

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Transmission Line Marker Ball Replacement Phase 4: Groups C & E

PP&A Project #: 4915

Project Manager: Dianne Bonner - TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Washington State

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance; B1.9 Airway Safety Markings and Painting; B3.2 Aviation Activities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace marker balls on four transmission lines in Columbia, Garfield, Whitman, and Yakima Counties, Washington. As part of BPA's wildfire mitigation effort, BPA noted that plastic and fiberglass marker balls can fail at their attachment point on conductor or ground wire, potentially igniting and falling to the ground to start wildfires. BPA would like to mitigate wildfire risk by completing replacements of the marker balls identified for Phase 4 before the 2023 wildfire season. Phase 4, groups C and E, construction is currently planned for June through July 2023.

BPA proposes to replace marker balls on Little Goose-Central Ferry No. 2, Little Goose-Lower Granite No. 1, Lower Monumental-Little Goose No. 2 and Wautoma-Knight No. 1 utilizing Human External Cargo (HEC), or a crew suspended from a helicopter. Helicopter landing zones are necessary for helicopters to land and take off, as well as for staging crew and equipment. Access road improvements are not anticipated at this time. Large flatbed trucks or similar vehicles would be used to haul materials and equipment but use of loaders, excavators, or other heavy equipment is not anticipated. Additionally, overhead ground wire replacement is required on Little Goose-Lower Granite No.1.

BPA may utilize either helicopters or drones to examine marker balls prior to replacement and to inspect marker balls following replacement for proper installation.

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/ Anthony Gibson

Anthony Gibson

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel Date: June 5, 2023

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: Transmission Line Marker Ball Replacement Phase 4: Groups C & E

Project Site Description

The project is located across central and southeast Washington. The project area is mostly shrub steppe that crosses the Snake River and its tributaries. Work would occur on privately-owned lands in addition to lands managed by the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers Walla Walla District. See Table 1 below for Township, Range, Section Number, and County information.

Table 1. Township, Range, Section Number, and County Information

Line Corridor	Span(s)	Township, Range, Section	WA Counties
Little Goose - Central Ferry No. 2	1/2 - 1/3	T13N, R38E, SEC28 T13N, R38E, SEC28	Whitman Columbia
Little Goose - Lower Granite No. 1	1/3 – 1/4	T13N, R38E, SEC28 T13N, R38E, SEC28	Whitman Columbia
	7/5 – 8/1	T13N, R39E, SEC28	Columbia
	8/4 – 9/1	T13N, R39E, SEC28 T13N, R39E, SEC27	Columbia
	15/4 – 16/1	T13N, R40E, SEC15	Garfield
Lower Monumental - Little Goose No. 2	18/3 – 19/1	T13N, R37E, SEC29 T13N, R37E, SEC32	Whitman Columbia
	23/5 – 24/1	T13N, R38E, SEC30	Whitman
Wautoma - Knight No. 1	33/3-33/4	T9N, R19E, SEC13	Yakima

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Following a review of the potential project impacts to cultural resources, BPA has determined that this undertaking would result in No Historic Properties Affected or No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties.

The BPA Historian review has shown that marker ball replacement is considered normal, in-kind repair work and would not adversely affect the National Register eligibility of any transmission lines.

For group C of Phase 4, BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation on October 17, 2022. The Yakama Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) provided concurrence with the Area of Potential Effects (APE) via an email dated February 10, 2023 (email from Kate Valdez, Yakama Nation THPO, to Anna Neuzil, BPA Archaeologist). The Yakama Nation stated that there are no historic properties at the location but that work at Wautoma-Knight landing zone two (WKLZ2) must be restricted to the proposed LZ and roads, and that work may only take place after May due to cultural purposes. BPA has rescheduled work to occur after May and would require that all personnel and equipment stay within the designated APE. BPA sent a no historic properties affected determination letter to the Yakama Nation on March 17, 2023. The Yakama Nation THPO concurred with the determination of no historic properties affected in a letter dated May 18, 2023.

For group E of Phase 4, BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the United States Army Corps of Engineers Walla Walla District, and the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), on October 7, 2022. DAHP concurred with the Area of Potential Effect (APE) in a letter dated October 7, 2022. BPA's cultural resources investigation did not identify historic properties within the APE. BPA sent a no historic properties affected determination on April 17, 2023. DAHP concurred with BPA's determination on April 20, 2023. No additional responses were received within 30 days.

Under Federal law, BPA has the responsibility to protect cultural resources that are inadvertently discovered on federally owned land or during federally funded projects. Should cultural resources be encountered during project implementation, all activity would be immediately discontinued and BPA cultural resources staff would be contacted. BPA's cultural resources staff would work with tribal representatives to address the inadvertent discovery as quickly as possible.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance is anticipated for this project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minimal disturbance to vegetation is anticipated. Vegetation may be crushed in those locations where equipment would be accessing marker balls. There would be no effect to ESA-listed plant species. No impacts to state or other sensitive species are anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In general, the project would have minimal impacts to wildlife and habitat related to temporary disturbance associated with elevated noise and human presence. The project would have no impacts to ESA-listed, state-listed, or other sensitive species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed in any river, stream, or other waterbody along the project and no riparian vegetation would be impacted. The project would have no effect to ESA-listed fish species.

Notes: Appropriately stocked spill response kits would be located in vehicles and landing zones used for this project.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities in wetlands are proposed.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to groundwater or aquifers are anticipated due to the lack of ground disturbance.

Notes: Appropriately stocked spill response kits would be located in vehicles and landing zones used for this project.

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 existing land uses. There would not be any recreational or operational disruptions.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have a minimal impact to visual quality. Replacement marker balls would be similar to the existing marker balls, and consistent with other marker balls along the transmission line.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of vehicular emissions and dust may occur temporarily during this project.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary noise from helicopter use and associated project activities would be expected. Helicopter use would occur during daylight hours. The operational noise of the transmission line would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: 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: BPA realty and environment staff have coordinated the proposed project activities with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation as well as the Yakama Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the United States Army Corps of Engineers Walla Walla District, and the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP).

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

Signed: /s/ Anthony Gibson Date: June 5, 2023
Anthony Gibson – EPI-4
Physical Scientist (Environmental)