

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Maupin-Redmond No.1 27/5 Structure Replacement and Access Road Improvement Project

PP&A No.: 4863

Project Manager: Lisa Casey – TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Wasco County, Oregon

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 replace an existing two-pole suspension structure and associated structural and electrical components (i.e., cross arms, insulators, guy and guy anchors, etc.) located at 27/5 of the 230-kV Maupin-Redmond No.1 high-voltage transmission line in central Oregon. BPA owns and operates the line that runs south from Maupin Substation in Wasco County, Oregon, to Redmond Substation in Deschutes County, Oregon. The repair work is needed to minimize the risk of the line causing a wildfire due to high winds. To enable the replacement of the wood pole structures, and to do so safely, BPA would also be performing road improvement and maintenance work through grading and compacting of the existing road aggregate in the existing road prism. BPA would also be improving drain dips at three locations and a stream ford in another location. A geotextile fabric would be used in or adjacent to wetlands and waterways during construction to minimize underlying ground disturbance. The geotextile fabric would be biodegradable.

Conventional utility line and construction equipment would be use, including a pole truck, dump truck, bucket truck and backhoe with auger attachment. Prior to entering the right-of-way (ROW), all heavy equipment would be cleaned to ensure they are free of soil, seeds and plant propagules. The existing wood poles would be removed from the ground, while new holes would be drilled approximately 5 feet ahead on line or 5 feet back on line from the existing hole using an auger attached to a backhoe or other method. The work would be completed in fall of 2022.

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/ Zoe Wellschlager

Zoe Wellschlager

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey C. Grange Date: September 1, 2022

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 is located in north Central Oregon, east of the Cascades and several miles to the east of the Deschutes River in the ecoregion of the Blue Mountains, on private lands and lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Tenmile Creek flows parallel along most of the project location and the river bisects the project access road at two locations; once near 21/4 and at 21/8. Throughout the project area vegetation is sparse and varies from green or previously burned juniper and pine woodland, to open expanses of patchy grassland and sagebrush ecosystems. Soils are silty, sandy and rocky. The project is not located nearby agricultural lands or other human created landscapes.

The structure rebuild planned at 25/7 is located directly 3 miles to the east of highway 97 after navigating the access road from the north about 8 miles from the intersection of highways 197 and 97. The access road navigates through a landscape shaped by water creating undulating hills, canyons and valleys.

At the proposed project location, the Maupin-Redmond No. 1 transmission line shares the right-of-way corridor with the Celilo-Sylmar No. 1 line. The Maupin-Redmond No. 1 line is supported by wood pole structures, and the Celilo-Sylmar No. 1 line is a steel-lattice line. The corridor is approximately 450 feet wide. Vegetation in the corridor is periodically managed to remove tall-growing trees and shrubs and promote low-growing vegetation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA engaged in consultation with Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on August 8th, 2022. The Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon responded on August 9th, 2022 with concurrence that the project had no adverse effects and SHPO responded on September 1st, 2022 with concurrence that the project had no adverse effects.

BPA Archaeologists have reviewed the proposed project and have found that there are four previously identified cultural resources present within the transmission line ROW containing the APE for the current undertaking. However, most work would not occur within any archeological site boundaries, with the exception of a drain dip needing repair within one site boundary and a stream ford needing repair within a separate site boundary.

Notes:

- Archaeological monitors would be present during construction activities.

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of the project, BPA would require that the work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by the appropriate consulting parties.
- Geotextile fabric and other protocols used in past repairs at these locations would be utilized to avoid impacting the natural ground surface. All repair activities would occur from the road prism and would have no excavation of material.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The majority of the project would occur on pre-existing and established access roads. Road improvement activities would mainly consist of drain dips, improving ditches, grading and compacting existing road aggregate in the existing road prism. Geotextile fabric would be utilized at several locations which would minimize soil disturbance in and adjacent to wetlands and waterways.

Soil would be disturbed at 27/5 where a structure replacement is planned due to new pole holes being drilled and a landing being constructed. Disturbed soils would be stabilized and re-seeded with a native seed mix.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Road improvement work would likely disturb vegetation immediately adjacent to the roadway, however disturbance would be limited as no new road construction is planned. The structure replacement occurring at 27/5 would also disturb vegetation where the landing is constructed and where the new pole holes are drilled, however, there is already very little vegetation present at 27/5 so there would be very little disturbance to plants in this area. Any disturbance would be stabilized with weed free straw and seeded with a native seed mix.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act, BPA obtained a species list for the project from the local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Office. No plant species protected under the ESA are listed in the project area. Therefore, the project would have "No Effect" on ESA-listed plants.

According to state databases, no special-status plants or BLM sensitive plants are present in the general project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wildlife that could be present in the project area, such as small mammals and birds, could be temporarily disturbed or displaced by project activities. However, disturbance would be temporary, and the surrounding lands provide ample cover.

BPA obtained a species list for the project site from the US Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) on 8/26/2022. The monarch butterfly is listed as a candidate species in the project area under the Endangered Species Act. However, no documented sightings for this species are found

in or near the project area. Additionally, construction activities would occur in October, outside of the monarch butterfly's host plant growing season. This project would therefore have "No effect" on the monarch butterfly.

According to state databases, no special-status wildlife or wildlife habitat is present in the general project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Improvements to the access road would occur on a section of roadway that crosses Tenmile creek, including improving a ford and a drain dip. During a recent field visit in the summer of 2022, Tenmile Creek was dry in the project area. According to state databases, Tenmile Creek is not fish-bearing at the project location. Maintenance at the ford is exempt under the Clean Water Act's maintenance exemption.

Notes: If flow is present in Tenmile Creek during the proposed work, in order to protect water quality, the work area would be isolated prior to construction with a coffer dam, and flow would be maintained downstream using a submersible pump to direct flow around the work area.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Several different types of wetlands exist in the project area where roadwork improvement would occur, however the work planned would be on existing roadways and should not create an additional impact to the wetlands present. Furthermore, work is planned for early fall when water table levels will be lower and there is less risk of disturbing wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No project activities would intersect groundwater and or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not alter existing land use, and is not located in a specially designated area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The road improvement proposed for the project would alter the visual character to a certain extent by placing geotextile and rock within the existing road footprint and by building a landing, however, the overall existing visual profile of a high-voltage transmission corridor would not be impacted, and vegetation disturbance would be minimized to the extent possible.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Short term impacts to air quality could occur from dust generated by construction activities and vehicle emissions. However, road contractors would be required to manage dust generation, and impacts from increased vehicle use would be temporary and limited.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Short term increases in ambient noise could occur due to construction activity. However, increased noise generation would be temporary. Apart from the transmission line corridor and roadway, the project area is isolated and the area is so sparsely vegetated in some locations that the amount of noise disturbance to humans or other animals is low.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is designed to lower risks to human health and safety by replacing an unsafe transmission line structure that could blow over due to high wind and ignite nearby vegetation. All construction activity would follow established industry standard safety protocols, including a Safety Plan, job hazard briefings, and employing flaggers as necessary.

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 has reached out to all stakeholders in the project area, including underlying landowners and the Bureau of Land and Management. BPA would continue to coordinate construction activity as necessary during project implementation and finalization.

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

Signed: /s/ Zoe Wellschlager
Zoe Wellschlager
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: September 1, 2022