

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Umatilla Electric Cooperative McNary-Rockpile Transmission Line Upgrade

Project No.: LURR-29750193

Project Manager: Nicole Cummings, TERR-TRI CITIES RMHQ

Location: Umatilla County, Oregon

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: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to allow Umatilla Electric Cooperative (UEC) to upgrade an approximately 0.6-mile-long portion of its existing 115 kilovolt (kV) McNary-Rockpile transmission line to 230 kV on BPA fee-owned property near Umatilla, Umatilla County, Oregon. To accommodate the request, BPA would grant UEC a temporary construction easement to allow for actions outside of the existing UEC right-of-way (ROW) and would modify the existing land use agreement to allow the UEC transmission line upgrade. The proposed action on BPA property is part of a larger UEC project to expand the capacity of its system to accommodate load growth and to increase reliability.

On BPA fee-owned property, the following actions are proposed:

- Replace the existing 115-kV conductor with new 230-kV conductor and install an additional circuit of 230 kV.
- Replace the existing guy anchors at structure UM-35 with four new anchors installed in a slightly different orientation.
- Convert existing monopole structure UM-34 to a two-pole configuration by installing an additional pole mounted on a 10-foot by 30-foot drilled pier footing. The existing pole would remain in place.
- Stage conductor pulling and tensioning (P/T) equipment at structures UM-27, UM-34, and UM-35 as well as between UM-29 and UM-30.
- Reattach the new conductor and replace hardware at six structures (UM-27 to UM 32); the structures themselves would not be removed or altered.

The anticipated temporary disturbance areas would include eight structure work areas and four P/T sites. Each structure work area would be centered on the eight transmission structures and would be located entirely within the existing UEC ROW. P/T equipment would be staged within the existing UEC ROW between structures UM-29 and UM-30 and could partially extend outside of the existing UEC ROW at structures UM-27, UM-34, and UM-35. Ground disturbance at the structure work areas and P/T staging areas would include vegetation clearing and potentially minor grading to allow for vehicle access and to stabilize equipment. All areas of the project site would be accessed via existing access roads, and no access road work is proposed. In total, up to approximately 18 acres could be temporarily disturbed, and the new pole footing at structure UM-

34 would permanently disturb approximately 80 square feet. All temporary disturbance areas would be restored to pre-construction conditions.

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.

Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

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: Umatilla Electric Cooperative McNary-Rockpile Transmission Line Upgrade

Project Site Description

The project site is located on BPA fee-owned property south of BPA's McNary Substation in Umatilla, Umatilla County, Oregon (Township 5 North, Range 28 East, Section 16). Ground disturbance would occur within transmission structure work areas and P/T staging areas, which are located primarily within UEC's existing McNary-Rockpile transmission line ROW; although P/T staging areas could partially extend off-ROW in some locations. Ground cover in these areas consists primarily of degraded shrub-steppe habitat characterized by common, low-growing grasses, forbs, and weeds, including kochia (*Kochia scoparia*), diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*) and cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), with a low density of shrub species such as sagebrush (*Artemisia spp*) and rabbitbrush (*Ericameria spp*). The Adkins, Burbank, and Quincy soil series are mapped within the project site, none of which are classified as hydric. No wetlands or water bodies are mapped within or near the project site. Surrounding land uses include electric transmission infrastructure and commercial and industrial properties interspersed with degraded undeveloped shrub-steppe habitat.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On February 2, 2024, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon
- Nez Perce Tribe
- Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (Oregon SHPO)

On behalf of UEC, Power Engineers (Power) conducted background research and an intensive field survey of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). A report prepared by Power and provided to BPA identified three existing transmission lines considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP): McNary-Morrow Flat No. 1, McNary-Morrow Flat No. 2, and McNary-Horse Heaven No. 1. However, the proposed project would not alter the integrity or eligibility of these historic transmission lines. The Power report did not identify any other historic or cultural resources eligible for inclusion in the NRHP within the APE.

Therefore, on May 10, 2024, BPA determined that the proposed undertaking would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: OR 2024 028; SHPO Case

No. 24-0308). Oregon SHPO concurred with BPA's determination on June 7, 2024. No other comments were received.

Notes:

- Implement the Post Review Discovery Procedure in the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during implementation. Discontinue all ground-disturbing activity 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: The proposed action could cause up to approximately 18 acres of temporary soil disturbance at the structure work areas and P/T staging areas from vegetation clearing and potentially minor grading and from operating vehicles and equipment. Installation of the new pole at structure UM-34 would permanently disturb approximately 80 square feet. UEC would be responsible for implementing standard construction best management practices (BMPs) to minimize soil erosion, sedimentation, and fugitive dust. Temporarily disturbed soils would stabilize as vegetation is reestablished and would eventually return to near pre-existing conditions following completion of the proposed action. The proposed action would not impact geology.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could temporarily crush, strip, or bury up to approximately 18 acres and would permanently remove approximately 80 square feet of degraded shrub-steppe habitat characterized by common, low-growing grasses, forbs, and weeds. UEC would be responsible for implementing standard construction BMPs to stabilize soils, re-establish vegetation, and minimize the spread of noxious weeds. Temporarily disturbed areas would eventually return to near preexisting conditions following completion of the proposed action. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status plant species, including plants listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat would be permanently impacted.

Notes:

- Reseed disturbed areas during the appropriate time period for germination with a native, regionally-appropriate seed mix.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary disturbance of normal wildlife behavior and wildlife displacement could occur from elevated noise and human presence during construction. However, there would be little permanent impact to wildlife habitat, and temporarily disturbed or displaced wildlife would likely reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed action. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status wildlife species, including wildlife listed under the Federal ESA near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat is present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: An artificially channelized irrigation canal, the Brownell Ditch, flows through the UEC ROW between structures UM-34 and UM-35. The Brownell Ditch does not support special-status fish species. The project site is not located within a floodplain. No in-water activities would occur, and UEC would be responsible for implementing standard construction BMPs to prevent erosion and sedimentation from impacting any water bodies. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact water bodies and floodplains and would have no effect on special-status fish species or habitats.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present within or near the project site. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground excavation to install the new pole at structure UM-34 could reach depths to groundwater, but the new pole footing would not result in leaching into groundwater. No new uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed. Standard construction BMPs would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact on groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action is consistent with existing land use at the project site and would not impact adjacent land uses. The project site is not located in a specially-designated area. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact land use or specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, the presence of equipment and general construction activities, including vegetation disturbance, would cause temporary visual impacts. The new pole at structure UM-34 would be consistent with the existing visual quality of the area, and the project site is not located in a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would produce minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions in the local area. There would be no long-term change in air quality following completion of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would produce intermittent and temporary construction-related noise at levels greater than current ambient conditions, which could be audible from nearby commercial and industrial properties. Noise impacts would be temporary and would only occur during daylight hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). There would be no long-term change in ambient noise following completion of the proposed action.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: UEC would be responsible for ensuring that all standard safety protocols would be followed throughout implementation of the proposed action to minimize risk to human health and safety. Therefore, the proposed action would not be expected to impact human health and 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: 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: The proposed action would occur on BPA fee-owned property. No landowner notification, involvement, or coordination would be required.

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

Signed:

Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist