

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Forest Grove-McMinnville-1: 115kV Line Upgrade

PP&A No.: 4889

Project Manager: Lisa Casey

Location: Yamhill and Washington Counties, Oregon

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 fix a number of impairments, and complete switch work and substation work on the Forest Grove-McMinnville-1 115kV transmission line in Western Oregon. BPA owns and operates the line that runs south from Forest Grove substation to McMinnville substation. The location of the impairments are at structures 1/17, 1/21, 2/3, 3/3, 6/3, 6/4, 8/5, 8/7 13/8, 17/5, 19/8, and 23/3. Work at the impairment locations would include excavation, guy wire adjustments, raising conductor phases, and raising structures. Weights would be added at 3/2, 3/4, 13/7, 13/9, 17/4 and 17/6. Switch work is occurring at 1/21 and would likely occur in 2024. Substation work would occur on the seismic risers, surge arrestors, and the switches in Bay 6 at Forest Grove substation. The work is needed to upgrade the infrastructure associated with the Forest Grove-McMinnville-1 115kV line to bring up the listed impairments, switch work, and substation risers and surge arrestors to the current recommended BPA standard. Equipment used for this type of work could include dump trucks, line trucks, boom trucks, and excavators. The work would be started in summer of 2023.

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/ Zoe Wellschlager

Zoe Wellschlager

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer Date: September 5, 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.

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Project Site Description

The project is located in Western Oregon to the east of the Coast Range and the west of the Cascades in the ecoregion of the Willamette Valley. The Willamette Valley ecoregion has a temperate climate with wet winters and dry summers. It is the most important agricultural region in Oregon due to its productive soils and mild climate, but it also holds 9 of the 10 largest cities in Oregon, including Portland, and Oregon's capital, Salem. Named for the Willamette River it encompasses, this ecoregion is both a landscape of urban and rural environments.

Most of the project area is located on agricultural lands with small amounts of urban landscape present at either end of the project area. Numerous streams and rivers cross over the Forest Grove-McMinnville-1 115kV transmission line, but only the Tualatin River lies close to a part of the project area near structure 8/5. Structure 8/7 is located in one of the small patches of forest in the project area.

Near part of the proposed project area, the Forest Grove-McMinnville kV No 1 line shares the right-of-way corridor with several other lines including the Cascade Steel Tap to Carlton-Sherwood No 1 line, the Carlton-McMinnville No 1 line, and the Carlton-Tillamook No 1 line. The Forest Grove-McMinnville-1 115 kV line is supported by wood pole structures and steel-lattice lines. The corridor is approximately 100 to 230 feet wide. Vegetation in the corridor is periodically managed to remove tall-growing trees and shrubs to promote low-growing vegetation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA engaged in consultation with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on November 28th, 2022. BPA conducted a review of existing archaeological records in and near the area of potential effect as well as completed a field survey. On August 1st, BPA made a determination that the proposed undertaking would have no adverse effect on historic and cultural properties. On August 31st, 2023, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde responded in concurrence and asked to be contacted if any changes were made to the planned scale and/or scope of work. They also asked to be contacted in the event of an inadvertent discovery of cultural resources during project implementation. The other consulted parties did not respond within the 30-day comment period.

Notes:

In the unlikely event of inadvertent discovery of cultural or historic resources during project activities, all work would immediately stop until the resources can be evaluated by BPA

archaeologists and additional consultations with the appropriate parties are completed as necessary.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of slope shaping may occur approximately 700 ft from the Tualatin River, between 8/5 and 8/6. The area that would be disturbed lies near the top of a hill that is largely vegetated with Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus bifrons*). A small excavation job is also planned near 8/7 which lies partially in a farmer's field. Disturbed soil would be hydroseeded or stabilized with weed-free straw and seeded with a native seed mix. Several structures would also be replaced in agricultural fields at 17/5, 13/7, and 3/3. Landowners did not request any restoration. Most of the project location would be reached by driving across agricultural fields. Where applicable, disturbed soils would be stabilized and re-seeded with native seed mix or a seed mix preferred by the owner of the agricultural field if they have a restoration need.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Plants would be disturbed by project activities, such as in the areas being excavated, and the areas receiving structure replacements. In the locations where vehicles would need to be driven through an agricultural field, the vegetation would also be disturbed. Beyond such activities, ground disturbances would be minimized as much as possible. Any disturbed areas where rip rap or blankets are not used would be stabilized with weed-free straw and seeded with native seed mix or it would be hydroseeded with a native seed mix.

BPA obtained a species list on December 27, 2022, for the project area from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). An effects determination was conducted for Kincaid's lupine, Nelson's Checker-mallow, and Willamette daisy. BPA determined that the project would have no effect on special-status plants and habitat. Please review the project's Effects Determination Memo for more information.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wildlife that could be present in the project area, such as small mammals and birds, could be temporarily disturbed or displaced by project activities. The presence of humans and additional noise could disturb wildlife. However, disturbance would be temporary, and wildlife would have similar habitat adjacent to the project area to move into were they to be disturbed. All work occurs outside of designated critical habitat areas and would have no impacts on state or federally listed species.

BPA obtained a species list for the project site from USFWS on December 27, 2022. An effects determination was conducted for Pacific marten, northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, and streaked horned lark. BPA determined that the project would have no effect on special-status wildlife and habitat, including state-listed species. Please review the project's Effects Determination Memo for more information.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Tualatin River is approximately 700 feet from where slope shaping would occur between 8/5 and 8/6. The proposed work could require equipment such as a mini-excavator, a skid steer, a dozer, a front-end loader, a dump truck, a work truck and trailer, or other similar types of equipment. A threatened ESA-listed fish species is present: steelhead (Upper Willamette River ESU, winter run). Other non-listed fish species present include coho salmon, coastal cutthroat trout, and Pacific lamprey. The project area is not near designated critical habitat for any fish species. Appropriate storm-water BMPs would be used during the project to protect the river from runoff or erosion from slope-shaping activities. Work areas would be stabilized upon completion of the project activities and would either be reseeded or replanted. No in-water work is planned in the ESA-listed fish stream or in any other stream for this project.

Based on the ESA review conducted, BPA made a determination that the project would have “No Effect” for all ESA-listed species and designated critical habitat and essential fish habitat under USFWS and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) jurisdiction.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are within the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project activities do not have the potential to impact groundwater or aquifers, including public and private water wells or springs. Any spills would be addressed immediately and follow BPA protocol for cleanup and regulatory notifications.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project locations are within existing transmission line rights-of-way and would not change existing land uses. Project locations do not include any specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Slope shaping and excavation occurring at 8/5 and 8/7 would change the current appearance of the ROW in two locations. However, the area of effect is minimal in both locations and both locations are surrounded by trees and tall shrubs so visual impacts would be minimal till the site is revegetated. In other areas of the ROW, structures would be raised or additional hardware would be added to structures, but the overall existing visual profile of a high-voltage transmission corridor would not be impacted, and vegetation disturbance would be minimized to the extent possible.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Short-term impacts to air quality could occur from dust generated by construction activities and vehicle emissions. However, BPA would be required to manage dust generation, and impacts from increased vehicle use would be temporary and limited.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Short-term increases in ambient noise could occur due to construction activity. However, increased noise generation would be temporary.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would reduce issues related to old equipment or transmission lines that are too low to the ground. This would reduce outage times and maintain reliable power in the region.

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: All activities have been coordinated with landowners.

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

Signed: /s/ Zoe Wellschlager Date: September 5, 2023

Zoe Wellschlager

Physical Scientist (Environmental)