Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Jones Canyon-Santiam No. 1 Access Road Improvement Project; Phase 1 Line Miles 62-75 and 104-114

PP&A No.: 4068 & 4779

Project Manager: Donna Martin, TELF-TPP-3

Location: Wasco County and Marion County, OR

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 access roads along the Jones Canyon-Santiam No. 1 transmission line in Wasco and Marion counties, Oregon. BPA owns and operates the Jones Canyon-Santiam No. 1 high voltage transmission line which runs from Jones Canyon Substation in Gilliam County, Oregon, to Santiam Substation in Marion County, Oregon. The transmission line is a key component of the Northwest's high voltage electrical transmission system. It is supported by steel lattice structures. BPA transmission line maintenance crews access the transmission line right-of-way for periodic inspections, repairs, and emergency response through a series of compacted gravel access roads. The BPA access road system in this area is in disrepair and in need of maintenance.

For Phase 1 of the project, BPA proposes to improve access roads in line miles 62–75 and 104-114. The vast majority of the proposed work would be within existing access road footprint. In summary, BPA proposes to improve approximately 7 miles of access roads, reconstruct approximately 10 miles, and install approximately 200 ft. of new access road footprint. Road improvements consist of light blading of the road base, placement of rock, and compaction. Road reconstruction includes heavier blading, placement of base and surface rock, and compaction. New road construction includes blading to establish the road prism, placement of base and surface rock, and compaction. In addition to the road work, BPA proposes to install nine landings at existing transmission steel lattice structures. Landings range in size up to 50 ft. by 50 ft. and allow for safe access to the transmission line for maintenance equipment. Surface water control features would also be installed to properly channel run-off and stormwater off the road surface into established natural drainages. BPA would install approximately 150 water bars and 90 drain dips to facilitate stormwater drainage. BPA also plans to install two 48-inch diameter culverts in non-fish bearing waterways in line miles 110 and 112 of the project.

Standard road construction equipment would be utilized for the project, such as dump trucks, bladers, roller compactors, excavators, and light duty trucks. Work would be completed in the summer and early fall of 2024.

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, EPR-4
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ *Katey Grange*
Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer Date: *July 30, 2024*

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: Jones Canyon – Santiam No. 1 Access Road Improvement Project; Phase 1 Line Miles 62 – 75 and 104-114

Project Site Description

The Jones Canyon – Santiam No. 1 Access Road Improvement Project spans over fifty linear miles in central Oregon, from the Umatilla Plateau ecoregion of the Columbia Plateau, westward through the Cascade Crest Montane Forest and Western Cascades Montane Highlands in the Cascade Mountain Range of central Oregon. The eastern portion of the project area in the Columbia Plateau is characterized by rolling hills with thin topsoil overlying basalt bedrock. The grasslands are generally treeless. The western portion of the project area is within the Cascade Mountains, with rugged mountainous terrain, and forested with Douglas fir, grand fir, lodgepole pine, and other common coniferous species of the Northwest. Understory in this area includes ferns, vine maple, rhododendron, thimbleberry, Oregon grape, and native grasses. In 2020, the Lionshead Fire burned through the Cascade Mountains portion of the project area. The area was severely burned, with extensive tree mortality.

The Jones Canyon – Santiam No. 1 transmission line is the primary constructed feature of the project area. The steel lattice line runs through a cleared transmission corridor of approximately 350 feet in width. The corridor is shared by BPA lines in the eastern project area, and a non-BPA transmission line in the western project area. Vegetation within the corridor is periodically managed to promote low-growing species. Large mature firs are only found within spanned canyons of the corridor. Vegetation within the corridor is comprised of common native grasses and shrubs. The BPA access road system runs through and adjacent to the corridor. Access roads are generally 12-14 ft. in width and are compacted gravel or dirt two-track roads. Ditching, gates, and water crossing features are present such as fords and culverts. In the western portion of the project area, the BPA access roads branch off from the main roads managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), including Breitenbush Road and other National Forest roads. In the eastern portion of the project Area, BPA access roads branch off State Highway 216, 187 and Reservation Road to access the transmission line corridor.

