

Supplement Analysis
for the
Transmission System Vegetation Management Program EIS
(DOE/EA/EIS-0285/SA-827)

Pollution Prevention and Abatement Project Number 4,814
Natural Resource Specialist/Project Manager: Cozette DeTray – TFBV-BELL-1

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Activities

BPA proposes to clear unwanted vegetation in and adjacent to the right-of-way of high-voltage transmission lines and access roads in BPA's Idaho Falls Transmission Line Maintenance District, in Fremont, Madison, Jefferson, Bonneville, Bingham, Custer, and Elmore counties, Idaho; specifically the Goshen – Drummond No. 1, Swan Valley – Goshen No. 1, Lost River – Spar Canyon No. 1, and the Anderson Ranch – Mountain Home No. 1 lines. Vegetation management needs were assessed, and Vegetation Control Cut Sheets were created for the right-of-way corridor and associated access roads along these transmission assets.

The corridor in the proposed project area measures approximately 100 to 200 feet in width, and the treatment area covers approximately 85 linear miles through terrain that ranges from mountains and range lands to irrigated agricultural lands. Relatively small sections of the proposed treatment area runs through public lands. Public land managers include the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, and lands managed by the State of Idaho.

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.

To comply with Western Electricity Coordinating Council standards, BPA proposes to manage vegetation with the goal of removing tall-growing vegetation that is currently or would 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 low-growing plant communities along the right-of-way (ROW) to control the development of potentially threatening vegetation.

A combination of selective and nonselective vegetation control methods would be used to perform the work, and may include hand cutting, mowing, herbicidal treatment, or a combination of those methods. To ensure that the roots are killed, to prevent re-sprouts, and to selectively manage vegetation that interferes with the operation and maintenance of transmission infrastructure, herbicides would be

selectively applied using spot treatment (stump treatment) or localized treatments (basal treatment and/or low-volume foliar treatment). For worker safety and fire prevention, broad-spectrum (non-selective) residual herbicide would be applied, and only applied immediately adjacent to switch platforms and selected transmission structures (primarily wood poles). All herbicides and adjuvants would be chosen from a list of approved chemicals in BPA's Transmission System Vegetation Management Program Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) (DOE/EIS-0285, May 2000) and subsequent supplement analyses to the FEIS.

Cut, lop and scatter of immature, tall-growing trees and brush would be cleared from approximately 180 acres of ROW, and approximately 180 acres of herbicide treatment is planned, as well as four miles of access roads treatments, and 150 structure sites. Some urban tree removal and chipping of woody material is also planned. The work would be initially implemented in the fall of 2022 and continue into 2023. In addition, BPA proposes to remove approximately five corridor trees in, or adjacent to, the ROW and to remove limbs from approximately three trees in, or adjacent to, the ROW. A follow-up treatment of re-sprouting target vegetation would be conducted as necessary. 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. All debris would be disposed of onsite, along the ROW, using on-site chipping/mulching, or cut, lop, and scatter techniques.

Analysis

A Vegetation Control Cut Sheet was developed for this corridor that incorporated the requirements identified in BPA's Transmission System Vegetation Management Program FEIS and Record of Decision (August 23, 2000). The following summarizes natural resources occurring in the project area along with applicable mitigation measures outlined in the Vegetation Control Cut Sheets.

Water Resources

Water bodies (streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands) occurring in the project area are noted in the Vegetation Control Cut Sheets. As conservation and avoidance measures, only spot and localized treatment with Garlon 3A (Triclopyr TEA) would be used within a 100-foot buffer up to the water's edge of any stream containing threatened or endangered species, and 35 feet for all other waterways and wetlands. Trees in riparian zones would be selectively cut to include only those that would grow into the minimum approach distances of the conductor at maximum sag; other trees would be left in place or topped to preserve shade. Shrubs that are less than 10-feet-high would not be cut where ground to conductor clearance allows. No ground-disturbing vegetation management methods would be implemented, thus eliminating the risk for soil erosion and sedimentation near the streams. Where private water wells/springs or agricultural irrigation sources have been identified along the ROW and noted in the Vegetation Control Cut Sheets, no herbicide application would occur within a 50-foot radius of the wellhead, spring, or irrigation source (164 feet when using herbicides with ground/surface water advisory).

Endangered Species Act and Magnuson-Stevens Act

Pursuant to its obligations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA made a determination of whether its proposed project would have any effects on any ESA-listed species. A species list was obtained for federally-listed, proposed, and candidate species potentially occurring within the project boundaries from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Based on the ESA review conducted, BPA made a determination that the project would have "No Effect" for all ESA-listed species and designated critical habitat under USFWS' jurisdiction. The threatened bird,

yellow billed cuckoo, and its designated critical habitat are present in the project area. Nesting season timing restrictions would be implemented in suitable yellow billed cuckoo habitat to ensure no potential impacts to the migratory species could occur from proposed actions.

BPA conducted a review of ESA-listed species, designated critical habitat, and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) (as defined by the Magnuson-Stevens Act), under the jurisdiction of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). However, none were found in the project area. BPA made a determination that the project would have “No Effect” for all ESA-listed fish species and designated critical habitat under NMFS’ jurisdiction, and the project would not adversely affect EFH.

Cultural Resources

The proposed vegetation management actions do not result in ground disturbance to the physical environment, so the action is not one that typically has the potential to affect historic and/or cultural resources. If a site is discovered during the course of vegetation control, work would be stopped in the vicinity and the BPA Environmental Specialist and the BPA Archaeologist would be contacted.

Re-Vegetation

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.

Monitoring

The entire project would be inspected during the work period, fall of 2022 through summer of 2023. A follow-up treatment may occur after the initial treatment. Additional monitoring for follow-up treatment would be conducted as necessary. A vendor scorecard would be used to document formal inspections and would be filed with the contracting officer.

Findings

BPA finds that the types of actions and the potential impacts related to the proposed activities have been examined, reviewed, and consulted upon and are similar to those analyzed in the Transmission System Vegetation Management Program FEIS (DOE/EIS-0285) and ROD. There are no substantial

changes in the EIS's Proposed Action and no significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns bearing on the EIS's Proposed Action or its impacts within the meaning of 10 CFR § 1021.314(c)(1) and 40 CFR §1502.9(d). Therefore, no further NEPA analysis or documentation is required.

/s/ Aaron Siemers

Aaron Siemers – EPR-4
Physical Scientist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel Date: September 30, 2022
NEPA Compliance Officer

References:

Vegetation Control Cut Sheets

Idaho Falls District FY23 Vegetation Management Endangered Species Act Effects Determination

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