

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Spar Canyon Substation Expansion Project

Project No.: N0831-P02306

Project Manager: Charley Majors– TEPF-CSB-2

Location: Custer County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.11 Electrical power substations and interconnection facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to expand Salmon River Electric Cooperative, Inc.'s (Salmon River Electric) Spar Canyon substation located on Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-managed lands. The expansion work, occurring partially outside the existing substation yard, would accommodate the installation of a new high-voltage reactor with increased capacity, efficiency, and reliability. The existing reactor would remain in place for redundancy. The project would occur during multiple seasons and may require multiple years.

The proposed expansion work would extend the eastern side of the current substation boundary by 1.9 acres and Salmon River Electric's existing right-of-way permit and easement with BLM would be updated to incorporate the modification. Initial site development would require excavation and permanent alteration of approximately 1.7 acres of land in previously undisturbed areas. Approximately 19,000 cubic yards of material would be removed over a 6 to 8 week period and hauled to local disposal site in Challis, Idaho. Temporary laydown and stockpile areas have been identified within the existing substation and just to the north in a previously developed rocky area. Once the expansion area is properly graded and sloped, foundations, grounding grid, oil containment, and the new reactor with its associated breaker, switch, and bus work, would be installed. A new security fence and wildlife range fence would be installed along the newly expanded eastern boundary of the substation.

An approximately 1,200-foot-long existing shared use BLM recreational and BPA access two-track road would be rerouted around the expansion using heavy equipment driven in a specified area to create a noticeable path.

During construction, existing roads would be used for travel to and from the substation. If existing county roads are damaged by the increased use for disposal of spoils and construction, they would be restored to as good as or better than their previous condition.

General equipment that may be utilized for this project includes: excavator, tractor-trailer, crane, transmission line bucket truck, transport dump trucks, dozer, grader, and vibratory roller compactor.

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/ Laura Roberts

Laura Roberts
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Katey C. Grange</u>	<u>June 27, 2022</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: Spar Canyon Substation Expansion Project

Project Site Description

The proposed substation expansion project occurs on BLM-managed land in central Idaho (T11N, R21E, Section 7). The project area occurs in high elevation shrub-scrub rangeland. No surface waters or wetlands occur within the general vicinity of the proposed project. The fenced substation yard is covered in crushed rock with little to no vegetation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA archaeologists completed background research, an intensive field survey, and subsurface testing of the proposed project area and determined that the project would result in No Historic Properties Affected. No previously recorded archaeological resources were noted within the APE during background research, however, during field survey two surface isolates were identified (SC-TC-ISO-01 and SC-TC-ISO-02). These isolates consisted of pre-contact lithic material and a tool. Both of these isolates were recommended as Not Eligible for listing on to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). No other cultural resources were identified.

Consultation documentation for BPA's determination was sent on May 25th, 2022 to the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Nez Perce Tribe, the Shoshone Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation, and the BLM – Challis District. The BLM provided comments during their review period, and concurred with BPA's determination. The SHPO requested final site forms on June 21st, 2022. The forms have subsequently been sent by BPA. No other responses were received.

Should any cultural resources be discovered during project activities, then all project work must stop and the Environmental Protection Specialist should be notified immediately. No additional review under Section 106 of the NRHP is required for this action at this time.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: The proposed project would excavate and permanently alter approximately 1.7 acres of previously undisturbed ground. Approximately 19,000 cubic yards of material would be removed. The expanded substation yard would be covered in crushed rock, which would result in a permanent loss of soil productivity.

Notes:

- BLM approved site restoration plan and applicable temporary and permanent Best Management Practices (BMP) would be implemented.
- Spoils from excavations would be disposed of according to all local, state, and Federal regulations.

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

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: The project would permanently eliminate approximately 1.7 acres of sparsely vegetated shrub-scrub rangeland. No federally Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species occur within the vicinity of the project area.

