

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Skamania PUD Distribution Line Removal

Project No.: LURR-20230260

Project Manager: Brent Leslie, TERR-REDMOND

Location: Skamania County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights-of-way

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to allow Public Utility District No. 1 of Skamania County (Skamania PUD) to remove its existing 40-foot-tall wood distribution pole, pole-mounted transformer, and 7.2-kilovolt (kV) overhead distribution line from BPA's fee-owned transmission line right-of-way (ROW) west of structures 10/5 on the Underwood Tap to Bonneville PH 1-Alcoa No. 1 & 2 and North Bonneville-Midway No. 1 transmission lines in Carson, Skamania County, Washington. Skamania PUD's wood distribution pole is structurally compromised and at risk of failure. Therefore, the proposed action is required to mitigate a safety risk and ensure system reliability.

Skamania PUD would remove the compromised wood pole, overhead transformer, and 7.2-kV overhead distribution line using a bucket truck and line truck. The resulting hole would be backfilled with aggregate and graded flat. The site would be accessed from adjacent, privately-owned property to the north via existing access roads. Temporary ground disturbance would occur within an approximately 50-foot by 50-foot area centered on the distribution pole. No new structures or equipment would be installed. All decommissioned equipment would be removed from the site.

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/ Walker Stinnette

Walker Stinnette

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange

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.

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Project Site Description

The project site is located on BPA fee-owned transmission line ROW west of structures 10/5 on the Underwood Tap to Bonneville PH 1-Alcoa No. 1 & 2 and North Bonneville-Midway No. 1 transmission lines in Carson, Skamania County, Washington (Township 3 North, Range 8 East, Section 28). All ground disturbance would occur within an approximately 50-foot by 50-foot work area centered on Skamania PUD's existing wood distribution pole at the northern edge of the BPA property. Vegetation consists of low-growing, common grasses, forbs, and weeds that are regularly mowed as part of routine transmission line ROW maintenance. The underlying Washougal soil series is not hydric, and no wetlands or surface waters are present within or near the project site. Residential properties are located outside of the ROW to the north and the south. All work areas are located within a designated Urban Area of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA).

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA conducted a desktop review of the Area of Potential Effects (APE) using the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation online database. The North Bonneville-Midway No. 1 and Underwood Tap to Bonneville PH 1-Alcoa No. 1 & 2 transmission lines were identified within the APE and are considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP). However, the proposed undertaking would not alter the eligibility of these resources. No known archaeological sites were identified within or near the APE. The proposed undertaking would be limited to the disturbance area associated with previous construction of the Skamania PUD distribution line and BPA transmission lines, and existing access roads would be used. Therefore on September 1, 2023, BPA determined that the proposed undertaking would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: WA 2023 146).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would result in soil disturbance from excavation of the wood distribution pole and minor soil compaction from vehicle and equipment use. All ground disturbance would occur within an area no greater than approximately 50 feet by 50 feet. Temporarily disturbed soils would eventually stabilize as vegetation becomes reestablished following completion of the proposed action. The proposed action would not impact geology.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would temporarily remove, crush, or cover some common grasses, forbs, and weeds, and shrubs within an area no greater than approximately 50 feet by 50 feet. Temporarily disturbed areas would eventually revegetate following completion of the proposed action. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status plant species within or near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat is present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary wildlife disturbance could occur from construction noise. However, wildlife species that could be present in the area would likely be habituated to this level of disturbance given surrounding land uses. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status wildlife species near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat is present.

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 habitat is located within or near the project site. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact water bodies or floodplains and would have no effect on special status fish species or habitat.

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: Excavation is unlikely to reach depths that would intersect groundwater, and the proposed action would not generate or use hazardous materials that would contaminate groundwater or aquifers, if present. No new wells or other uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed. 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 could temporarily impact adjacent residential land uses due to construction noise that would last less than a day. However, there would be no permanent land use impacts following completion of the proposed action. The project site is located entirely within a designated Urban Area of the CRGNSA, which means the CRGNSA Management Plan does not apply. No CRGNSA Management Plan consistency review by the U.S. Forest Service would be required.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, the presence of equipment and general construction activities, including excavation and minor vegetation disturbance, would cause temporary visual impacts. The existing wood distribution pole, overhead transformer, and 7.2-kV overhead distribution line would be removed, and no new structures or equipment would be installed. Temporarily disturbed areas would eventually appear similar to the surrounding landscape.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would produce minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions in the local area. 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 produce intermittent and temporary construction-related noise at levels greater than current ambient conditions, which could be audible from nearby residential properties. Noise impacts would be temporary and would only occur during daylight 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: The proposed action would not generate or use hazardous materials. Decommissioned equipment would be removed from the site. 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: All proposed work would occur on BPA fee-owned property. No landowner notification, involvement, or coordination would be required.

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

Signed: /s/ Walker Stinnette September 6, 2023
Walker Stinnette Date
Environmental Protection Specialist