

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: McNary-Paterson Tap

Project No.: P02364

Project Manager: Sarah Sprague -- TEPS-TPP-1

Location: Umatilla County, OR and Benton County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.6 Additions and Modifications to Transmission Facilities; B4.12 Construction of Powerlines

Description of the Proposed Action: The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to expand the McNary Substation, add transmission towers, move existing transmission lines and construct new transmission lines in Umatilla County, Oregon and Benton County, Washington. The project would create another route of service from McNary Substation to Paterson Tap, to reduce the load on the McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 line. The proposed project is located on federal lands (BLM and Army Corps of Engineers managed).

Work in Oregon would occur in and around the McNary Substation in Umatilla, Oregon. Work would include a single 115kV bay expansion adjacent to the southwest corner of the substation and moving the McNary-Ross No. 1 line from the west side to the east side of the existing structures. The McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 line would be re-terminated at the McNary substation, with five new wood pole structures added. A short section of new line (to be named McNary-Berrigan Tap No. 1) would be built including three new structures (two wood, one steel pole) adjacent to McNary Substation. The line's Columbia River crossing structures and spans would not be modified.

In Washington, the new McNary-Berrigan No. 1 line would use existing McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 structures from the river crossing to a new tap location. Existing adjacent towers with spans crossing the McNary-Badger Canyon-1 line may require modifications including adding redundant hardware and reducing span tensions. A new approximately 2-mile-long segment of the McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 line, consisting of approximately 17 wood pole structures, would be built parallel to the existing McNary-Franklin No. 2 line between an existing structure and a new two-pole wood structure tap. Once the work is complete, the McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 line would be renumbered from the new tap to Badger Canyon Substation (approximately 25 miles).

Overall, a total of 27 new structures would be constructed, including one new tubular steel monopole supported on a drilled pier foundation and 26 wood pole structures (H-frame and three-pole). Areas around the new towers that would be temporarily disturbed during construction total approximately 6.5 acres. Approximately 0.25 acre of land would be permanently disturbed by the installation of the new towers. At McNary Substation, approximately 0.5 acres of land outside the existing fence line would be graded and leveled for the 115kV bay expansion. Two material yards are

being considered for use, both within the McNary Substation perimeter fence. No access road work is planned.

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/ Douglas Corkran

Douglas Corkran
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.

Proposed Action: McNary-Paterson Tap

Project Site Description

The project area is located east and northeast of the City of Umatilla, in north central Oregon. The area is high desert shrub-steppe and grasslands on either side of the Columbia River just below McNary Dam. On the south side of the river where the project exits the McNary Substation, the ground surface is gently sloped to the north and is composed of gravel and earth with grassy and weedy cover that was previously disturbed during construction of the McNary Dam. Some riparian vegetation (cottonwoods and shrubs) and a small area of native sagebrush exist closer to the river crossing. There are several residences approximately 200-300 feet west of a portion of the project area. There are multiple transmission lines and towers surrounding this portion of the project area.

The project area on the north side of the river sits on a bedrock plateau approximately 75 vertical feet above the river and extends up a gentle slope to the north and northeast for several miles. This area has been heavily grazed in the past and consists of low growing grasses and sagebrush. Some noxious weed species are present. No residences or structures are located near the project area north of the river.

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 and 36 CFR Part 800, BPA initiated consultation with Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, the United States Bureau of Land Management – Spokane District (BLM), the United States Army Corps of Engineers – Portland and Walla Walla districts, the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on October 5, 2021. BPA received a response from DAHP on October 5, 2021 concurring with the APE. On October 5, 2021 the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN) responded that the APE was within a Traditional Cultural property (TCP) and that they recommended a study to consider the effects of the project on the TCP. The Oregon SHPO concurred with the APE on October 24 2021. On November 29, 2021 the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) responded that the APE is within a Historic Property of Religious and Cultural Significance, and recommended a cultural survey with shovel probes excavated in areas of disturbance. The BLM responded on October 27, 2021 informing BPA of several cultural resources on BLM lands which they were concerned about potential impacts to.

On February 11, 2023, BPA sent a Determination of Effects letter to the consulting parties, with a determination that the project would have an adverse effect on historic properties. DAHP concurred on February 21, 2023, the BLM concurred on March 8, 2023, and Oregon SHPO concurred on March 16, 2023.

