

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Libby-Conkelley No. 1 Urgent Gate and Tank Trap Installation Project

**PP&A No.:** 4305

**Project Manager:** Ryan Martin – TELF-TPP-3

**Location:** Flathead County, Montana

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

B1.3 Routine Maintenance; B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to install access restrictions to the Libby-Conkelley No. 1 transmission right-of-way (ROW) in line mile 41 near transmission structures 41/1, 41/3, 41/4 and 41/5 in Flathead County, Montana. Access restrictions would include three heavy duty gates and a series of tank traps, which are constructed earthen features comprised of a berm and a ditch, designed to deter vehicular traffic. The tank traps would be installed adjacent to the gates and in one other strategic location along the ROW perimeter to keep unauthorized vehicular traffic from driving around the gates or otherwise entering the transmission ROW. BPA would install the tank traps and gates in an effort to inhibit unauthorized use of the transmission ROW which is drawing complaints from neighbors and raising safety concerns.

The standard heavy duty BPA gates would be installed. The tank traps would be approximately 2.5 to 5 feet in depth and 2.5 to 5 feet wide. Approximately 575 linear feet of tank trap installation is planned. Disturbed soils would be seeded and mulched upon project completion. Equipment would likely include a backhoe, front end loader, and light duty trucks.

**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 Grange  
NEPA Compliance Office

Date: November 27, 2019

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 is located on private land in the Salish Mountains ecoregion of the Northern Rocky Mountains in Flathead County, northwestern Montana. The project area is at approximately 4,000 feet elevation in the rural forested mountains approximately 25 miles northwest of Flathead Lake. The ecoregion is characterized by long, cold winters and wet springs. Native vegetation includes subalpine fir, Douglas-fir, and grand fir, as well as western larch, ponderosa pine, and lodgepole pine in those areas impacted by former logging activity or other development. BPA manages the cleared transmission ROW for the Libby-Conkelley No. 1 line. Tall-growing vegetation is routinely cut to maintain safety and reliability clearance distance with the energized transmission line. Vegetation in the ROW includes small firs and pines, native grasses, and weeds such as common mullein. The project location is adjacent to and runs nearly parallel to Pleasant Valley Road, which provides public access to the transmission easement in this rural location. A BPA access road runs through the transmission easement, and the grade is relatively flat. Canada lynx critical habitat is present within about 100 feet of the project area.

## Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. <b>Historic and Cultural Resources</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> On November 26, 2019, a BPA archaeologist surveyed the project area for historic and cultural resources. No historic or cultural resources were identified during the on-site survey.</p> <p>BPA and BPA's contractor would implement an inadvertent discovery plan in the event that historic or cultural resources are encountered during project activities.</p>		

2. <b>Geology and Soils</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Excavation of footings for gate installation, and excavating and mounding the ditches and berms for the tank traps would disturb topsoil and local bedrock, which consists of quartzite and glacial till. However, impacts would be limited to the footprint of the tank traps and the immediate work area.</p> <p><u>Note:</u> BPA and/or BPA's contractor would implement the following minimization measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Disturbed cuts and fills would be seeded with a native seed mix and stabilized using erosion and sediment control best management practices.</li></ul>		

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



Explanation: Excavation of footings and gate installation would disturb vegetation, which currently primarily consists of small firs and pines, native grasses, and weeds. All disturbed areas would be reseeded with a native seed mix post construction and stabilized.

BPA obtained an official species list for the project area from U.S. Fish and Wildlife on November 26th, 2019. No threatened, endangered, or candidate plant species are potentially present in the project area. There would be no effect on ESA-listed species or other state special status species.

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



Explanation: Excavating and construction in the project area would likely temporarily disturb wildlife such as deer, birds, and large and small mammals due to the presence of human activity, machinery operation, and noise. However, the disturbance would be temporary and wildlife would be able to easily avoid project activities.

BPA obtained an official species list for the project area from U.S. Fish and Wildlife on November 26th, 2019. Canada lynx, grizzly bear, North American wolverine, and yellow-billed cuckoo are listed as threatened, endangered, or proposed threatened in the project area. Critical habitat for Canada lynx is within 100 feet of the project area. Due to the location of the work in a previously disturbed area adjacent to a public roadway that is regularly used, BPA has determined that the project would have no effect on listed species, including Canada lynx, in the project area and no effect on critical habitat.

Installation of access restrictions including gates and tank traps adjacent to Pleasant Valley Road would restrict human activity in the area, which would potentially have a mid- and long-term benefit to wildlife.

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



Explanation: No water bodies or floodplains are present in the project area. No project activities would occur within or near waterbodies.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: No wetlands are present in the project area. No project activities would occur within or near wetlands.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: Planned excavation would extend approximately 2.5 to 5 feet in depth and would not intercept or impact groundwater and/or aquifers.

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



Explanation: Existing land use is transmission easement, transportation easement, silviculture, and wildlife habitat. The land is privately owned by corporate owners and private individuals. The driver of the project is unauthorized use of the transmission ROW. Authorized land uses in the project area which would be improved in the long-term by the project.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: Gate and tank trap installation would alter the existing visual quality of the road way adjacent to Pleasant Valley Road and in other work locations adjacent to access roads. However, the visual quality of the area is already impacted by the transmission line and the road. Disturbed areas would be seeded, and with time would blend more closely to the existing visual quality of the area.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: Some dust and vehicular emissions may be generated due to construction activity and disturbed soils. However, due to the extent of the work and planned ground disturbance, impacts to air quality would be negligible.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Some temporary noise may be generated due to construction activity. However, the project is located in a fairly remote area and the construction noise associated with construction, excavation and regrading would not be significant.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: Construction crews would follow a site specific safety plan and implement best practices such as morning safety meetings prior to work starting.  
Restricting access to the transmission ROW would likely deter unauthorized use of the area and would improve safety in the area.

**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

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**Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination**

Description: BPA would continue to coordinate with landowners and neighbors in the project area to alert stakeholders of progress and schedule.

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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/ Aaron Siemers  
Aaron Siemers, EPR-4  
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: November 27, 2019