

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Vantage-Hanford Corridor Aerial LiDAR Patrol

Project No.: N/A

Project Manager: Kim Cerdon - TERG

Location: Benton County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance and B3.2 Aviation activities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to conduct an aerial patrol using a helicopter equipped with laser imaging, detection, and ranging (LiDAR) sensor equipment on the Vantage-Hanford Corridor 500kV transmission corridor. BPA uses LiDAR data from patrols to determine the health of transmission line equipment along with identifying any potential hazards from encroachments from impairments or vegetation as required by NERC regulations. BPA would conduct a daytime flight mission to scan approximately 0.5 mile of transmission corridor from the operation mile 24, structure number four, to termination point of the transmission line at the Hanford 500 kV Substation. Flight operations would be conducted from North to South at 500 feet above ground level with a planned duration of approximately 20 minutes. Flight origin would be from the Tri-Cities Airport. After the completion of the LiDAR mission on the Vantage-Hanford Corridor 500kV transmission corridor, the helicopter would increase altitude near the Hanford Substation and depart the area towards the Tri-Cities Airport avoiding overflying the Hanford Nuclear Reservation and would remain under direction of the air traffic control procedures for the local airspace.

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/ Nicholas Johnson

Nicholas Johnson

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel May 26, 2023

Sarah T. Biegel

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: Vantage-Hanford Corridor Aerial LiDAR Patrol

Project Site Description

The project location is overhead the Vantage-Hanford transmission line rights-of way which are located in Benton County, Washington, approximately 15 miles North of Richland. The project area transects with the Department of Defense Hanford site located in Section 28 and 29 of Township 14 North, Range 26 East. The starting point of the patrol near structure number 4 of mile 24 is located just north of the Columbia River inside the USFWS Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. The Hanford site begins on the south side of the Columbia River and includes the Hanford Substation, which is located on Hanford property. The Tri-Cities Airport is located approximately 35 miles to the southeast of the transmission line corridor.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA determined that the proposed action would result in a No Potential to Cause Effects to cultural resources or historic properties. BPA issued a documentation memorandum covering this finding on May 25, 2023.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project actions would not have impacts to soils or geologic features.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed actions would not have any impacts to plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal or special-status species or habitats that would be impacted by the proposed actions. There are several state sensitive bird species located within and near the projected flight area that could be disrupted during flight operations. However, any disruptions to the state sensitive bird species would be temporary and brief as the planned flight operation is a single transient flight 500-feet above ground level, which does not involve any off airport landings, prolonged loitering, or hovering over the transmission corridors. Some local species may temporarily flush from or avoid the area during flight operations but would likely return after the completion of the brief flight operations timeline. Only minor, temporary impact to special-status wildlife species is expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed actions would not impact water bodies, floodplains, or fish present in the project area.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no planned field landings; therefore, no impacts would occur to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project actions would not affect groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BPA project would not result in any land use changes.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not result in any changes to the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of dust and vehicle emissions during flight operations would be expected; however, there would be no substantial changes to air quality during or after the helicopter flight.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Helicopter flight noise would be temporary and 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: There are known areas of contamination throughout the Hanford site. However, the project would not affect those areas as there are no planned activities on the ground. Flight operations would not include field landings and the altitude of flight would not cause soil disturbance from helicopter operations.

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 Contracting staff have been coordinating with the appropriate parties at Hanford and would ensure all flight clearances are obtained prior to conducting the flight operations over Hanford property. No other notifications would be required for the project.

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

Signed: /s/ Nicholas Johnson May 26, 2023
Nicholas Johnson Date
Environmental Protection Specialist