

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Libby – Bonners Ferry No. 1 Impairment Remedies and Access Road Improvements – Phase I; Line Mile 32 Switch and Structure Replacements

PP&A No.: 4,567

Project Manager: Andrew Young – TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Lincoln County, Montana

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to improve function and safety of a disconnect switch on the Libby - Bonners Ferry No. 1 transmission line at line mile / structure number 32/1. The existing switch would be removed. Associated work, including new switch construction and wood pole transmission line structure replacement, would occur at structures 32/1, 32/2, and 32/3. BPA would also install overhead optical ground wire (OHGW) along these spans. BPA owns and operates the Libby-Bonners Ferry No. 1 115 kV high voltage transmission line, which runs from Libby Substation in Lincoln County, MT, to Bonners Ferry Substation in Boundary County, ID. In line mile 32 of the transmission line as it trends west from Libby, near the town of Troy, MT, and BPA's Troy Substation, the disconnect switch on structure 32/1 is not properly functioning and is a safety and operational hazard. BPA proposes to remove the switch and the accompanying wood pole structure 32/1, as well as remove structures 32/2 and 32/3. New wood pole structure 32/1 would be constructed to current standards. The switch would be moved and constructed on a switch stand adjacent to 32/2, and a new wood pole structure would be constructed at 32/3. Guy wires would be installed at 32/1 and 32/2. To support this work, existing access roads would be utilized without improvements, and the front gravel parking lot of the Troy Substation would be used as a material staging area. Equipment would include light duty trucks, excavators, transmission line maintenance trucks, and other industry standard equipment.

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

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer Date: July 6, 2023

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: Libby – Bonners Ferry No. 1 Impairment Remedies and Access Road Improvements – Phase I; Line Mile 32 Switch and Structure Replacements

Project Site Description

The Libby – Bonners Ferry No. 1 Impairment Remedies and Access Road Improvements – Phase I; Line Mile 32 Switch and Structure Replacements is located adjacent to Troy Substation in Lincoln County, MT, near the town of Troy, MT. The larger project area is located in the Northern Rockies Level III Ecoregion, which is characterized by a series of high, rugged mountain ranges and dense coniferous forests. Summers are typically hot and dry, with extensive snow in winters. The project site is located near US Highway 2. The landscape has been extensively altered by the Troy Substation, an adjacent parking lot, and an active gravel quarry. The area is generally flat with the exception of those locations impacted by the quarry. The ground is rocky and vegetation is sparse, and consists of common native grasses and weeds. No waterways or wetlands are present at the project site.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA Archaeologists reviewed the project and developed an Area of Potential Effects for project activities, followed by background research through the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (MT SHPO) online database and a site visit. Consulting parties included the MT SHPO, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho. On May 8, 2023, BPA determined that the project would result in no adverse effect to historic properties. No comments were received during the consultation.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation and soil disturbance would be required to install wood pole structures, guy anchors, and the new switch stand. The project is located in an existing high-voltage transmission corridor, adjacent to existing transmission structures and landings, in an area that is highly disturbed due to previous development and the rock quarry.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is located in a highly disturbed and rocky environment, adjacent to an electrical substation and in a rock quarry. Vegetation is very sparse and consists of common native grasses, forbs, and weeds. Some vegetation may be disturbed during project activities.

In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), on June 30, 2023, BPA obtained an official species list for threatened, endangered, and candidate species in the project area protected under the ESA. No ESA-listed plants are present in the project area; therefore, the project would have “No Effect” on ESA-listed plants.

No state-listed sensitive plants or other protected plants are present in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is located in a highly disturbed and rocky environment, adjacent to an electrical substation and State Highway, and in a rock quarry. Vegetation is very sparse and consists of common native grasses, forbs, and weeds. Habitat for animals is limited. Birds and small mammals could be temporarily disturbed by project activities; however, the project site is remote, and surrounding habitat can be used for wildlife disturbed by construction.

In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), on June 30, 2023, BPA obtained an official species list for threatened, endangered, and candidate species in the project area. BPA determined that the project would have “No Effect” on the yellow-billed cuckoo, as well as Canada lynx, North American wolverine, and grizzly bear, since no suitable habitat is present. BPA also determined that the project would have “No Effect” on the candidate species of monarch butterfly.

No documented state-listed sensitive wildlife species are present 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 waterbodies are present in the project area. The project is not located in a floodplain.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No excavation would extend to depths that would impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is not located in a specially-designated area. The project would not alter existing land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not significantly alter existing visual quality, which currently is dominated by the transmission system, highway, and rock quarry.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor, local impacts to air quality would occur due to construction activity and vehicular traffic; however, impacts would be temporary and insignificant. Work areas are generally located in remote places, without many human receptors.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction activity would generate noise. However, impacts would be local and relatively minor. All project activity would occur during daylight hours, and work areas are generally located in remote places, without many human receptors.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have benefits to human health and safety, as the purpose of the project is to maintain a safe and functional high voltage electrical system.

- Notes: Prior to the start of the project, work crews would identify and discuss the job hazards and safety concerns, and follow all BPA and OSHA safety procedures during construction.

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 would coordinate project activities with land owners and land managers at proposed work locations, and would continue to coordinate during construction.

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
Scientist (Environmental)

Date: July 6, 2023