

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Ashe-Marion #2 Emergency Re-conductor Project (195/3 - 199/4)

PP&A No.: 3,728

Project Manager: Mark Korsness, TEP-TPP-1

Location: Clackamas County, Oregon

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

B1.3 Routine Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action:

Recent inspection of the Ashe-Marion #2 500 kV transmission line identified a damaged section of the sub-conductor in mile 196 of the line as it runs from Ashe Substation to Marion Substation. This section is located in Mt. Hood National Forest. One of the sub-conductors in span 196 of the line is damaged and failing, impacting the safety and reliability of the transmission line. If the damaged conductor is not repaired prior to the winter of 2017/2018, the transmission system would be placed in an elevated risk of failure and emergency outage. BPA proposes to address the sub-conductor failure in the Ashe-Marion #2 line by restringing a four-mile section of the damaged phase with new steel reinforced electrical conductor. The conductor would be replaced from structure 195/3 to 199/4 in Clackamas County, Oregon. BPA would establish pulling and tensioning sites at 195/3 and 199/4 to install the new conductor and add the appropriate tension to the line.

Vegetation would be cleared and landings would be graded near structure 195/3 of the line to accommodate the pulling and tensioning equipment and other heavy machinery. Vegetation and ground disturbance is estimated at 100 ft. x 100 ft. at this landing site, and road rock may be emplaced to provide a suitable surface for the equipment. Near structures 199/4, pulling and tensioning equipment would be staged primarily on the existing access road, though approximately 125 mostly small Douglas-fir and noble fir trees would need to be removed to clear the area. Except for these trees, all vegetation clearing would be within the existing transmission right-of-way, which undergoes periodic vegetation maintenance to maintain necessary electrical clearances. Temporary closure of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) gravel access road near 199/4 would likely be required in order to perform the work.

New hardware assemblies would be installed at structures 195/3, 196/3, 196/4, and 199/4. Access road improvements would be required, primarily at an ongoing landslide near mile 198 of the line which has impacted the roadway. All road work would be on the existing access road footprint, and, except for landing construction near the pulling and tensioning site at 195/3, no new road construction would be required.

Equipment would include heavy machinery such as semi-trucks, track hoes, dump trucks, utility bucket trucks, cranes, and helicopters, as well as pickup trucks and smaller transportation vehicles. Ripplebrook

heliport near the Ripplebrook Camp Store would potentially be utilized as the backup helicopter port for the project, with an additional primary helipad established at a USFS gravel yard near mile 196 of the work area. A material staging yard would potentially be established in a developed, paved area of Estacada Ranger Station or the Ripplebrook Camp Store USFS complex.

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/ Aaron C. Siemers
Aaron C. Siemers
Environmental Scientist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel
Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: August 29, 2017

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: Ashe-Marion #2 Emergency Re-conductor Project (195/3 - 199/4)

Project Site Description

The project area is located in the Western Cascades ecoregion in western Oregon, with the western half of the approximately 4-mile project area in the Montane Highlands ecoregion, and the eastern half in the Lowlands and Valleys ecoregion. The Lowlands and Valleys ecoregion includes the lower slopes of the Cascades, with mild, wetter climate, and dense forests of western hemlock and Douglas-fir. Steep valleys and wet climate support high gradient rivers with cold water fish, such as Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout.

The Montane Highlands ecoregion is characterized by steeply sloping mountains at higher elevations, ranging from 3,000 – 6,500 ft. The geology of the area is primarily basalt. Vegetation is dominated by Douglas-fir, western hemlock, noble fir, and Pacific silver fir.

While historically logged in certain sections, and characterized by the cleared 300 ft. wide high voltage transmission right-of-way, the majority of the project area is located in or near northern spotted owl-designated critical habitat. The land is also part of Mt. Hood National Forest, and managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The project area has significant topographic expression, making access difficult. For instance, in some locations, the transmission right-of-way (ROW) drops off at an approximately 45% slope.

The vegetation management practices within the transmission line right-of-way are the dominant factor in the ecology of the majority of the project's work area. Tall vegetation is periodically cut to maintain necessary transmission clearances. This practice favors non-native plants in an area that would in most cases naturally support coniferous forests. Vegetation in the ROW includes native grasses, vine maple, small fir trees, and rhododendron. The eastern side of the project area is generally more flat. Vegetation in the ROW includes native grasses, small fir trees, vine maple, Scotch broom, and blackberry. Oxeye daisy and rhododendron are also present.

