

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Golden Hills Wind Farm Interconnection

Project No.: G099

Project Manager: Debbie Staats – TEPS-TPP-1

Location: Gilliam County, OR

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to install a single span of conductor on structure 5/6 of BPA's Biglow Canyon-John Day No 1 transmission line, which would connect into BPA's deadend structure on the located at PGE's Biglow Canyon substation, expand the John Day Substation, and remove a line impairment. The work would allow Avangrid to interconnect a 200– megawatt (MW) wind project via their 230-kV generation tie line into BPA's Klondike Schoolhouse-John Day No. 1 transmission line.

In order to facilitate the interconnection, BPA proposes to provide more reactive support by adding additional shunt capacitors at its John Day substation. The substation would need to be expanded by about 0.6 acre along China Hollow Rd. The expansion would take place along the south west side of the substation within existing BPA fee-owned land.

Additionally, the proposed interconnection would require the removal of a critical line impairment along BPA's right-of-way corridor Klondike Schoolhouse-John Day No 1 transmission line. An impairment occurs where the distance from the conductor to the ground surface does not have adequate clearance for safe and reliable operation. Clearance of the impairment, located between structures 1/3 – 1/4 would be achieved by using a backhoe to excavate approximately 2 feet of topsoil in an area about 0.25 acres in size. The impairment area would then be graded and the excavated materials would be dispersed on-site, contoured to blend into existing topography, and re-vegetated.

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/ Douglas Corkran

Douglas Corkran
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange February 4, 2021

Katey C. Grange Date
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: G099 Golden Hills Wind Project Interconnection

Project Site Description

The project site (including the John Day substation, impairment area and transmission tower) is located in upland areas in flat to gently rolling dryland wheatfields and agricultural areas. There are no wetlands and no waterbodies within several miles of the project work areas.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Oregon SHPO and affected tribes on July 26, 2020. The Oregon SHPO responded on August 4, 2020 that they did not concur with the delineated APE and believed that the customer's wind project and associated customer transmission lines should be included in the APE. On August 6, 2020 BPA requested comments from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) on the SHPO's decision which were received on September 8, 2020. Several tribes also issued comments requesting that BPA include the wind project and associated transmission lines in the APE. BPA declined to include the wind project and transmission lines in the APE in a letter to the ACHP dated September 11, 2020 asserting its earlier reasoning to keep its existing delineated APE. On November 2, 2020 BPA issued a letter to the consulting parties with a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties. On December 4, 2020 the Oregon SHPO agreed with BPA's determination of no adverse effect, but continued to disagree with the APE. On December 11, BPA issued a letter to ACHP requesting review of BPA's finding of no adverse effect. On January 7, 2021 BPA received a letter from the ACHP continuing to disagree with BPA's determination of the APE. On January 28, 2021, BPA sent a letter to the ACHP acknowledging that there remains disagreement from its consulting parties; however, BPA affirmed its characterization of the APE and finding of no adverse effect on historic properties and stated that it has fulfilled its responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.5(c)(3)(ii)(B).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is located in dryland wheatfields and agricultural areas. Exposed erosive soils exist within the project area; however, project activities are located in flat or gently sloping areas and would take place during the dry season. Any disturbed soils in non-agricultural areas would be revegetated. Approximately 0.25 acres of topsoil currently used for crops would be removed to mitigate the line impairment. These agricultural areas disturbed by construction would be managed by the landowner as part of their ongoing

operations. BPA would compensate the landowners for any damages associated with topsoil removal.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is located in dryland wheatfields and agricultural areas, with little native vegetation. No special- status plant species are located in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is located in dryland wheatfields and agricultural areas, with little to no high quality wildlife habitat present. No special-status wildlife species are located in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water bodies or floodplains are located in or near the project area.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is located in an upland area with no wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not alter surface or subsurface water flow patterns and is not located in an area with substantial groundwater or aquifer resources.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing land uses would not change as a result of the project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some additional substation and tap structures would be added; however, these would be located in areas where existing substation and transmission line structures are already located. Some minor changes to visual quality may result; however, the area is sparsely populated and traveled and these changes are unlikely to be noticed by most viewers.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor fugitive dust and vehicle emissions are expected during construction; however, these impacts will be minor, temporary and localized.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor equipment noise is expected during construction. No residences or other sensitive areas are located near the project area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not create additional health and human safety hazards.

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 the underlying landowner at the substation expansion site. The two private landowners within the remainder of the project area would be notified prior to construction.

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

Signed: /s/ Douglas Corkran February 4, 2021
Douglas Corkran-ECT-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist