

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Hot Springs Substation Equipment Replacements and Upgrades

Project No.: P03624

Project Manager: Daniel Meier, TEPP-TPP-1

Location: Sanders County and Flathead County, Montana

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

B1.3 Routine maintenance; B1.7 Electronic equipment; B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities; B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace, upgrade, and/or install new substation and electronic equipment, oil containment, and an equipment shelter and to realign perimeter fencing at BPA's existing 500-kilovolt (kV) / 230-kV Hot Springs Substation near Hot Springs, Sanders County, Montana. BPA also proposes to upgrade electronic equipment at BPA's existing 230-kV Flathead Substation near Kalispell, Flathead County, Montana. Various pieces of equipment have outlived their useful service lives and are due for routine replacement and upgrade. Therefore, the proposed action is required to maintain safe and reliable operation of the substation facility.

In the 500-kV area of the Hot Springs Substation yard, the entire existing 500-kV Reactor Bank 1 would be replaced, including the reactors, motor-operated disconnects (MODs), surge arresters, current voltage transformers (CVTs), 500-kV power circuit breaker (PCB), and shunt reactors. The new 500-kV reactors would require an upgraded oil containment system, including new geomembrane liners and stormwater conveyance piping. These new oil containment elements would tie into the existing conveyance piping, oil/water separator vault, coalescing plate separator (CPS) vault, and stormwater outfall, none of which would be modified. In the 230-kV area of the yard, multiple PCBs, disconnect switches, CVTs, power transformers (PTs), and surge arresters would be replaced. To accommodate the new equipment, minor perimeter fence realignments would be required east and west of the 230-kV bank, which would expand the substation yard approximately 700 square feet total into areas that were previously disturbed and covered in crushed rock during construction and installation of the substation. A new, approximately 41-foot-long by 8-foot-wide by 11-foot-tall shelter would be installed on a new concrete pad within the existing substation yard. The shelter would house station service equipment that provides essential electrical power to the substation control house and associated facilities.

Electronic equipment, including relays and controls, would be upgraded inside the existing control houses at Hot Springs Substation and Flathead Substation. The updated relaying and controls at Hot Springs Substation would require a new global positioning system (GPS), with GPS equipment installed in racks inside the control house and two new exterior GPS antennas mounted on the roof. A small 1-inch hole in the side wall of the control house would be required to

route cables into the building. These actions would not require any ground disturbance or major exterior or interior building modification.

The proposed action would replace approximately 40% of the equipment in the Hot Springs Substation yard. All ground disturbance associated with these actions, including the perimeter fence realignment, would occur within existing graveled areas previously disturbed during construction and installation of the substation. The project site would be accessed using BPA's existing access road system and no access road improvements or reconstruction would be required. General equipment would include cranes, excavators, bulldozers, dump trucks, vacuum trucks, and substation maintenance vehicles. All decommissioned equipment and excess materials would be disposed of in accordance with all local, state, and federal regulations.

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.

Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
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: Hot Springs Substation Equipment Replacements and Upgrades

Project Site Description

The project site is located on BPA fee-owned property at BPA's Hot Springs Substation located on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) Flathead Reservation near Hot Springs, Sanders County Montana (Township 21 North, Range 24 West, Section 14). All work would occur within, and immediately outside, the 15.5-acre substation yard in areas that were previously disturbed and covered in crushed rock during construction and installation of the substation. BPA maintains these areas to be clear of vegetation. No wetlands are present within or near the project site. The closest surface waters are two unnamed intermittent tributaries to Warm Springs Creek: one located approximately 100 feet north and downslope and the other located approximately 450 feet south and upslope from the project site. The area surrounding the substation is flat to rolling topography and consisting of undeveloped sage brush prairie and mixed grassland, mixed agricultural uses including irrigated fields and grazing, BPA transmission line right-of-way (ROW), and rural residential properties.

All actions proposed at BPA's Flathead Substation near Kalispell, Flathead County, Montana (Township 29 North, Range 21 West, Section 30) would occur inside the existing control house or on the control house roof.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On October 12, 2022, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT)
- CKST Tribal Preservation Department

BPA conducted background research of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). Hot Springs Substation is a historic district that has been determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Of the six buildings associated with Hot Springs Substation, four are considered individually eligible and contributing to the potential historic district; the remaining two buildings are not eligible and not contributing. The Anaconda-Hot Springs Transmission Line has also been determined eligible for inclusion in the NRHP. The proposed action would not alter the integrity or eligibility of either the Hot Springs Substation historic district (including its four contributing buildings) or the Hot Springs-Anaconda Transmission Line. No other historic or cultural resources were identified within the APE. Therefore, on April 7, 2023, BPA determined that that the proposed project would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA Project No.: MT 2021 011). No comments were received from the consulting parties.

Notes:

- Implement the Post Review Discovery Procedure in the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during implementation. Discontinue all ground-disturbing activity in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All soil disturbance would occur within existing graveled areas previously disturbed during construction and installation of the substation. Standard construction best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to minimize soil erosion, sedimentation, and fugitive dust. The proposed action would not permanently disturb native soils and would not impact geology.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No vegetation is present within the project site. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on special-status plant species or habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary disturbance of normal wildlife behavior and wildlife displacement could occur from elevated noise and human presence during construction. However, there would be little permanent impact to wildlife habitat, and temporarily disturbed or displaced wildlife would likely reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed action. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status wildlife species, including wildlife listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat is present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water bodies are present within the project site, and the project site is not located within a floodplain. Standard construction BMPs would be implemented to minimize soil erosion, sedimentation, and fugitive dust and thereby prevent indirect impacts to off-site water bodies, floodplains, and fish-bearing streams. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact water bodies and floodplains and would have no effect on special-status fish species or habitats.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present within the project site. Standard construction BMPs would be implemented to prevent sediment migration offsite into nearby wetlands, if present. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground excavation would be unlikely to reach depths to groundwater. The proposed action would include upgrading the oil containment system that would capture oil in the event of equipment failure or spill and would minimize any potential for impact to groundwater. Standard construction BMPs would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action is consistent with existing land use at the project site and would not impact adjacent land uses. The project site is not located in a specially-designated land use area. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact land use or specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action, including replacing substation equipment, constructing the new equipment shelter, and realigning the perimeter fence, would result in a perceptible change in the appearance of the Hot Springs Substation yard. However, any visual changes would be minor relative to the scale of existing equipment and structures and would be consistent with the existing visual quality of the area. The project site is not located in a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would cause a minor and temporary increase in dust and emissions in the local area. Standard construction BMPs would be implemented to suppress dust, as needed. There would be no long-term change in air quality following completion of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, use of vehicles and equipment and general construction activities could temporarily and intermittently produce noise at levels higher than current ambient conditions. Construction noise could be audible from one rural residential property located approximately 700 feet southeast of the substation. Noise impacts would be temporary and intermittent and would only occur during typical working hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). There would be no long-term change in ambient noise following completion of the proposed action.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All standard safety protocols would be followed throughout implementation of the proposed action to minimize risk to human health and safety. Therefore, the proposed action would not be expected to impact human health and 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: The proposed action would occur entirely on BPA fee-owned property. BPA would notify, involve, and coordinate with adjacent landowners, if required.

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

Signed:

Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist