

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Benton County PUD Cable Upgrade in BPA Right-of-way

**Project No.:** LURR 201801571

**Project Manager:** Miroslava Rivera - TERR-3

**Location:** Benton County, WA

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights of way

**Description of the Proposed Action:** BPA proposes to allow Benton Public Utility District (Benton PUD) to upgrade electrical cable equipment in BPA fee-owned transmission line right-of-way

Benton PUD would upgrade their existing underground electric service cable to their Cold Creek Substation within BPA's fee-owned transmission right-of-way, between Midway-Moxee transmission line Structures 5/1 and 5/2 and within the adjacent Bonneville-Midway No. 1 transmission line right-of-way. . Benton PUD would replace an existing junction box and install an underground electrical vault with a pad switch. Electrical cables and conduit would be removed, replaced, and installed in a narrow trench. The trench would run from the Benton PUD Cold Creek Substation fence to the vault location, then from the vault out towards the Benton PUD power pole, for a total length of about 280 feet on BPA property. Benton PUD would use a backhoe to trench about 18 inches in width and 4 feet in depth.

**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/ Kimberly St.Hilaire

Kimberly St.Hilaire

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Stacy L. Mason

Stacy L. Mason

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: April 20, 2018

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist  
Seed List for Revegetation of Disturbed Areas

## 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 location is located within the Yakima Valley portion of the Columbia Plateau about 27 miles east of the city of Moxee, in Benton County, in central Washington. The project area is about ½ mile north of State Highway 24, and about 4 miles west of the western boundary of the Hanford Reach National Monument.

The surrounding topography consists of level areas and undulating hills to the north, which include some ephemeral stream drainages. Nearby land uses include sparse rural residential, agricultural uses, including grapes, and ranching.

Vegetation in the project area is typical for the Columbia Basin in eastern Washington. The vegetation in the project area is annual grassland that is low to very low quality, due to the prevalence of non-native species. In the project area, non-native invasive annual grass and herbaceous flowering species are predominant and include cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), tall tumbled mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*), Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), herb Sophia (*Descurainia sophia*), and redstem stork's bill (*Erodium cicutarium*). Native species in the project area include Sandberg bluegrass (*Poa secunda*), western tansymustard (*Descurainia pinnata*), and long-leaf phlox (*Phlox longifolia*).

### 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"/>

Explanation: In 2013 through 2018, this transmission corridor was the subject of a BPA transmission line rebuild project. BPA conducted cultural consultation on the rebuild project and conducted background research and field surveys for archeological, historic, and traditional cultural properties. There are no cultural resources known in the areas where construction would occur under this project. To ensure there are no impacts to cultural resources from this project, mitigation shall be implemented.

Mitigation:

No project personnel, vehicles, equipment, or activities shall be located or occur more than 50 feet to the north of the vault and trench location.

In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, the following actions should be taken:

- Stop work in the vicinity and immediately notify the BPA environmental lead, a BPA archaeologist, appropriate BPA project staff, interested Tribes, Oregon SHPO, and the appropriate local, state, and federal agencies.
- Implement reasonable measures to protect the discovery site, including any appropriate stabilization or covering.
- Take reasonable steps to ensure the confidentiality of the discovery site, including restricting

access.

## 2. Geology and Soils



Explanation: Impacts to soils would be minimal because they would be disturbed in a small area, some of which is along an existing access road. Trenching for conduit installation would be to a maximum depth of 4 feet. Native soils would be used to backfill the trench, with the subsoil and topsoil replaced in their correct position.

Mitigation:

- Temporarily stockpile topsoil and redeposit soils at the approximate level where they were excavated. Subsoil must be replaced as the lowest level with topsoil in the uppermost level in the excavated area and not spread near the trench.
- Minimize the construction work area in order to disturb soils in the smallest area possible.
- Locate staging areas in previously disturbed or graveled upland areas to minimize disturbance to soils.

## 3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)



Explanation: Impacts to vegetation would be minimal because plants would be disturbed in a small area, some of which is along an existing access road. The area is vegetated with low-quality grassland, dominated by non-native species. A noxious weed, diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*) was noted in this general area during a weed survey several years ago.

A special-status plant, Columbia milk-vetch (*Astragalus columbianus*), is known to occur in the project area. Columbia milk-vetch only occurs in Washington State in an approximately 25- by 5-mile area in Yakima, Kittitas, and Benton counties along the west side of the Columbia River. This species is a federal species of concern and state sensitive species. Columbia milk-vetch is adapted to low intensity fires and can colonize recently disturbed areas, including areas such as along dirt roads.

