

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Knight-Ostrander No. 1 USFS 777 Road (Tanner Creek Road) Ford Maintenance Project

**PP&A No.:** 4,486

**Project Manager:** Donna Martin, TELF-TPP-3

**Location:** Multnomah County, OR

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

## **Description of the Proposed Action:**

BPA owns and operates the high voltage Knight-Ostrander No. 1 transmission line, which runs from Knight Substation in Klickitat County, Washington, to Ostrander Substation in Clackamas County, Oregon. BPA is proposing to conduct ford maintenance along an access road that services the line, known as Tanner Creek Road or USFS Road 777, which is located in the far northeast corner of Multnomah County, OR, directly south of Bonneville Dam and I-84, in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The road provides access to twelve steel lattice transmission structures along line miles 61 through 63 of the transmission line, as well as a NOAA/National Weather Service weather station. The proposed ford maintenance would occur in an unnamed tributary to Tanner Creek. Work would consist of placing aggregate in the area of the existing ford where material has washed away to re-establish the roadway and reinforce the ford crossing. Work would be conducted during the low-flow season, but if flow is present during construction, the work area would be isolated and flow redirected around the work area to protect water quality. Equipment would likely include an excavator, front end loader, dump truck, roller, 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/ Sarah T. Biegel*

Date: June 7, 2021

Sarah T. Biegel

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:** Knight-Ostrander No. 1 USFS 777 Road (Tanner Creek Road) Ford Maintenance Project

### Project Site Description

The ford maintenance project is located in the Columbia River Gorge in the Western Cascades Lowlands & Valleys ecoregion. This ecoregion is characterized by a Pacific marine, mild, wet climate and forests of western hemlock and Douglas-fir. The stream crossing ford location is within the Knight-Ostrander No. 1 access road system, known as Tanner Creek Road or USFS Road 777. The gravel road is approximately 14 ft. wide near the ford crossing, and the unnamed creek crosses with an approximately 12 ft. channel.

In general, the Eagle Creek Fire substantially altered the ecosystem and environment of the work area. The work area along Tanner Creek Road was severely burned, removing the majority of the surface vegetation, leaving large fir and hemlock trees completely defoliated and unstable, and combusting the organic material within the soil. The habitat and hydrology of this area will be changed for the foreseeable future. Vegetation is sparse, and includes native grasses, sword fern, and oxeye daisy. Some Douglas-firs and western hemlock, which either survived the fire, or were located in areas that the fire avoided, provide patchwork tree cover.

The project location is detailed below:

Township		Range		Section	County	Site Characteristics
2	N	7	E	PB 47	Multnomah Co., OR	Western Cascades Lowlands & Valleys ecoregion

### Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

#### 1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

##### Explanation:

BPA engaged in consultation with the U.S. Forest Service in April of 2021. Based on the existing road conditions and proposed construction activities which would not include new ground disturbance, BPA and the USFS concurred that the undertaking would have no potential to effect historic properties.

In the unlikely scenario that historic or cultural resources are encountered during construction activities, all work would cease until it can be inspected and assessed by the appropriate parties.

## 2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

### Explanation:

The planned ford maintenance activity would occur on pre-existing, established road footprint. Staging areas and turn-around zones for construction activity would be established in previously disturbed areas.

### Notes:

- Any disturbed soils incidental to construction would be stabilized with native seed and weed-free straw or other acceptable erosion and sediment control methods.

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

Potential for Significance: No

### Explanation:

Light grading near the ford with heavy machinery would potentially disturb some vegetation immediately adjacent to the existing ford crossing. These areas would be reseeded with native grasses post-construction. On the whole, native vegetation present in the area would not be significantly impacted by project activities.

BPA obtained a species list for the project. No Endangered Species Act (ESA) – listed plant species are present in the project area. In correspondence with USFS staff regarding the planned project, the USFS did not express concerns regarding the presence of sensitive plant species in the work areas.

### Notes:

- Construction activity on undisturbed areas vegetated with native plants would be limited as much as possible.
- To reduce the risk of introducing invasive weeds, all equipment would be cleaned thoroughly, with pressurized water, of dirt and weeds before entering and before departing National Forest System lands.
- Fill material and aggregate would be from a certified weed-free source

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

Potential for Significance: No

### Explanation:

Construction on the project would likely disturb wildlife in the area due to the presence of humans and additional noise. However, disturbance would be temporary, and the forest provides ample habitat for wildlife outside of the immediate project area.

BPA obtained a species list for the project. An effects determination was conducted for northern spotted owl and northern spotted owl critical habitat. BPA determined that the project would have “no effect” on northern spotted owl and northern spotted owl critical habitat. In correspondence with USFS staff regarding the planned project, the USFS did not express concerns regarding the presence of sensitive wildlife species in the work areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation:

The project area is not located in or near a floodplain. All in-water work would be conducted during the Oregon Dept. of Fish & Wildlife designated work window for Tanner Creek and tributaries to Tanner Creek. During ford maintenance activities, if flow is present during construction, the work area would be isolated and flow redirected around the work area to protect water quality. Fish are not present in the unnamed tributary at the elevation of the ford crossing.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation:

No wetlands are present in the project area.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation:

Excavation on the project would only include light grading and surface rock removal, and would not involve depths that would intersect groundwater and/or aquifers.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation:

Land use consists of public lands managed by the USFS for recreation and wildlife habitat. The proposed project would not alter existing land use. The project is located within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA). BPA consulted with the USFS' CRGNSA office regarding the proposed project. In an email dated April 29, 2021, BPA provided a description of the planned ford maintenance and a map showing the location of the proposed work. The USFS CRGNSA office did not formally respond to BPA's notification of planned action. However, work on the ford was discussed during the spring 2021 BPA/USFS CRGNSA coordination meeting, and additional information was shared via email following the meeting. No further coordination with the USFS CRGNSA office is required.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation:

The ford maintenance and addition of rock would be consistent with existing visual quality.

### **Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation:

Some dust may be generated due to construction traffic, transport, placement of rock, and general construction activities. A fugitive dust plan would be implemented to control dust generation, if needed. With an appropriate dust control mitigation plan, the project would have minor, temporary impacts to air quality.

## 10. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

### Explanation:

Some temporary noise may be generated due to construction traffic, transport, placement of rock, and general construction activities. However, the project is in a relatively remote area, away from highly trafficked recreational sites and concentrated human activity.

## 11. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

### Explanation:

The project is located in an uninhabited area. The access road contractor would develop a safety plan to protect worker 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:

BPA notified and coordinated planned project activities with the USFS Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Office. BPA would continue to coordinate with all stakeholders as necessary during planning and construction going forward.

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: June 7, 2021  
Aaron Siemers  
Environmental Protection Specialist