On September 22, 2023, a Memorandum of Agreement was executed which includes stipulations to mitigate adverse effects to a Traditional Cultural Place and a Historic Property of Religious and Cultural Significance. In addition, the MOA stipulates that BPA would fund the CTUIR and YN to conduct cultural resources monitoring of project activities. BPA would also comply with the BLM right-of-way stipulations for cultural resources when performing work on the project within BLM lands. While some limited adverse effects to cultural resources would occur, with mitigation and monitoring overall expected impacts to cultural and historic resources are expected to be low to moderate.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor soil disturbance would occur where the new wood and steel pole towers would be installed. An auger would remove soils to the proper pole depth and would scatter the soil near the new tower locations. New tower locations are in relatively flat areas with little risk of erosion and are not near areas that would be adversely affected by sediments. The substation expansion area is in gravelly soil that has already been graded and altered by past construction. Impacts to geology or soils are expected to be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No plants listed under the Endangered Species Act are present in the project area. BLM identified populations of *Alonia bifrons*, a BLM sensitive moss species near the project area in Washington. BLM requested that BPA survey for and manage noxious weeds on the portion of the project area that crosses BLM-managed lands north of the Columbia River. Several occurrences of spotted knapweed were identified within the project area on BLM lands. BPA would implement weed control measures on BLM lands within the project area as per the BLM ROW stipulations including pre- and post-construction weed treatment and would require construction personnel to wash their vehicles prior to entering the site at a commercial car/truck wash or with a dedicated wash station set up near the entrance to the project area. The McNary substation expansion area (approximately 0.5 acres) is sparsely vegetated with only some grasses and weedy species that would be permanently removed. Only small areas of permanent vegetation removal would take place for a total of approximately 0.25 acres at new tower sites. Overall, approximately 0.75 acre of permanent vegetation removal would take place. Approximately 6.5 acres of temporary vegetation disturbance is anticipated during construction. With the implementation of the weed management measures and revegetation of disturbed sites, impacts to plants are expected to be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No federally-listed, special-status species, or habitats exist within or around the project area. Common wildlife species using the project area may be temporarily affected during construction but no long-term impacts would occur. Most work would take place on existing

roads and landings, although approximately 6.5 acres of area around new transmission towers could be temporarily impacted by construction vehicles and equipment. Some minor impacts to ground nesting or burrowing wildlife is expected from these activities, but overall impacts to wildlife are expected to be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No work would take place in or immediately next to water bodies or floodplains. The line crossing the Columbia River would be added to existing steel lattice towers and would not affect the river or riparian area. Ground disturbing work would take place well away from the river and would not lead to sediments or other material entering the river. No impacts to water bodies, floodplains or fish are expected.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would take place in dry upland areas. No wetland areas are present in the project area. No impacts to wetlands would occur.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No areas of shallow groundwater or sensitive aquifers are known to exist within the project area. Subsurface work would be limited to auguring for new transmission poles and some shallow grading for the substation expansion area. No hazardous materials beyond fuels and oils used in construction equipment would be used for the project and spill remediation materials would be stored at the construction site to quickly contain any releases of oil or gas. No impacts to groundwater and aquifers is expected.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no specially-designated areas within the project area. The project area already contains transmission line facilities and substation equipment. No changes to existing land uses would occur. No significant recreational uses occur within the project area. The proposed action is in conformance with BLM's 1987 Spokane Resource Management Plan (RMP) because it is specifically provided for in the following RMP decision:

Keep public lands open for exploration/development of mineral resources, rights-of-way, access, and other public purposes with consideration to mitigate designated resource concerns (BLM 1987, p. 12).

No impacts to land use or specially-designated areas would occur.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor changes in visual quality would take place with the addition of new transmission line structures and substation equipment. However, all work would take place in existing transmission line corridors or substation areas with multiple existing transmission lines and equipment. The new structures would be similar in appearance and size to what is already there, so any impacts to sensitive viewers (especially the residences nearby the transmission line corridor in Oregon) would be minimal. Impacts to visual quality would be low.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor and temporary vehicle and construction equipment emissions and fugitive dust would occur during construction of the project. No new sources of emissions are anticipated once the project is constructed. Air quality impacts are expected to be low.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor and temporary vehicle and construction noise would occur during construction of the project. Construction noise from new tower construction could temporarily impact the residences west of McNary Substation. Noise would be limited to working hours during the day and would only last for the duration of construction, approximately two to four weeks. The McNary Substation expansion area is approximately 0.25 miles from the nearest residence and construction in this area is not expected to contribute substantially to noise impacts at the residences. No new permanent sources of noise are anticipated once the project is constructed. Overall, noise impacts are expected to be low.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not create any new safety hazards or use materials that could threaten human health and safety. No impacts to human health and safety are anticipated.

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: Underlying landowners have been notified about the proposed project and would be kept updated before and 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/ Douglas Corkran September 26, 2023
Douglas Corkran Date
Environmental Protection Specialist