

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Big Eddy Direct Current Test Line Removal Project

Project No.: P03490

Project Manager: Michael Toomey - TELP-TPP-3

Location: Wasco County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.10 Removal of Electric Transmission Facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to disassemble and remove the Big Eddy Direct Current Test Line because the de-energized transmission line is no longer in service. The wood pole portion of the transmission line was previously removed due to urgent safety concerns. However, 24 steel-lattice structures and associated equipment remain. To disassemble and remove the transmission line, the following BPA actions could occur:

- Excavate landing pads (up to 50 feet by 100 feet) immediately adjacent to structures that are located on uneven ground.
- Remove conductor, ground wire and hardware mounted to the steel-lattice structures.
- Pull the 75-foot-tall steel-lattice structures over and cut them into smaller, more manageable pieces for relocation on a flatbed vehicle.
- Excavate around each tower footing (5 foot radius around each footing, about 5 feet deep) and cut the footing off at about 3 feet below the ground's surface or completely remove the footing.
- Create temporary primitive access roads in uneven areas, if needed, by excavating and temporarily relocating local soil to create a safer slope and route of travel path for heavy equipment. No gravel would be applied and the natural grade would be restored upon project completion.
- If an existing route of travel path is damaged during construction activities, then BPA may need to restore it to pre-project conditions, or better. Restoration activities may include, grading soil up to 6 inches deep, flattening out ruts or applying new gravel to potholes on existing gravel roads.
- Some gates and fencing may need to be temporarily removed or repaired as a result of construction activities.

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/ Becky Hill

Becky Hill
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC

Reviewed by:

/s/ Carol Leiter

Carol Leiter
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Katey C. Grange</u>	<u>April 2, 2021</u>
Katey C. Grange	Date
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: Big Eddy Direct Current Test Line Removal Project

Project Site Description

The project area is located northeast of The Dalles, Oregon. Project activities would be conducted on BPA transmission line rights-of-way on private property and off-reservation tribal lands. The project area is located in a mix of flat and gently sloped lands planted with wheat, cattle grazing pastures, and undeveloped steppe shrub and grass areas on the hillslopes. Structure 5/2 is located on the edge of a small orchard, and span 5/1 to 5/2 crosses over Fifteen Mile Creek. This creek is highly channelized and relatively narrow because it is located in a relatively deep riparian corridor, compared to the surrounding rolling hills at higher elevations where structures 5/1 and 5/2 are situated. Fifteen Mile Creek is designated freshwater critical habitat for Middle Columbia River Steelhead, and has about 100 feet of riparian vegetation lining both sides of the creek.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated Section 106 consultation on August 31, 2017 with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA), the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

On October 12, 2017, BPA determined that the removal of the Big-Eddy DC Test Line would be an adverse effect to a historic property because the test line is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as a contributing resource to the High Voltage Direct Current Test Center. SHPO concurred with this determination on October 19, 2017.

Cultural resource surveys were performed and sensitive sites were identified that would be avoided during project activities and protected *in situ*. BPA determined on March 1, 2019 that the sensitive sites would not be adversely affected as a result of the proposed project and SHPO concurred with this determination.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SHPO and BPA was signed on March 26, 2020. The MOU defines mutually agreed upon mitigation measures to be implemented by BPA for the adverse effect to the historic property.

Should any cultural resources be discovered during project activities, then all project work would stop in the area, and the cultural resources lead would be notified immediately. An Inadvertent Discovery procedural document with contact information would be supplied to the construction crew lead prior to commencing construction work.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be used to implement site-specific erosion and sediment control. All disturbed areas would be stabilized and seeded upon project completion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status plant species or habitats are present in the project area. Vegetation that would be disturbed as a result of this project include wheat and various grasses. All disturbance areas would be seeded upon project completion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status wildlife species have been documented within 1 mile of the project area, nor are any are likely to occur based on lack of suitable habitat. No designated critical habitat is present in the project area. Any wildlife present in the area may be temporarily disturbed during construction activities, but the level of disturbance would be consistent with that experienced from typical project area land uses, such as agriculture.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No project activities would occur within Fifteen Mile Creek or the associated riparian corridor. Therefore, no water bodies, floodplains, or fish would be impacted by the project.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the project area. Therefore, no wetlands would be impacted by the project.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Spill prevention measures would be utilized during construction activities. The project would not provide a pathway for groundwater contamination.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur and project activities would not impact land use. Portions of the project area would be located within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. On February 5, 2018, BPA submitted documentation to the USFS for consistency review with the CRGNSA Management Plan because a portion of the transmission line (3,700 linear feet) is located within the General Management Area or the Urban Area of the CRGNSA. On May 2, 2018, the USFS determined that the project activities would be consistent with National Scenic Area Act and the Savings Policy 5 of the CRGNSA Management Plan.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be beneficial effect to the visual quality of the area by removing transmission facilities as a result of the project.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have a small impact on air quality; however, small amounts of vehicle emissions and dust may occur during construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have minor impacts on noise as some temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project activities, all standard safety protocols would be followed. Project activities would not impact human health or 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: BPA contacted local landowners and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, as the project area is located on private property and off-reservation tribal lands. BPA also coordinated with the USFS CRGNSA office, as a portion of the line is located within the National Scenic Area.

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

Signed: /s/ Becky Hill

Becky Hill, ECT-4

Contract Environmental Protection Specialist

Flux Resources, LLC

April 2, 2021

Date