

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Timber Tap to Forest Grove-Tillamook No. 1 Access Road Improvement Project

PP&A No.: 2,628

Project Manager: Todd Wehner, TELP-TPP-1

Location: Washington County, OR

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B 1.3 Routine Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to perform routine maintenance on the Timber Tap transmission line access roads. BPA owns and operates the Timber Tap to Forest Grove – Tillamook No. 1 115 kV transmission line (Timber Tap), which runs from a location near Banks, OR, to Timber Substation near Timber, OR, in Washington County. The roadways serve as the primary access road to the transmission easement, as well as serve local private residents and commercial timber companies.

The project proposes to install bridge abutment protection and bank stabilization using articulated concrete blocks at the Gales Creek bridge in unincorporated Glenwood, OR; remove two perched and abandoned culverts and a temporary bridge at an unnamed tributary to Beaver Creek in line mile 7 of the transmission line (no replacement structure proposed); establish a new road approach and approximately 100 feet of new access road from NW Timber Road to the BPA easement and transmission line structures 7/6 and 7/7; and replace a culvert with a new fish-passable structure on a second unnamed tributary to Beaver Creek in line mile 4. In addition, the project proposes limited grading and application of gravel to sections of existing access roads, installation of cross drain culverts, drain dips and water bars, and installation and/or replacement of gates. In total, approximately 0.5 miles of roadway would be improved.

Construction is proposed during summer and early fall 2020, and work in fish-bearing waterways would occur within the ODFW approved in-water work window, July 15th-September 30th. Construction equipment would likely include a backhoe loader, dump truck, road roller, track-hoe, diesel tractor trailer, and light duty trucks.

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
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange
Katey Grange
NEPA Compliance Office

Date: *April 7, 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 is located in rural Washington County, OR, south of US 26, near unincorporated Glenwood, OR, in the Valley Foothills ecoregion of the Willamette Valley, as well as the Willapa Hills ecoregion of the Coast Range. The approximate site elevation is between 450' to 800' above sea level. Land use within the project vicinity includes the BPA transmission line right-of-way (ROW), forested hillslopes, county and local roadways, and rural residential properties. The project area is under and adjacent to the 115 kV high voltage Timber Tap transmission line. In order to maintain sufficient clearances, transmission line easements are managed periodically to remove tall growing coniferous trees and promote more low growing vegetation.

Adjacent to the ROW, historic and ongoing timber harvest in the area has generally replaced the old-growth forests with early to mid-successional forests of Douglas fir, though some mid to late successional forest with suitable northern spotted owl habitat is present in line mile 5 of the project area, in the southern range of the project near Glenwood. Vegetation within the vicinity is typical of the region and consists of coniferous forests like Douglas fir and western red cedar, deciduous trees and shrubs like big leaf maple, vine maple and alder, upland shrubs and herbaceous vegetation such as bracken fern and sword fern, and invasive weeds like Himalayan blackberry and Scotch broom. Lower Columbia River coho salmon (NMFS threatened) and Upper Willamette River steelhead (NMFS threatened) have been documented to occur within the project area within two of the waterways proposed for in-water work, and Designated Critical Habitat for the Upper Willamette River steelhead occurs in Gales Creek within the proposed in-water work area.

Work would take place on existing BPA access roads as well as in-water work within three perennially flowing waterways (Gales Creek; two unnamed tributaries to Beaver Creek) within the Gales Creek Watershed (Nehalem River - 1710020201 (HUC10), Gales Creek – 1709001001), a tributary to the Tualatin River. A wetland and waterbody delineation of the project work area occurred in 2016 and 2017 and identified a small fringe wetland in addition to the three perennial waterbodies.

The project area is as follows:

- City, County, State: Washington County, OR, near the towns of Timber and Glenwood, OR
- Legal Description: T2N R5W Sec 23 to T3N R5W Sec 10
- Latitude/Longitude: Approximate Start 45.647 N -123.269 W End: 45.759 N -123.294 W
- Land Ownership: Private, State (Oregon Department of State Lands (ODSL))

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></p> <p>BPA engaged in consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians on May 14, 2019. BPA identified an area of potential effect and detailed proposed project activities. A literature review and a field survey of the area of potential effect was conducted in June and July of 2019. On October 1st, 2019, BPA sent a report and determination letter stating that the undertaking would result in no historic properties effected. The Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde responded with no additional comments on October 28th, 2019, and OR SHPO responded with concurrence on October 29th, 2019.</p> <p>In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of the project, BPA would require that the work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by the appropriate consulting parties.</p>		
2. Geology and Soils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u></p> <p>The project would require some ground-disturbing activities for the removal of the existing culvert and installation of a fish passable culvert on an unnamed tributary to Beaver Creek near Timber Tap structure 4/5, installation of bridge abutment protection at the Gales Creek bridge crossing, removal of the temporary bridge and perched culverts near 7/7, and excavation of the road cut for the new approach to 7/6 and 7/7. The new access road cut would be approximately 250 cubic yards (CY). Excess material would be spread in the ROW nearby in an upland location and stabilized, used as road fill material, or hauled off and disposed. Overall, the project would reduce soil erosion and scour at the in-water work locations. No prime or unique farmlands would be affected by the project.</p> <p><u>Note:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• During construction, erosion and sediment control best management practices (BMPs) would be employed to reduce erosion and sedimentation prior to commencing ground disturbing activities and would be removed after construction has been completed and soils are stabilized.• Disturbed cuts and fills would be seeded with a native seed mix and stabilized using erosion and sediment control BMPs, including hydroseed and erosion control blankets.		

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



Explanation:

Excavation and grading associated with road improvements and construction would disturb vegetation adjacent to the existing roadway, near the culvert replacement location and temporary bridge removal location, and especially at the location of the new approximately 100 ft. road cut from NW Timber Road to structure 7/6 of the Timber Tap transmission line. Approximately 15 large trees would need to be removed, comprised of big leaf maple and Douglas fir, and ranging from 7 inches to 26 inches diameter at breast height (DBH). The understory including vine maple, Oregon grape and sword fern would also be impacted.

BPA obtained an official species list for the project area from U.S. Fish and Wildlife on December 9th, 2019. An effects determination was made for four Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species that occur within Washington County, including Bradshaw's desert-parsley, Kincaid's lupine, Nelson's checker-mallow, and the Willamette daisy. BPA utilized survey results provided by OTAK biologists who surveyed the project area in 2016 and 2017 during the growing season to determine the suitability for federally protected plant species. No suitable habitat for these four federally protected plant species occurs within the proposed construction footprint. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on special-status plant species, and limited impacts to other native and non-native vegetation.

Note:

- Post construction, all disturbed areas would be reseeded with a native grass and forb seed mix and stabilized
- Disturbed soils near riparian areas would be revegetated with low-growing native shrubs in accordance with the project's planting plan
- BPA would conduct follow-up monitoring to ensure the success of the revegetation

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



Explanation:

Roadwork, culvert installation, excavation and construction in the project area would likely temporarily disturb wildlife such as deer, birds, and small mammals due to the presence of human activity, machinery operation, and noise. Several large Douglas fir and big leaf maple trees would be removed for the new approximately 100 ft. road approach, which would disturb birds and other animals in the immediate project area and remove habitat. Disturbed soils adjacent to the new road would be planted with native grass seed and shrubs, which would potentially restore some habitat to wildlife. The planned tree removal would likely occur late in the nesting bird season. If tree removal occurs during the nesting bird season, nesting bird surveys would be conducted prior to tree removal.

BPA obtained an official species list for the project area from U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) on December 9th, 2019. Fisher, red tree vole, northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet and Fender's blue butterfly are listed in the project area under the Endangered Species Act. Contract OTAK biologists surveyed the project area in 2016 and 2017 to determine the suitability for federally protected wildlife species. No suitable habitat was identified for fisher, red tree vole, marbled murrelet and Fender's blue butterfly. No critical habitat for these species is present in the project area. Due to lack of suitable habitat, BPA determined that the project would have no effect on these ESA-listed species in the project area.

For potential effects to northern spotted owl, BPA analyzed recent habitat modeling data provided by USFWS and identified locations within the project area that may provide suitable northern spotted owl habitat. Specifically, suitable habitat was identified in line mile 5 of the transmission line (TN2, R5W, Section 11). With the exception of drive through traffic, all planned work in this area would be completed in the cleared ROW. However, the work would be located within 0.25 miles of suitable habitat per the USFWS habitat model. Recent northern spotted owl field survey data for this work location is not available; therefore, BPA assumed presence of suitable habitat per USFWS guidance. Therefore, in order to avoid potential effects to northern spotted owl from this planned project activity, BPA would conduct this section of work after September 30th, at the end of the northern spotted owl nesting season. With this planned mitigation in-place, BPA has determined that the project would have no effect on northern spotted owl.

Note:

- If tree removal occurs during the nesting bird season, nesting bird surveys would be conducted prior to tree removal.
- Disturbed soils adjacent to the new road would be reseeded with a native seed mix and low-growing native shrubs.
- Work within 0.25 miles of suitable northern spotted owl habitat would be conducted after September 30th, at the end of the owl nesting season.

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish**

(including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)



Explanation:

Proposed work in two work locations; Gales Creek and one of the Beaver Creek tributary locations, met the threshold for preconstruction notification and permitting under the Oregon Dept. of State Lands (ODSL) Removal-Fill Law, and Section 401 and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. BPA has obtained the required permits for the project. Work would be completed under a Nationwide 14 Clean Water Act permit; Linear Transportation Projects, a 401 Water Quality Certification, and under a general ODSL Removal-Fill permit. BPA would ensure that the project met all the general and special permit conditions detailed in the permit documents.

The Gales Creek bridge work area is located in a FEMA-designated 100-year flood zone. The flood plain at this location is approximately 150 feet wide and consists of the Gales Creek flood terraces on the northeast bank of Gales Creek, and the State Highway 6 and the Glenwood general store embankment on the southwest bank. While planned regrading and installation of articulated concrete block near the bridge abutments would add fill material within the floodplain, the additional volume is not anticipated to substantially alter floodplain function.

BPA determined that the project may effect, but is not likely to adversely affect ESA-listed fish and critical habit. BPA engaged in consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for potential effects to ESA-listed fish and critical habitat. In consultation with NMFS, BPA identified conservation measures to include riparian planting and installation of large wood within Gales Creek to provide habitat enhancement within the waterway. In addition, the proposed project includes replacing a perched culvert with a fish-passage approved culvert, which would also potentially benefit ESA-listed fish within the project area.

Notes:

- BPA and BPA's contractors would implement the Clean Water Act and OR Removal-Fill Law permit conditions, which include working within established low-flow work windows, work area isolation, maintaining down stream flows and aquatic movement, turbidity monitoring, and installation of erosion and sediment control BMPs prior to ground disturbance.
- BPA and BPA's contractors would implement the conditions of the project authorization from NMFS, which includes fish salvage operations by a qualified fish biologist, water quality BMPs, riparian plantings, and installation of large wood within Gales Creek for habitat enhancement.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation:

No permanent impacts to the delineated wetland are proposed. Temporary impacts may include the placement of wetland mats in order to move machinery from the bank of Gales Creek into the work area. Potential temporary impacts do not meet regulatory thresholds requiring notification or permitting.

Notes:

- BPA and BPA's contractors would implement a riparian planting plan which includes seeding and stabilizing all disturbed soils near Gales Creek and other waterways with native wetland grasses and riparian shrubs and trees.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation:

Project activities would not impact groundwater or aquifers. Proposed excavation is not at a depth that would intersect groundwater or aquifers.

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



Explanation:

Current land use consists of private rural residential land, private forested lands managed by timber companies, lands managed by the State of Oregon, and high voltage transmission ROW. The proposed project would not alter or change existing land use. There are no specially designated areas in or near the project area.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation:

The work is primarily maintenance of existing transmission access roads. Proposed work, even moderate alterations from the current installed design, would not markedly change current appearance. In some work locations, planned work would change existing visual quality, but would likely improve upon current conditions. For instance, at the Gales Creek bridge location, the existing area is scoured due to erosion and the planned work would improve the visual as well as the functional aspects of the abutment protection. The work would remove the existing rip rap and concrete that is protecting the abutments, and replace it with new, sloping grade and articulated concrete blocks. In another example, near a tributary to Beaver Creek, two existing culverts are perched entirely outside of the channel, are rusting, and serve no function. A temporary bridge has been in place for a number of years and is degrading. Removing the temporary bridge and perched culverts and restoring the area would improve visual quality. Alternately, the new approximately 100 ft. access road cut to access structures 7/6 and 7/7 would alter visual quality along NW Timber Road by removing several trees adjacent to the road and installing a new roadway. This location is immediately adjacent to the cleared transmission ROW and therefore has pre-established visual impacts. Proposed impacts to visual quality from this new road would be minimized by stabilizing the disturbed soils and planting native grasses and shrubs along the new roadway.

Note:

- BPA and BPA's contractors would implement a revegetation plan which includes seeding and stabilizing all disturbed soils. The new road cut would be stabilized and revegetated in an attempt to match existing visual quality.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation:

Some dust may be generated due to construction activity and disturbed soils. If necessary, a fugitive dust plan would be implemented to control dust generation.

11. **Noise**



Explanation:

Some temporary noise may be generated due to construction activity. However, the project is located in a fairly remote area and the construction noise associated with tree removal, excavation and regrading would not be significant.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation:

A site specific safety plan would be developed by the construction contractor and implemented in the field. Traffic control and flagging would be employed as necessary in those areas with public traffic.

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:

During the planning phase, BPA has notified and coordinated with stakeholders such as Washington County, Oregon Dept. of State Lands, private timber company landowners, and private citizens. Proposed work on the Gales Creek bridge, which provides sole access to a subdivision of rural residential properties in Glenwood, Oregon, is anticipated by the community and a welcome investment in a shared transportation asset. BPA would continue to work with all public and private stakeholders during 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
Aaron Siemers, EPR-4
Environmental Protection Specialist

Date: April 7, 2020