

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: La Pine Substation Shunt Capacitor Expansion

Project Manager: Alaric Hsu, TEPS-TPP-1

Location: Deschutes County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):

B3.1 Site characterization and environmental monitoring

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to perform geotechnical testing, soil resistivity testing and water infiltration tests at the La Pine Substation near La Pine, Oregon. Geotechnical testing is needed to design the equipment footings, while soil resistivity testing is needed to ensure adequate grounding of the electrical equipment and ground mat beneath the substation. Infiltration tests would support the design of a stormwater retention pond. All of these components would support a proposed substation expansion and installation of three additional shunt capacitors and associated equipment. The expansion would occur on the northwest side of the LaPine Substation and would increase the substation footprint by approximately 340 feet by 300 feet.

For the geotechnical testing, two machine drilled borings would be done. The borings would be approximately 8-inches-diameter and up to 80-feet-below-grade. Soil samples would be collected, while excess soil cuttings would be spread in a thin layer on the ground. The boreholes would be backfilled in accordance with Oregon Water Resources Department rules and regulations. Additionally, four test pits would be excavated to a depth of 5- to 10-feet-below-grade. These test pits would be 2- to 3-feet-wide and 6-feet-long. The excavated areas would be backfilled with the excavated soils and tamped down with the back of the excavator bucket.

Two additional test pits would be excavated to a depth of 5-feet-deep by 4-feet-wide by 4-feet-long for infiltration testing for onsite disposal of surface water runoff. The infiltration test pits would be backfilled consistent with the test pits described above.

Soil electrical resistivity measurements would be conducted using two sets of perpendicular arrays that would be approximately 300-feet-long each. The test involves pressing approximately 0.5-inch-diameter electrodes into the soil to a depth of less than 12-inches at exponential intervals.

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.

Beth Belanger
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment: 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: La Pine Substation Geotechnical Testing

Project Site Description

The project area is located 2.5 miles east of La Pine, Deschutes County, Oregon, on the Deschutes National Forest. The site is in the southeast quarter of section 18, township 22 south, range 11 east. An existing BPA substation is located on the property, with a BPA transmission right-of-way (ROW) on the eastern side of the substation and another ROW on the northwest side of the substation, which has transmission lines owned by Midstate Electric Cooperative. Finely Butte Road runs east to west, just north of the substation. A vast amount of undeveloped national forest lands are present to the north, south and east.

The undeveloped area surrounding the substation consists of a ponderosa pine and lodgepole pine forest, less than 100 years old. The understory is largely open, but contains shrubs and herbaceous plants, with the main plant communities consisting of bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), small flowered blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia parviflora*), lowly penstemon (*Penstemon humilis*) and goosefoot violet (*Viola purpurea*).

There are no wetlands or waterways in or near the project area. The nearest stream is located 1.3 miles to the south and the nearest known wetlands are 2.5 miles to the west.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On February 16, 2023, BPA sent initiation of consultation letters to the Burns Paiute Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and to the US Forest Service Deschutes National Forest (DNF), for the overall project. On March 12th, 2023, SHPO gave notice of receipt of consultation materials. A cultural survey of the project area took place in June 2023. The BPA archaeologist and historian made a determination of no adverse effect to historic resources. The determination and report were sent to the consulting parties on February 09, 2024. The USFS DNF responded on February 15, 2024, with comments on the report. On March 21, 2024, the Oregon SHPO also responded with comments on the report. The report was later amended to address both USFS DNF and Oregon SHPO comments as well as to add geotechnical, soil resistivity and infiltration testing and was resent to the consulting parties on April 16, 2024. The Klamath Tribe was inadvertently omitted from the original list of consulting parties but was added to the distribution of the amended report. On May 14, 2024, SHPO concurred with BPA's effect determination. To date, no other consulting parties have responded within 30 days of when the determination letter and amended report were sent.

Notes:

- The BPA archaeologist assigned to this project will monitor the soil resistivity testing.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impacts to geology and impacts to soils from testing procedures would be insignificant. The boreholes would be backfilled in accordance with Oregon Water Resources Department rules and regulations. The excavated areas would be backfilled with the excavated soils and tamped down with the back of the excavator bucket.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A plant survey occurred in June of 2023 and no Federal/state special-status species or habitats were documented in the survey area. Up to 150 square feet of low growing vegetation would be removed during excavations for geotechnical and water infiltration testing. The excavated soil would be backfilled, and the existing seed bank and plant rhizomes would assist with plant re-establishment. Soil resistivity test arrays are proposed outside of the survey area, but the testing would have a none-to-low potential to impact plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A wildlife survey was conducted in June of 2023 and no Federal/state special-status species or habitats were noted; however, there is a low potential for dispersing wolves or wolverines to cross through the project area. Testing would occur over a period of approximately four days and would not remove habitat. Wolves, wolverines and other wildlife may temporarily avoid the area when humans are present but there are vast wilderness areas surrounding the site. Testing activities are unlikely to impact federal/state special-status species or habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no water bodies, floodplains, or fish in or adjacent to the project area. There would be no impact to these resources.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impacts to wetlands because there are no wetlands in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impact to groundwater or aquifers. The soil boring locations would be backfilled with an inert material, such as bentonite clay or similar. The nearest EPA Sole Source Aquifer is located 130 miles to the northwest of the project location.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impact to these resources because the testing would not change the land use of the project area and there are no specially-designated areas in or near the project location.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The onsite testing would be of a short duration and would not impact the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A minor amount of increased emissions would occur from the testing equipment and vehicles onsite; however the increase would be temporary. A slight increase in dust may also temporarily occur. There are no residents or businesses in the adjacent areas that would be impacted.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A slight increase in noise from equipment would occur; however, work would only be conducted during daytime hours. There are no residents or businesses in the adjacent areas that would be impacted.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Personal protective equipment and safety procedures would be followed when contractors are performing the work. There would be no impact to 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 is working closely with the Deschutes National Forest to obtain the necessary permit for testing activities.

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

Signed:

Beth Belanger
Environmental Protection Specialist