Mitigation:

- Restrict construction activities to the minimum work area needed to work safely and effectively to limit disturbance of vegetation.
- In areas where machinery will travel, cut or crush vegetation rather than blading or clearing areas that would remain vegetated.
- Park equipment and vehicles in areas without vegetation, such as along access roads and at the Cold Creek Substation.
- Prior to construction, hand pull any diffuse knapweed that occurs in areas where construction vehicles will drive and in areas where soils will be excavated; bag the weeds, and dispose of them off-site in an approved disposal facility
- Use vehicle and equipment cleaning stations to minimize the introduction and spread of weeds during construction by cleaning vehicles and equipment prior to entering and as soon as possible after leaving each work area.
- Reseed disturbed areas after construction activities are complete, at the appropriate time period for germination, with a locally-adapted, native seed mix, approved by BPA environmental staff; BPA recommends seeding with the native seed mix currently being used to revegetate areas disturbed during the recent Midway-Moxee and Midway-Grandview transmission line rebuild project.

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



Explanation: Noise would be temporarily generated during construction which could displace wildlife species from the Project area. It is expected that while wildlife would leave the area during construction, they would return after construction and only a minimal amount of wildlife habitat would be impacted. In 2013 through 2018, this transmission corridor was the subject of a for a BPA transmission line rebuild project and wildlife surveys were conducted in the project area. Special-status wildlife species are not expected to occur within the project area.

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



Explanation: The area where work would occur is a very dry upland with no water bodies present in the project area. The nearest waterbody is an ephemeral stream located about 1800 feet to the northeast of the project area. A review of available floodplain data revealed no floodplains in the project area. Because there are no water features, there are no fish are present within the project area.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: There are no National Wetland Inventory (NWI) wetlands in the project area. In 2014, the project area was the subject of a wetland delineation for a BPA transmission line rebuild project. Wetlands were not found in the project area. The area where work would occur is a very dry upland with shrub-steppe vegetation; there are no indications of wetland hydrology, wetland plants are not present, and soils are not hydric.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: The maximum depth of disturbance would be 4-feet in a small area. Excavation to this depth and in this small an area would not be expected to impact groundwater or any aquifers.

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



Explanation: All work would occur in an existing transmission line right-of-way near a substation and there would be no change of the existing land use.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The electrical conduit and electrical vault installation would not change the appearance of the landscape except for minimal ground disturbance in work areas. Only the junction box would be visible above ground. The project area is sparsely inhabited and the closest residence is about 1,200 feet from the project area. There are no other sensitive viewers that have a clear view of this landscape because motorists on Highway 24 only have a distant view of the Project area.

Mitigation:

- Conduct all work during daylight hours in order to avoid use of nighttime illumination.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: There would be a small amount of particulate matter generated by ground disturbance. This area is very vulnerable to wind erosion. Vehicles and equipment would also generate dust. Vehicles and equipment would generate emissions temporarily during construction. Because dust and vehicle emission would be temporary and result from work in a small area, there would be no violations of any applicable air quality standards.

Mitigation:

- Restrict speed on BPA access roads to no greater than 15 miles per hour to minimize the creation of dust.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Noise would be temporarily generated during construction and the nearest sensitive noise receptors are residents about 1,200 feet from the Project area.

Mitigation:

- Conduct all work during daylight hours to minimize noise disturbance to nearby residents.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: Benton PUD shall be responsible for and comply with all procedural and substantive environmental requirements imposed by local, state, or federal laws and regulations applicable to the project. Benton PUD shall not conduct any work during periods when vegetation is dry and there is a risk of wildfires.

Mitigation:

- Do not use or store any hazardous materials on BPA property (i.e., fuels, herbicides, solvents, paints, or other substances).
- Benton PUD shall notify BPA in a timely manner if there are any reportable releases of hazardous substances or breaches of environmental requirements, and shall mitigate and abate adverse environmental impacts.
- Benton PUD shall conduct this work in the spring prior to the beginning of fire season or in the fall, once fall rains have commenced and there is no longer fire danger. To determine if fire season warnings are in effect, contact the Department of Energy Hanford Site and obtain their fire season status report.

**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:

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**Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination**

Description: Work would be conducted on BPA fee-owned land and surrounding landowners would not be affected. Benton County would be responsible for coordinating with any other landowners for their work as appropriate.

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

Signed: /s/ Kimberly St.Hilaire  
Kimberly St.Hilaire  
Environmental Protection Specialist, ECT-4

Date: April 20, 2018