

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 Phase I Impairment Remedies; Spans 1/4, 9/3, 15/2, 15/5, 53/5, and 63/3

PP&A No.: 4,221

Project Manager: Gerri Colburn – TEPF-CSB-2

Location: Kootenai and Bonner Counties, Idaho, and Sanders County, Montana

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3-Routine Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to remedy impairments to the Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 transmission line at six locations along the line. BPA owns and operates the Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 high-voltage transmission line, which runs from Lancaster Substation in Kootenai County, Idaho, to Noxon Substation, in Sanders County, Montana. The line is supported by steel lattice structures. BPA has identified six impairments to the line that need to be remedied as soon as possible. Impairments are locations where the distance between the ground surface and the energized conductor does not meet safety and reliability standards. The impairments are located within spans in line mile and structure number 1/4, 9/3, 15/2, 15/5, 53/5, and 63/3 of the transmission line as it trends eastward from Lancaster Substation.

At the majority of the repair locations, BPA proposes to install wood pole prop structures, which would support the conductor and restore the necessary clearance. These new prop structure locations would also require the installation of counterpoise to ground the structure and protect the line from lightning. Counterpoise is typically installed in trenches that run ahead on-line and back on-line from the structure site, and the trenches are then backfilled with native material. At one location, at the line's crossing of the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir of the Clark Fork River, existing steel lattice structure 63/3 would be relocated 70 feet back-on-line and raised to a higher elevation of 140 feet, a 50 foot height increase. Relocation would involve excavation and installation of new footings for the structure, and restoration of the previous structure location.

All work would be conducted within the existing high-voltage corridor. Some light grading would be required at the prop structure locations to set up equipment safely for installation of the wood poles. Gravel access roads and landings would be installed at the prop structure locations. At the river crossing location, a new approximately 50 foot by 100 foot landing would be constructed to allow for installation of the new steel lattice tower, and future inspection and maintenance of the tower. Excavation would be required for counterpoise installation at the prop structure locations, and the new footings at structure 63/3. All work sites would be regraded, and un-rocked disturbed soils would be stabilized with a native erosion control seed mix and straw mulch.

A material yard would be established at a previously disturbed and developed location within the fenced yard of BPA's Bell Substation in Spokane, WA. Equipment generally used for this work includes electrical line trucks, a back hoe, dump trucks, light duty trucks, and a crane. The work would be completed in late summer and fall of 2023.

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) 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), BPA has determined that the proposed action:

- 1) fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D (see attached Environmental Checklist);
- 2) does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal; and
- 3) has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

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

/s/ Aaron Siemers

Aaron Siemers

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange

Katey C. Grange Date: June 30, 2023

NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

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: Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 Phase I Impairment Remedies; Spans 1/4, 9/3, 15/2, 15/5, 53/5, and 63/3

Project Site Description

The proposed action is located in the Columbia Mountains / Northern Rockies ecoregion of northern Idaho and western Montana. The ecoregion is characterized by rugged mountains and intermontane valleys, with many of the same coniferous tree species present that comprise the forests west of the Cascade Mountains, including red cedar, western hemlock, and subalpine fir. The project's Action Area is located on privately-owned land, with one proposed work location (structure 63/3) within the Kootenai National Forest. Land use surrounding the Action Area ranges from agricultural, private timber, and rural residential, to public conservation and timber lands of the National Forest.

The proposed action would occur within, and immediately adjacent to, BPA rights-of-way (ROWs) and access roads for the Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 transmission line. BPA does not own the property on which the transmission lines are located, but rather has easement rights to operate and maintain the transmission lines and access roads. The cleared transmission corridor is approximately 200 ft. wide, and the Lancaster-Noxon No. 1 line shares the corridor with a non-BPA line. Vegetation in the corridor is periodically managed to remove tall-growing tree species and promote low-growing grasses and shrubs. While the work sites are generally flat, the surrounding topography is hilly to mountainous, typical of the Northern Rockies. Elevation in the proposed work locations generally ranges around 2300 feet. On the western side of the work area, closer to Lancaster Substation and the town of Post Falls, Idaho, land use is generally agricultural and rural residential, while toward the western work area, as the line follows the southern side of the Clark Fork River valley, work sites are generally more remote, and are rural residential, or private timber lands. No fish-bearing or perennial waterways are located in the Action Area, and no known wetlands are present in the work area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Pursuant to its responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, BPA evaluated the proposed project and developed an Area of Potential Effects (APE). On July 17, 2022 BPA initiated consultation on the proposed undertaking with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Kalispell Tribe of Indians, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Spokane Tribe of Indians, United States Forest Service – Idaho Panhandle National Forest and Kootenai National Forest, the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (MT SHPO), and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office.

BPA conducted background research with Idaho and Montana state cultural resource databases, followed by an intensive field survey of the APE. Background research identified 10 previously recorded historic-era archaeological resources within one mile of the APE. On April 6, 2023, BPA made a determination that the project would have no adverse effect to historic and cultural resources and received comment back from MT SHPO. BPA submitted an amended report to the consulting parties on June 1, 2023. There were no additional comments.

Notes:

- 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.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation and soil disturbance would be required to install wood pole prop structures, counterpoise, and any necessary guy wires and anchors, as well as to install the new footings for the new steel lattice structure at 63/3. However, disturbance would be limited to the six work sites. The project is located in existing high-voltage transmission corridor, adjacent to existing transmission structures and access roads, in areas generally previously disturbed during the original construction of the transmission line. Maximum excavation depth would likely be approximately 10 to 15 feet. Upon project completion, the existing grade would be restored with native backfill, or select backfill, and the disturbed soils would be seeded with a native erosion control seed mix and stabilized with straw or hydro-mulch. Excess soils would be spread on site and stabilized with seed and straw.

Notes:

- Work site footprints would be minimized as much as possible to avoid soil disturbance.
- Upon project completion, disturbed, un-rocked soils would be stabilized with native erosion control grass seed and mulched with straw, or hydroseeded.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Local plants would be disturbed at the proposed prop structure locations as equipment is mobilized, the ground is trenched for counterpoise installation, holes are dug for prop structure installation and steel lattice footings, etc. However, work area footprint would be limited to the existing transmission right-of-way corridor and minimized as much as possible at the work site locations. Upon project completion, the area would be re-graded to match existing contours, and seeded with a native seed mix.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on February 27, 2023. No ESA-listed plants or habitat are present in the project area, therefore, the project would have “No Effect” on ESA-listed plant species.

BPA reviewed available data sources, and no special status state species are documented in the project area.

Notes:

- Work site footprints would be minimized as much as possible to avoid impacts to local plants.
- Upon project completion, disturbed, un-rocked soils would be stabilized with native erosion control grass seed and mulched with straw, or hydroseeded.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Local wildlife, such as small to midsized mammals and birds, could be disturbed by project activities, assuming they are present in the project area. However, disturbance would be temporary, and the surrounding landscape provides ample habitat and cover for displaced animals.

In accordance with the ESA, BPA obtained an official species list from USFWS on February 27, 2023. After a review of the habitat within the project area, and recorded ESA-listed species observations documented in Montana and Idaho's Natural Heritage Program databases, BPA determined that the project would have "No Effect" on Canada lynx, grizzly bear, North American wolverine, yellow-billed cuckoo, and the candidate species monarch butterfly.

BPA reviewed available data sources, and no special status state species and/or habitat is documented in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no water bodies, floodplain or fish streams located in the project area. At the structure 63/3 project location, the transmission line crosses the Cabinet Gorge Reservoir of the Clark Fork River. However, the river is over 600 ft. from the structure location, and no proposed project activity or ground disturbance would encroach on the river, or impact fish, including ESA-listed bull trout, or other aquatic life species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No excavation would extend to depths that would impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The majority of proposed project work sites are located on private lands; including open tracts near Post Falls, Idaho, and private forested lands. Primary land use is high-voltage transmission corridor. The proposed project would not alter existing land use, and is not located in a specially designated area. The river crossing location, structure 63/3, is located on lands managed by the Kootenai National Forest. The proposed project would not alter existing land use at this location.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Installation of wood pole prop structures on the steel lattice line would increase the number of structures supporting the line, landings, and spur roads. At the river crossing location, 63/3, the steel lattice tower would be moved back-on-line, and raised xx feet. However, the proposed project would not substantially change the existing visual character of the area, which is currently high voltage transmission corridor, and would remain so after project completion.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor, local impacts to air quality would occur due to construction activity and vehicular traffic, however impacts would be temporary and insignificant. Work areas are generally located in remote places, without many human receptors.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction activity would generate noise. However, impacts would be local and relatively minor. All project activity would occur during daylight hours, and work areas are generally located in remote placed, without many human receptors.

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12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have benefits to human health and safety, as the purpose of the project is to restore safety and reliability clearance standards currently affected by the line impairments.

Notes:

- Prior to the start of the project, work crews would identify and discuss the job hazards and safety concerns, and follow all BPA and OSHA safety procedures during construction.

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 would coordinate project activities with land owners and land managers at proposed work locations, and would continue to coordinate during construction and site restoration. BPA has notified the USFS of the planned action and would continue to coordinate project activities on National Forest lands during construction.

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

Signed: /s/ Aaron Siemers

Aaron Siemers

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: June 30, 2023