

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: McNary-Ross No. 1 Miles 140-148 Access Road Improvement Project

PP&A No.: 3998 & 4010

Project Manager: Donna Martin – TELF-TPP-3

Location: Skamania County, Washington

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 routine access road maintenance along BPA's McNary-Ross No. 1 transmission line corridor in Skamania County, Washington. Improvements would allow crews to be able to access structures along the transmission line for routine maintenance, inspections and emergency response to ensure the integrity of the Northwest's electrical grid.

BPA proposes to perform routine access road maintenance and reconstruction in line miles 140 through 148 of the transmission line. Access road work would include stabilizing steep roadsides, adding drain dips and water bars, creating turn-arounds, adding landings, installing one brown or green colored gate, cross-drain culverts, and pullouts. Work would also include blading, shaping, grading, and adding rock to approximately five miles of existing access road. The ford crossing at Greenleaf Creek would be improved during the established in-water-work window for the waterway. The ford would be widened and armored to allow for more safe and reliable passage for BPA operations. General equipment used for this type of project includes graders, rollers, bull dozers, excavators, backhoes, and dump trucks.

This work is proposed to be conducted during the late summer and fall of 2022 construction season.

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/ Aaron Siemers

Aaron Siemers

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey C. Grange

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: January 19, 2022

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 area is located in the low elevation slopes of the Columbia River Gorge, in the Western Cascades Lowlands and Valleys ecoregion. The ecoregion is dominated by western hemlock and Douglas-fir forests in a low elevation alpine environment. The underbrush contains sword fern, lady fern, Oregon grape, grasses and small shrubs.

The project is located in Skamania County, Washington, and extends through two BPA maintenance districts - The Dalles and Ross districts. The proposed project is located on the Washington side of the Columbia River Gorge near the towns of Stevenson and North Bonneville. The project area is located on state, federal, and privately-owned land. The majority of the project is located in and near the border to Gifford Pinchot National Forest, within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA). The CRGNSA land use designation of the project area is Special Management Area (SMA) Forest and SMA Open Space.

The transmission corridor is approximately 150 feet wide. The vegetation within the McNary – Ross No. 1 high voltage transmission corridor is managed periodically to remove tall-growing tree species that could encroach on the line. All proposed work would occur within or adjacent to the right-of-way corridor on hilly to mountainous terrain. The areas of improvement would be accessed using existing BPA and USFS privately-owned access roads, though equipment and personnel may be required to traverse off-road for staging.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, BPA engaged in consultation with the Washington Dept. of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHPP), the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and the U.S. Forest Service Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. BPA identified an Area of Potential Effect and detailed proposed project activities. BPA conducted a field survey of the Area of Potential Effect. BPA sent a determination letter on July 18th, 2021, stating that the undertaking would result in no historic properties effected. DAHPP responded with concurrence. No other parties responded to BPA's determination during consultation.

Notes:

- BPA would implement an inadvertent discovery plan in the event that historic or cultural resources are discovered during the course of construction.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The majority of the work would occur in the existing road prism, where a road-base of rock already exists. Standard construction erosion control measures would be utilized as necessary to prevent erosion and disturbed areas would be stabilized with mulch and a native seed.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The majority of the project would occur on existing BPA access road footprint. However, some new landings would be installed, and temporary impacts to plants would occur due to construction activity, during access road blading and especially at locations such as turn-arounds and staging areas. Best management practices issued by the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area would be implemented during construction to mitigate impact to plants. There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species in the project area. The USFS has identified sensitive plant species that would be avoided during construction.

Notes:

- Rare and native plant habitats exist along talus slopes in the vicinity of structures 141/3, 141/4, and 141/5. Vehicles would not be permitted off the existing road prism in these areas and vegetation removal would be limited to the area directly affected by the project.
- Any disturbed areas would be reseeded with a seed mix recommended by the CRGNSA biologist.
- All vehicles would be cleaned prior to entering the project site in order to prevent the spread of invasive weeds.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Wildlife in the area may be disturbed by construction activities; however, the disturbance would be temporary and the surrounding landscape provides ample habitat and cover. In accordance with the ESA, BPA reviewed the project and potential effects to ESA-listed species in the project area. BPA made a determination that the project would have “No Effect” to yellow-billed cuckoo and the candidate species monarch butterfly. The project area is located in the vicinity of northern spotted owl critical habitat. BPA made a determination of “May effect, not likely to adversely affect” for northern spotted owl, and a “no effect” determination for northern spotted owl critical habitat. A biological assessment primarily focused on the project’s potential impact to northern spotted owl was submitted to USFWS on January 13, 2020. USFWS sent a letter of concurrence on February 26, 2020 which stated that the project “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” northern spotted owl

Notes:

- Implement seasonal timing restriction prohibiting work between March 1 and July 15.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Ford improvements are planned in Greenleaf Creek. Greenleaf Creek has documented fish presence, including coastal cutthroat trout and rainbow trout. The project would have no effect on ESA-listed bull trout or bull trout designated critical habitat. BPA has obtained a Section 404 Clean Water Act permit for the proposed work, and the ford improvement design has been submitted to WA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife for review. Work area isolation and fish capture would be implemented during construction to protect water quality and minimize potential impacts to fish. The work would be done during the in-water work period (August 1st – August 31st). Additionally, erosion control best management practices (BMPs) would be utilized during construction to prevent erosion and sedimentation into Greenleaf Creek and other, unnamed intermittent waterways in the project area.

Notes:

- Greenleaf Creek is a part of a sensitive watershed. Prior to and after reconstruction of the ford, a temporary bridge would be installed over Greenleaf Creek for the duration of the project to protect the ford and the creek from the temporary frequent heavy vehicle traffic.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands in or adjacent to the project area. The project would have no impact to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No excavation or other project work would be at a depth or location that would potentially impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project area is located within Gifford Pinchot National Forest and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA). All work would be performed within the ROW or on existing access roads and land use would not change as a result of project activities. BPA coordinated with the USFS CRGNSA office on March 3, 2020. BPA received a response from the CRGNSA on April 1, 2020 which contained a list of Best Management Practices which would be implemented during project activities. These BMPs have been incorporated under the various resource areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would be consistent with the visual character of the existing road prism and access roads. The new gate installation is located in the transmission corridor and would not substantially alter the existing visual profile of the access road system. It would be painted a color brown or green color that matches CRGNSA color standards.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have no substantial impacts on air quality; however a small amount of vehicle emissions and dust may occur during construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary construction noise 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: A health and safety plan would be prepared and submitted to the BPA safety office prior to construction. Project activities would increase safety for crews accessing transmission lines.

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: All activities have been coordinated with landowners.

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

Signed: /s/ Aaron Siemers

Aaron Siemers, EPR-4
Environmental Protection Specialist

Date: January 19, 2022