Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Damper Installations on the Cougar-Thurston #1 transmission line corridor

PP&A No.: 3328

Project Manager: Gary Beck TEP-TPP-1

Location: Lane County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to perform installation of 666 dampers, 32 spiral dampers, and in-kind replacement of 10 wood pole structures along the Cougar-Thurston #1 transmission line corridor. Minor road and landing maintenance is scheduled to be performed at select wood pole replacement structures.

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, July 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/ *Phil Smith for*
Benjamin J. Tilley
Natural Resource Specialist

Concur:

/s/ *Stacy L. Mason* Date: *February 5, 2016*
Stacy L. Mason
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: Cougar-Thurston #1 Damper Installation & Wood Pole Replacements

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Project Site Description

The project components in the Cougar-Thurston #1 115kV transmission line corridor traverse the entire length of the corridor, which follows Highway 126 E from Cougar Dam to Thurston Substation in Springfield, Oregon. The first 8 miles of the corridor is within the Willamette National Forest. Another 6-mile section is with lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The remainder is privately-owned commercial forestlands. All properties are in Lane County, Oregon.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. **Historic and Cultural Resources**	☑	☐

Explanation: Oregon SHPO concurred on September 30, 2015, that the project will likely have no effect on any significant archaeological objects or sites. Based on the information provided, additional archaeological research is not anticipated for this project. In the unlikely event an archaeological object or site (i.e., historic or prehistoric) is encountered during project implementation, all ground disturbance at the location should cease immediately until a professional archaeologist can be contacted to evaluate the discovery.

2. **Geology and Soils**	☑	☐

Explanation: The project area is in a previously disturbed right-of-way within the existing transmission line corridor. The ground disturbance for the damper installations is expected to be negligible, as work will be performed primarily by aerial efforts. The ground disturbance for the wood pole replacements expected is that typically associated with removing a 2-pole transmission line support structure and guy-anchors (.05 acre) and installation of the replacement poles (.04 acre).

3. **Plants** (including federal/state special-status species)	☑	☐

Explanation: There are no federally-listed plant species or designated critical habitat present at or adjacent to the project area. State special-status species present near the project area include:

1. Pacific Marten – last observed 1980 caught in a mink trap at one location of the corridor.
2. Lichen (*Nephroma occultum*) – last observed 1977 in one location in the 6-mile of the corridor.
3. Tall bugbane – last observed 1998 – one mature plant in one location of the corridor.

Due to the time period from last observation and the infrequency of observations, there is very little potential for the plants to occur in the planned disturbance footprint.

4. **Wildlife** (including federal/state special-status species and habitats) ☐ ☑

Explanation: Federally-listed wildlife and/or critical habitats include Northern spotted owl critical habitat adjacent to the line corridor between structures 14/6 and 18/1. There is no identified owl presence within .25 miles of the transmission line corridor. State special-status species that may be present include the Western pond turtle. Two turtles were last observed in 2002 approximately .15 miles from the line corridor.

Mitigation: All work within identified critical habitat for the Northern spotted owl will be scheduled for the time period between October 1 and March 1, outside of the identified breeding seasons for the Northern spotted owl. If there are constraints on obtaining an outage for the line in this location, it is possible that work may be performed during the late breeding season for the Northern spotted owl, which occurs from August 6 to Septermber 30. If work is scheduled during this time frame, there will be restrictions from working in the two hours following sunrise and the two hours preceeding sunset.

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish** (including federal/state special-status species and ESUs) ☑ ☐

Explanation: The line corridor roughly follows Highway 126 E and the McKenzie River, which contains Upper Willamette River steelhead (winter run), and Upper Willamette River Chinook salmon, including designated critical habitat for the Chinook salmon, as well as essential fish habitat for both species. In addition, there are 6 small waterways (creeks) that cross under the line corridor that also contain the above-mentioned fish species and habitats. All work locations will take place at structure sites, none of which are within 100 feet of any of these waterways or crossings identified. Ground disturbance for the project work will be minimal, and the time and extent of exposure of any potential disturbed soil would also be minimal. No in-water work is planned for this project, and BMP's would be utilized for the project's minor footprint. There would be no impacts to waterbodies, floodplains, or fish species.

6. **Wetlands** ☑ ☐

Explanation: The line corridor resides in modestly mountainous terrain, with pole structures typically placed at the highest points possible. Only at the bottoms of select spans are there any wetlands to speak of. No work will take place within 100 feet of any wetland adjacent to the project. BMP's employed would minimize any potential runoff that could compromise water quality.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers** ☑ ☐

Explanation: The project location (described in #6) would preclude any work being near or adjacent to potential groundwater sources, including underground aquifers. Disturbance from the project work would be physical in nature with no potential contaminants other than vehicular fluids that could possibly leak on-site. Spill kits will be in every vehicle and piece of work equipment present at all work locations.

8. **Land Use and Specially Designated Areas** ☑ ☐

Explanation: Land use along this line corridor is predominately commercial and federal forest lands. Other than special designations identified in the Project Description and #4 above, there are no specially designated areas within or adjacent to the project area.

9. **Visual Quality** ☑ ☐

Explanation: Damper installations will result in a very modest visual change. Dampers are similar in size to the existing conductor and are approximately 15 inches long. They will be placed on both sides of every other structure on each of the three conductors. The spiral dampers in the first mile of line are similar but with a spiral wire around them for additional vibration control. The wood pole structures would be in-kind replacments of poles of the same size, shape, and location. Some minor rocking of the landing areas is some locations would be typical of disturbance expected with maintenance work. The visual impact of the overall project would be short-lived and would blend in quickly with the surrounding configurations.

10. **Air Quality** ☐ ☑

Explanation: Diesel generators providing up to 4MW of power generation will be used periodically near Blue River Substation to maintain electrical service to the sub, providing the city of Blue River, Oregon with power during portions of the project that could affect their electrical service. Air quality permits from the Lane Regional Air Pollution Authority (LRAPA) will be obtained in accordance with Lane Code Title 37 (Air Contaminant Discharge Permits). The generators will only be used in the event that outage schedules conflict with the continuation of electrical service to the town of Blue River, Oregon. The remainder of work activities for this project are maintenance-level in nature and should be completed in a short time period with minimal crews and machinery, resulting in exhaust fumes and potentially dust during dry periods. Dust control measures will be used if necessary.

11. **Noise** ☑ ☐

Explanation: Temporary construction noise will occur from work activities during daylight hours. Concerning identified Northern spotted owl critical habitat, disruption distances will be maintained during the core breeding season (March 1 – Aug. 5). Sunrise/Sunset restrictions during the late breeding season (Aug. 6 – Sept. 30) will be implemented if work must occur with critical habitat during this timeframe due to outage constraints. Diesel generators used will have noise-muffling devices to minimize sound traveling away from the worksite. Operational noise of the electrical facilities will remain constant.

12. **Human Health and Safety** ☑ ☐

Explanation: No known soil contamination or hazardous conditions exist at identified work sites. A site-specific safety plan or Job Hazard Analysis will be developed and approved by BPA prior to work commencing. Daily job briefings will occur prior to work initiation each day to assure an overview of all potential hazards involved for that work day.

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, if necessary:

☑ Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment

facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

☑ 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, if necessary:

☑ 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, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: Coordination with the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management has occurred. Private property owners have been notified via local public notification. Identified concerns will be addressed and mitigations implemented prior to project initiation.

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

Signed: /s*/ Phil Smith for*
Benjamin J. Tilley, EP-Alvey

Date: *February 5, 2016*