

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Wheatridge Wind G0365 Interconnection at Morrow Flat Substation

Project Manager: Charla Burke - TEPS-TPP-1

Location: Morrow County, Oregon

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 interconnect Wheatridge Wind Energy, LLC's 300-megawatt (MW) Ella Butte wind development project to BPA's electrical transmission system. The wind project would connect to Umatilla Electric Cooperative's (UEC's) new 230kV steel pole transmission line that is being built across BPA's Morrow Flat Substation property and into the Morrow Flat Substation where it would be interconnected with BPA's transmission system.

To interconnect the wind project BPA would install two buried fiber optic vaults and approximately 550 feet of fiber optic cable in conduit outside the substation yard and approximately 1,650 feet inside the substation yard. The proposed fiber optic work would occur on BPA-owned land in and surrounding the Morrow Flat Substation, and would run from the substation east out to UEC's new transmission line tower. Fiber vaults would be placed alongside the tower. The fiber optic lines would be either trenched or plowed into place. Equipment used to perform this work may include a combination of cable trenching or plowing machines, backhoes, excavators, dump trucks and work trucks. All disturbed areas would be restored at the end of the project.

BPA would also install communications equipment in the existing Morrow Flat substation control house, and in Wheatridge Wind Energy's new Blueridge substation located adjacent to the wind project approximately 20 miles south of the substation.

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/ Douglas F. Corkran
Douglas F. Corkran
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange
Katey Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: March 23, 2020

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 proposed project would be conducted on BPA-owned property at the existing Morrow Flat Substation property, and across an existing transmission line right-of-way located approximately four miles east of the town of Boardman, Oregon in the BPA Tri-Cities District. The project area is flat agricultural land with low ground cover. A large portion of the property is actively cultivated. The land use in the surrounding area is also agricultural. There are no wetlands or waterbodies on the property.

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"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> The project area has been surveyed multiple times in the last 9 years. No cultural resources were identified during any of the surveys. The area has been previously disturbed by construction and agricultural activities. Based on these surveys and the fact that the majority of the work would be happening in previously disturbed areas, BPA determined on March 23, 2020 that the proposed project has No Potential to Affect Historic Properties.</p> <p>In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, stop work in the vicinity and immediately notify the BPA environmental lead, archaeologist and project manager; Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation; 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.</p>		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Ground-disturbing activities proposed as part of this project would involve installing fiber optic vaults and trenching or plowing conduit into the ground, which would result in limited soil disturbance. The proposed work would not substantially impact geology and soils.</p>		
3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Agricultural crops may be disturbed in the limited work areas outside of the substation fence line. There are no federal/state special status plant species in the project area.</p>		

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



Explanation: The project area does not include habitat for any special status wildlife species. There would be no effect to ESA-listed species in the area. Common regional wildlife species such as ground squirrels and ground nesting birds may be temporarily affected by construction.

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



Explanation: The project is located in a dry upland area. No in-water work is proposed for this project and there are no floodplains present within the proposed work area. Best management practices would be used during construction to prevent sediment from migrating off site during ground disturbing activities.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: There are no wetlands in the vicinity of the project area.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: Installation of vaults and trenching fiber optic conduit would not affect groundwater or aquifers.

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



Explanation: The land is currently used for agriculture and transmission facilities. No change in land use would occur and project activities would not impact land use. No specially designated areas were identified within the project limits.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: No changes to visual quality are expected since the fiber optic system will be buried underground.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: The project would have no significant impacts on air quality; small amounts of vehicle emissions and dust may occur during construction.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Some minor temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours as the project is being constructed. There are no residences or other sensitive areas nearby that would be disturbed by construction noise.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: During project activity all standard safety protocols would be followed. A site-specific health and safety plan would be prepared and implemented to address any hazards during the proposed work. Project activities or the existence of the new transmission line would not impact human health or safety.

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: All activities would take place on BPA-owned land within the Morrow Flat substation property. BPA would contact any potentially affected adjacent landowners.

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

Signed: /s/ Douglas F. Corkran
Douglas F. Corkran
Environmental Protection Specialist

Date: March 23, 2020