Township		Range		Section	County	Ownership
7	S	5	E	17	Clackamas, OR	U.S.A.
7	S	5	E	16	Clackamas, OR	U.S.A.
7	S	5	E	15	Clackamas, OR	U.S.A.
7	S	5	E	14	Clackamas, OR	U.S.A.
7	S	5	E	13	Clackamas, OR	U.S.A.
7	S	5	E	12	Clackamas, OR	U.S.A.
6	S	6	E	3	Clackamas, OR	U.S.A.

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Due to the emergency nature of the project, the Section 106 process was abbreviated. BPA consulted with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, the United States Dept. of Agriculture Forest Service, Mt. Hood National Forest, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. BPA conducted background research using the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office's online database and conducted an intensive field survey of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). No historic properties were identified in the APE during the course of this investigation. In a letter dated August 8, 2017, BPA determined that no historic properties will be affected by the implementation of the proposed undertaking. BPA contacted the consulted parties during the week of August 14, 2017, and there were no comments on BPA's determination. BPA's National Historic Preservation Act obligations have been fulfilled following 36 CFR 800.12(b). During construction, BPA will proceed and follow established inadvertent discovery protocols.		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> The project would have relatively minor soil disturbance associated with landing construction near 195/3. Also, a localized landslide is present near mile 198 of the line that is impacting the U.S. Forest Service access road. BPA would rebuild the roadway as a part of the project activities. Erosion and sediment controls would be employed as necessary during construction.		
3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> No effects to special-status plants would occur and invasive weed controls would be employed as necessary. Please see the attached Effects Determination Memo for more information.		
4. Wildlife (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Please see the attached Effects Determination Memo for more information.		
5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including federal/state special-status species and ESUs)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The proposed project area is not located in a floodplain. Several alpine, high gradient streams are present in or near the transmission line right-of-way, including Skin Creek in mile 199 and Perry Creek in mile 195. However, no in-water work is planned, and no impacts to waterways, fish, or fish habitat would occur.		
6. Wetlands	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> The project is located in an upland, alpine environment and no wetlands are present in the proposed work areas.		

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Explanation:

No new groundwater wells or use of local groundwater resources are proposed. The project would not impact groundwater quality or aquifers.

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

Explanation:

The project area is located in Mt. Hood National Forest, managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Existing land use, which consists of conservation tracts, recreation and logging, would not be affected by project activities long term. In the short term, temporary closure of the USFS access road near structure 199/4 would likely be required to stage equipment and perform the pulling and tensioning work on the new conductor. This road is in a remote area and does not experience significant traffic. Through access has been blocked from the eastern direction due to the afore-mentioned landslide, which would be repaired during the project, mitigating the effects of the temporary closure. BPA is coordinating project activities with the Mt. Hood National Forest office and would continue to do so during construction.

9. **Visual Quality**

Explanation:

The proposed project is located in a transmission ROW. No changes or alterations to the transmission structures are planned, except for the installation of hardware at four locations, and restringing the conductor. These alterations will not significantly change the visual quality of the transmission line. Vegetation clearing and removal associated with the project is relatively minor, and adjacent to or within existing transmission line and transportation corridors. The project would not significantly impact the visual quality of the area.

10. **Air Quality**

Explanation:

Temporary impacts to air quality may occur due to dust and vehicle emission during construction. No long-term impacts would occur.

11. **Noise**

Explanation:

Temporary noise impacts may occur due to construction activities. No long-term impacts would occur.

12. **Human Health and Safety**

Explanation:

BPA and BPA's contractor would follow standard health and safety protocols during construction. In addition, addressing the damage to the conductor will reduce risk to the line, and the potential for emergency repairs when access to the line would be more dangerous.

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: NA

- 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: NA

- 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: NA

- 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: NA

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: In the planning phases, BPA has engaged in consultation and coordination with the Mt. Hood National Forest office of the U.S. Forest Service. BPA has obtained a special use permit from the Forest Service. During construction, BPA would continue to coordinate with the Forest Service.

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

Signed: /s/ Aaron C. Siemers
Aaron C. Siemers
Environmental Scientist

Date: August 29, 2017