An initial botanical survey was conducted within the known extent of the proposed project area at the time of survey. During this survey, an Idaho BLM special-status species [snowball cactus (*Pediocactus simpsonii*)] was observed at multiple locations. No noxious weeds were identified during the initial botanical survey. Following the initial botanical survey, further design review determined the need to expand the proposed project area. Additional preconstruction botanical surveys would be conducted in the previously unsurveyed areas of the proposed project area. No other sensitive plant species were observed or have the potential to occur within the project work area.

Notes:

- Preconstruction botanical surveys would be completed in all previously unsurveyed work areas.
- Prior to the initiation of ground disturbing activities individual snowball cacti, observed during initial or preconstruction botanical surveys, would be transplanted to an identified BLM approved location.
- BLM approved site restoration plan and applicable temporary and permanent BMPs would be implemented.

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

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: In general, the project would have short-term noise and disturbance impacts to local wildlife related to elevated equipment noise and human presence, but any disturbed wildlife would temporarily disperse to adjacent habitat during the temporary disturbance. No federally ESA-listed wildlife occur within the vicinity of the project area.

The proposed project area has state of Idaho and BLM special-status sage grouse and migratory bird nesting habitat and a previously observed sage grouse lek (communal area in which two or more males of a species perform courtship displays) approximately 1.3 miles away. Sage grouse and migratory bird nesting surveys would be conducted prior to ground disturbing activities to prevent impacting locally occurring nesting birds. Additionally, in order to comply with BLM's sage grouse guidelines of no repeated or sustained behavioral disturbance (e.g., visual, noise over 10 dbA at lek, etc.) to lekking birds from 6:00 pm to 9:00 am within 2 miles (3.2 km) of leks during the lekking season, BPA would determine lek presence/absence and/or follow applicable noise restrictions. Implementation of these measures would prevent impacting any nearby lekking sage grouse.

Notes: The project would occur during multiple seasons and may require multiple years

- For initial site development spring/summer; sage grouse and migratory bird nesting surveys within the project area and a 400 foot buffer would occur prior to construction. Nesting bird locations would be avoided or construction would be delayed until the nestlings have fledged the nest.
- A previously observed lek is located approximately 1.3 miles from the project area. For work between March 25 to May 15; lek surveys for presence/absence would be conducted and/or daily construction activities would be restricted to only occurring during the hours of 9 am to 6 pm.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water bodies occur in the general vicinity of the project. The project would have no impact to surface waters and there would be no effect to fish species, including Federal/state special-status fish species or habitats. Appropriate BMPs would be utilized to keep sediment from entering waterways.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: As no wetlands occur within the vicinity of the project area, the proposed project would have no impact on wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project occurs in high elevation shrub-scrub rangeland. No groundwater or aquifers would be impacted by the activities.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A change to land use would occur as a result of the proposed project. The substation expansion area, approximately 1.7 acres, would permanently convert the existing shrub-scrub rangeland into a substation yard. The proposed expansion work would extend the eastern side of the current substation boundary by 1.9 acres and Salmon River Electric's existing right-of-way permit and easement with BLM would be updated to incorporate the modification. BLM reviewed the proposed project and deemed it to be consistent with the areas land use and environmental policy.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The footprint of the substation would increase and a new reactor, breaker, switch, and bus work would be installed in the expanded substation yard. Although this would represent a perceptible change in the appearance of the substation, it would be consistent with the existing land use and visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities may generate a small amount of vehicle emissions and dust during construction. Existing facility emissions may slightly increase according to equipment installed. These changes would not significantly alter the emission profile of the existing Spar Canyon substation.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Current ambient noise is typical of an energized substation yard. During construction, use of vehicles, machinery, and equipment and general construction activities would temporarily increase noise above current ambient conditions during daylight hours. However, operational noise would not significantly increase above current ambient conditions.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers would follow all standard safety protocols. Activities would not impact human health or safety. All materials would be disposed of at approved facilities in compliance with local, state, and Federal regulations.

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 Environment and Realty have coordinated with BLM Environmental and Realty.

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

Signed: /s/ Laura Roberts June 27, 2022
Laura Roberts, ECT-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist