areas within the graveled yard would be stabilized by grading and the placement of substation yard rock. Stabilization of disturbed ground and exposed soils would be in accordance with best management practices (BMPs); erosion and sediment controls would be installed as needed. Any excess spoils not utilized as backfill during project construction would be hauled off site and disposed of at an approved disposal facility.

Notes:

- Develop an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan (ESCP) and BMPs to prevent any potential sediment migration off site.
- Upon construction completion, regrade and stabilize disturbed soils.
- Store spill containment and cleanup materials in construction equipment and at work sites.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The substation yard is maintained free of vegetation, and the work outside of the yard would occur on BPA substation property in previously disturbed areas maintained for low-growing vegetation. An approximately 64-square-foot area of low-growing vegetation outside the yard would be permanently converted to impervious surface with the installation of the cable vaults. There are no federal or state-listed plants or designated critical habitat occurring within the geographic area of the Knight Substation; therefore, no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plants or special-status plants would be impacted by the proposed action. Because there would be no effect on ESA-listed plant species, BPA did not initiate ESA Section 7 consultation. The proposed action would have a minor impact on existing vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A site visit was conducted on October 16, 2024, and ongoing desktop reviews through February 10, 2026, were performed to evaluate the proposed action's work areas for wildlife use and habitat. Project-specific desktop reviews primarily included review of proposed project design information, current and historic aerial images, and existing wildlife and wetland and waters databases maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

The official ESA species list from the USFWS, generated on February 10, 2026, identified three wildlife species with a federal listing status that have potential to occur in the project site: the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*). The desktop review and site visit did not identify any potential wildlife habitats on or near the project site, and no ESA-listed wildlife or special status species were identified as potentially present that may be impacted by the proposed action. Minor increases in noise and human presence during construction could have the potential to affect wildlife in proximity of the site; however, these impacts would be temporary and construction activities would not substantially change the character of the existing site. Therefore, BPA determined the proposed action would have no effect on ESA-listed threatened, endangered, or proposed wildlife species; designated or proposed critical habitat; candidate species; state special-status species of concern; or priority habitats. Because there would be no effect on ESA-listed wildlife species, BPA did not initiate ESA Section 7 consultation.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project site is a flat, upland area with no water bodies, floodplains, or fish-bearing streams present in or near the work areas that would be affected by the proposed action. The ESA species list from USFWS identified bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) as having potential to occur in or near the Knight Substation. There is one intermittent stream mapped by National Hydrography Dataset on the BPA project parcel; however, a review of desktop resources and a site visit on October 16, 2024 confirmed that no stream is present at or adjacent to the Knight Substation. Desktop resources included current and historic aerial images and topographic maps, flood maps maintained by the Federal Emergency

Management Agency, national and state wetlands and waters inventories, and databases maintained by National Marine Fisheries Service, USFWS, USGS and WDFW. Standard construction BMPs would prevent indirect impacts to water bodies, floodplains, and special-status fish. Therefore, the proposed action does not have the potential to impact water bodies or floodplains and would have no effect on special-status fish species or habitats. Because there would be no effect on ESA-listed bull trout, BPA did not initiate ESA Section 7 consultation. BPA did not apply for a Clean Water Act permit because no water bodies would be affected by the proposed action.

Notes:

- Develop an ESCP (See Section 2).

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project site is a flat, upland area with no wetlands present in or near the area affected by the proposed action. One riverine wetland is mapped on the Knight Substation parcel in the National Wetland Inventory database; however, a review of current and historical aerial images and topographic maps, state and federal databases, and the site visit conducted on October 16, 2024 confirmed that no wetland is present at or adjacent to the substation. BPA did not apply for a Clean Water Act permit because no wetlands would be affected by the proposed action. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: According to the Washington Department of Ecology Groundwater Map, no critical aquifer recharge areas, well heads, source water, or groundwater protection areas occur within or adjacent to the areas affected by the proposed action. The nearest groundwater wells are approximately 3.7 miles to the southwest located along Blockhouse Creek; well logs indicate varying groundwater depths ranging from 30 to 200 feet below the surface. The proposed action has a maximum excavation depth of up to 10 feet below the surface for guy wire anchor installation. Standard construction BMPs and spill prevention and response procedures would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers. Ground disturbance is unlikely to reach depths to groundwater, and no new wells or other uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

Notes:

- Spill prevention and response procedures would be developed and implemented during construction.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would occur entirely on BPA fee-owned property at and around the Knight Substation and is consistent with the current land use designation. No specially-designated areas are known to occur near the proposed action. Therefore, the proposed action would not change the existing land use or impact any specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The new equipment at Knight Substation would be consistent in type, quantity and appearance of the existing electrical infrastructure. The proposed action would have a minor impact on visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Construction activities have the potential to result in a minor and temporary increase in dust and emissions in the area affected by the proposed action. Standard erosion and sediment controls would be implemented, as needed. There would be no change to air quality after construction is completed. Thus, the impact on air quality from the proposed action would be minor.

Notes:

- Develop an ESCP (See Section 2).

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: General construction activities, including vehicle traffic and equipment, could temporarily and intermittently produce noise at levels slightly higher than normal ambient conditions. The Knight Substation is surrounded by agricultural land, open space, and dispersed rural residential uses. The nearest residence is approximately 0.3 mile to the northwest of Knight Substation. Temporary noise impacts during construction would be short-term and minor and consistent with the impacts associated with typical equipment used for electrical substation and transmission projects. After construction, the proposed action would have a minor impact on the current operating noise levels generated at Knight Substation. Therefore, the proposed action would have a minor impact on ambient noise at the site and surrounding area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All standard safety protocols would be followed throughout project construction, and standard construction BMPs would minimize risk to human health and safety. The proposed action would have low impacts on 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: All work would be on BPA fee-owned property at an active, operating electrical substation. If needed, a realty specialist would contact adjacent landowner(s) prior to starting construction activities.

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

Signed:

Christopher H. Furey, ECT-4
Environmental Protection Specialist