Land use ranges from federal lands managed by the USFS, Mt. Hood National Forest and Willamette National Forest, to tribal lands of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, and private lands in the eastern project area. Waterways in the project area include Squirrel Creek, a tributary to the Clackamas River, and several unnamed tributaries to the Breitenbush River. The western portion of the project area in the Cascades is designated critical habitat for northern spotted owl.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA conducted two consultations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for the proposed action. For the western portion of the project, located within lands managed by the USFS, on January 11th, 2022, BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the USFS – Mt. Hood and Willamette National Forests (USFS), the United States Army Corps of Engineers – Portland District (USACE), the Oregon State Department of Forestry, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (OR SHPO). An Area of Potential Effects (APE) was defined. Background research into previously recorded archaeological and cultural resources was conducted, followed by a thorough field survey of the APE. Background research conducted by AECOM indicated that 14 previously recorded archaeological resources (8 sites, 6 isolated finds) were located in the project APE. As a result of the archaeological field survey, three of the previously recorded sites were relocated, and one new isolated find and two historic built environment resources (Jones Canyon-Santiam No. 1 and McNary-Santiam No. 1 transmission lines) were recorded in the APE.

On October 20, 2023, BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no adverse effect to historic properties and received concurrence from the OR SHPO on November 21st, 2023.

For the eastern portion of the project, located in and near Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs lands, BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs and the State Historic Preservation Office in May of 2022. BPA developed an area of potential effects (APE), conducted background research and ground surveys. A number of cultural resources were identified during background research and ground surveys. With the implementation of avoidance measures, on May 8th 2024, BPA determined that the project would have no adverse effect to historic properties, and receive concurrence from OR SHPO on July 30th, 2024.

Notes:

- In those locations where road work is planned near recorded cultural resources, BPA would employ cultural monitoring to mitigate potential impacts to cultural resources, as well as use geotextile fabric during road improvements to protect the underlying soils and substrate.
- In the event of an inadvertent discovery of historic or cultural resources, BPA would implement an inadvertent discovery plan, stop work, and contact consulted parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The majority of the work would occur in the existing dirt and gravel access road prism, where a road-base of rock already exists. Standard construction erosion control measures would be utilized as necessary to prevent erosion and disturbed areas would be stabilized with mulch and a native seed.

With current conditions, due to degraded road surfaces and stormwater control features, seasonal run-off and stormwater are being captured by the access road system, which is resulting in erosion and sedimentation. The proposed access road maintenance would remedy the current erosional conditions in the project area.

Notes:

- BPA and BPA's contractor would develop and implement an erosion and sediment control plan during construction, to minimize the risk of erosion and sedimentation. Disturbed soils would be seeded and stabilized with mulch or hydroseed upon project completion.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The majority of the project would occur on existing BPA access road footprint. However, some new landings would be installed, and temporary impacts to plants would occur due to construction activity, during access road blading and especially at locations such as turn-arounds and staging areas.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act, BPA reviewed the project and potential effects to ESA-listed species in the project area. BPA obtained an official species list for the project area from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on April 18, 2024.

Whitebark pine is listed under the Endangered Species Act as threatened in the project area. However, the project does not occur at elevations typical of whitebark pine habitat (>4,300 ft.). No tree removal or vegetation management actions are proposed. BPA has determined that the project would have "No effect" on whitebark pine.

From reviewing available natural heritage data and in correspondence with USFS, no known special status plants are present in the project area.

Notes:

- Any disturbed areas would be reseeded with a seed mix comprised of grass species native to Mt. Hood National Forest.
- All construction equipment and vehicles would be cleaned prior to entering the project site in order to prevent the spread of invasive weeds.
- A pre-construction vegetation survey would be conducted on Warm Springs tribal lands. Post-construction, weed treatment would occur in areas that were disturbed that exhibit a proliferation in noxious weeds such as knapweed.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Wildlife in the area may be disturbed by construction activities; however, the disturbance would be temporary, and the surrounding landscape provides ample habitat and cover.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act, BPA reviewed the project and potential effects to ESA-listed species in the project area. BPA obtained an official species list for the project area from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on April 18, 2024. The project area is within northern spotted owl designated critical habitat and near historical northern spotted owl nest locations.

The northern spotted owl nesting period is generally March 1st – September 30th, but the late nesting period is defined as July 16th – September 30th, when juvenile northern spotted owl have greater mobility and are able to avoid disturbances and disruptions.

BPA has consulted with USFS biologists regarding effects to northern spotted owl. Planned construction activities and effects to listed species fall under the USFS' programmatic Biological Assessment for Routine Land Management Activity. BPA has determined that the project "may effect, but is not likely to adversely" northern spotted owl.

BPA has determined that the project will have "no effect" on other ESA-listed terrestrial species in the project area.

Notes:

- BPA would complete work on the project during the late nesting period; post July 15th

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Numerous ephemeral to intermittent drainages are present in the western project area, as the south-facing slope drains toward the Breitenbush River. Two fish-bearing waterways run in or near the project area, including Squirrel Creek, a tributary to the Clackamas River, and the Breitenbush River. However, BPA has no proposed actions within these fish-bearing waterways. Bull trout and anadromous salmonids are present in Breitenbush River, but due to the lack of in-water work in or within 500 ft. of the river, with the implementation of minimization measures, BPA has determined that the project would have "No Effect" to ESA-listed fish species.

In regard to in-water work, BPA is proposing to install two new culverts in unnamed tributaries to the Breitenbush River. The waterways are small intermittent to perennial streams, one with approximately 5 ft. ordinary-high water mark (OHWM), and the other with an approximately 3 ft. ordinary-high water mark. The depth of water at the crossings during low-flow summer months is 2 to 3 inches. The culvert locations are located approximately 1000 feet from the Breitenbush River.

BPA assessed the proposed impacts associated with culvert installation for compliance with the Oregon Removal-Fill Law (OR RF Law) and the Clean Water Act (CWA). In regard to the OR RF Law, proposed impacts within the OHWM of the waterways would not reach the thresholds requiring permitting. For the CWA, proposed impacts would not meet the criteria requiring pre-construction notification to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Impacts to waters of the U.S. would therefore be permitted under a non-notifying Nationwide CWA permit (NWP 57, Electric Utility Line and Telecommunications Activities). All other work within potential waters of the U.S. or State is maintenance of existing transportation structures and exempt under respective CWA and OR RF Law maintenance exemptions.

Notes:

- All road construction would occur during the dry season, post July 15th, when ephemeral to intermittent drainages are likely to be dry, or low flowing.
- During in-water work, work areas would be isolated with a coffer dam. Downstream flows would be maintained with a pump and bypass pipe.
- Disturbed soils near waterways would be stabilized with erosion control blankets, weed-free straw, and other erosion and sediment control best management practices (BMPs) to reduce risk to water quality, and revegetated.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: One large wetland complex is present in the project area, in line mile 109, associated with the Cub Creek drainage. However, BPA has no proposed work within the wetland for the Phase 1 scope of work.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The excavation planned for the project area would not be at a depth that would potentially disrupt groundwater or impact local aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is located within an existing high-voltage transmission line corridor and access road system. Adjacent land use includes federally managed forests lands for timber, habitat, and recreation, tribal lands of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, and private lands. There are no specially-designated areas present. Existing land use would not be impacted by project activities.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have temporary impacts to visual quality associated with soil disturbance and construction activity. Visual impacts associated with ground disturbance would be localized and temporary until revegetation occurs.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some dust may be generated due to construction activity. However, dust generation should be minimal due to the scope of the ground disturbance. The area is remote with limited human receptors.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

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

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A site-specific safety plan would be developed by the contractor and implemented during construction. Overall, the project would improve the safety and reliability of the transmission system, and provide safer access to transmission structures during inspection, maintenance, and emergency response.

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 has coordinated proposed activities with the USFS Willamette National Forest and Mt. Hood National Forest, as well as the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs and private landowners. With the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, BPA submitted a Small Project Assessment application and received a tribal resolution granting approval to proceed. BPA would continue to coordinate activities with all land managers and landowners into the construction phase of the project.

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* Date: *July 30, 2024*
Aaron Siemers, EPR-4
Physical Scientist (Environmental)