

Supplement Analysis
for the
Transmission System Vegetation Management Program EIS
(DOE/EA/EIS-0285/SA-819)

Pollution Prevention and Abatement Project Number 4,708
Natural Resource Specialist/Project Manager: Jake Marti, TFBV-The Dalles

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Activities

BPA proposes to clear unwanted vegetation in and adjacent to the right-of-way of high-voltage transmission lines, access roads, and communication sites in Skamania County, WA, specifically the N. Bonneville-Midway No. 1 transmission line. Vegetation management needs were assessed, and Vegetation Control Cut Sheets were created for the right-of-way corridor and associated access roads along these transmission assets.

The corridor in the proposed project area ranges from approximately 400 ft. to 150 ft. wide and is 22 miles long, through private forested lands, rural residential, and lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The project area is located within the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area, and the USFS Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA) office manages the natural resources within the project area.

The USFS was notified of the proposed project during routine coordination meetings. Approximately 5 miles of the N. Bonneville-Midway No. 1 transmission line corridor runs through USFS-managed lands. The Gifford Pinchot National Forest was notified of the planned work and provided acknowledgement. The USFS CRGNSA staff biologist was also informed of the proposed project, and recommended consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for potential impacts to northern spotted owl. Letters, on-site meetings, emails, and phone calls would be used to notify additional landowners approximately three weeks prior to commencing vegetation management activities. Door hangers would also be used at properties where special treatments are anticipated. Any additional measures proposed by landowners or land managers through ongoing communication would be incorporated into the vegetation management plan during project implementation.

To comply with Western Electricity Coordinating Council standards, BPA proposes to manage vegetation with the goal of removing tall-growing vegetation that is currently or will soon become a hazard to the transmission line (a hazard is defined as one or more branches, tops, and/or whole trees that could fall or grow into the minimum safety zone of the transmission line(s) causing an electrical arc, relay, and/or outage). The overall goal of BPA is to establish low-growing plant communities along the right-of-way (ROW) to control the development of potentially threatening vegetation.

A combination of selective and nonselective vegetation control methods would be used to perform the work, and may include hand cutting, mowing, herbicidal treatment, or a combination of those methods. To ensure that the roots are killed, prevent re-sprouts, and selectively manage vegetation that interferes with the operation and maintenance of transmission infrastructure, herbicides would be selectively

applied using spot treatment (stump treatment) or localized treatments (basal treatment and/or low-volume foliar treatment). For worker safety and fire prevention, broad-spectrum (non-selective) residual herbicide would be applied, and only applied immediately adjacent to switch platforms and selected transmission structures (primarily wood poles). All herbicides and adjuvants would be chosen from a list of approved chemicals in BPA's Transmission System Vegetation Management Program Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) (DOE/EIS-0285, May 2000) and subsequent supplement analyses to the FEIS.

Proposed vegetation management actions would include approximately 14.5 miles of clearing vegetation within and immediately adjacent to BPA access roads servicing the N. Bonneville-Midway No. 1 transmission line, 275 acres of cut, lop and scatter of immature firs and other trees as well as tall growing shrubs within the right-of-way, 550 acres of herbicide treatments (spot, basal and localized applications), cutting 3 danger trees (trees outside of the ROW easement that pose unique risk to the line), and 109 corridors trees (trees inside the ROW that pose risk to the line). BPA would also side limb three trees, and mulch and scatter debris. The work would be conducted in 2022.

A follow-up treatment of re-sprouting target vegetation may be conducted if necessary. Additional vegetation management may be necessary in subsequent years of the vegetation management cycle in discrete areas of noxious weeds, or where BPA personnel discover vegetation that poses a hazard to the transmission line. All debris would be disposed of onsite, along the ROW, using on-site chipping/mulching, or cut, lop, and scatter techniques.

Analysis

A Vegetation Control Cut Sheet was developed for this corridor that incorporated the requirements identified in BPA's Transmission System Vegetation Management Program FEIS and Record of Decision (August 23, 2000). The following summarizes natural resources occurring in the project area along with applicable mitigation measures outlined in the Vegetation Control Cut Sheets.

Water Resources

Water bodies (streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands) occurring in the project area are noted in the Vegetation Control Cut Sheets. As conservation and avoidance measures, only spot and localized treatment with Garlon 3A (Triclopyr TEA) would be used within a 100-foot buffer up to the water's edge of any stream containing threatened or endangered species. Trees in riparian zones would be selectively cut to include only those that would grow into the minimum approach distances of the conductor at maximum sag; other trees would be left in place or topped to preserved shade. Shrubs that are less than 10-feet-high would not be cut where ground to conductor clearance allows. No ground-disturbing vegetation management methods would be implemented, thus eliminating the risk for soil erosion and sedimentation near the streams. Where private water wells/springs or agricultural irrigation sources have been identified along the ROW and noted in the Vegetation Control Cut Sheets, no herbicide application would occur within a 50-foot radius of the wellhead, spring, or irrigation source (164 feet when using herbicides with ground/surface water advisory).

Endangered Species Act and Magnuson-Stevens Act

Pursuant to its obligations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA made a determination of whether its proposed project would have any effects on any listed species. A species list was obtained for federally-listed, proposed, and candidate species potentially occurring within the project boundaries from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Based on the ESA review conducted, BPA made a determination that the project would have “No Effect” for bull trout, yellow billed cuckoo, and the candidate species monarch butterfly. BPA made a determination that the proposed vegetation management activities “May effect, but are not likely to adversely affect” northern spotted owl and northern spotted owl critical habitat. The proposed project activities are within the scope of activities and action area evaluated in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) letter of concurrence (LOC) regarding: N. Bonneville-Midway Periodic Vegetation Management, consultation number 2022-0003379, sent to BPA in March, 2022, and conservation measures including work timing restrictions would be implemented near suitable northern spotted owl habitat and critical habitat in line miles 7, 8, and 12-25 of the transmission corridor.

BPA conducted a review of ESA-listed species and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) (as defined by the Magnuson-Stevens Act), under the jurisdiction of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The proposed vegetation management activities are within the scope of activities and action area evaluated in the Endangered Species Act Section 7 Programmatic Conference and Biological Opinion and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation for Standard Local Operating Procedures for Endangered Species to Administer Maintenance or Rebuild Projects for Transmission Line and Road Access Actions Authorized or Carried Out by the Bonneville Power Administration in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho (SLOPES PBO) (WCR-2014-1600, September 22, 2016). Streams in the project area with documented presence of ESA-listed fish, designated critical habitat for one or more species, and/or identified as EFH have been noted in the Vegetation Control Cut Sheets. It was determined that, by complying with the project design criteria listed within the SLOPES PBO, potential effects to ESA-listed anadromous salmonids and EFH would be consistent with those evaluated and addressed in the SLOPES PBO.

Cultural Resources

A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed project activities and determined that the undertaking is a type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties, assuming such historic properties were present. If a site is discovered during the course of vegetation control, work would be stopped in the vicinity and the BPA Environmental Specialist and the BPA Archaeologist would be contacted.

Visual Resources

The project area is located within the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area, and includes general management areas (GMA), special management areas (SMA), and GMA urban area. The proposed vegetation management actions would cut and remove trees, primarily trees present in spanned low-lying areas and canyons. However vegetation management, including tree removal, has been occurring periodically within the transmission corridor since the construction of the line, and therefore the proposed actions would not substantially impact the existing visual character of the transmission corridor.

Re-Vegetation

Existing naturalized grasses and woody shrubs are present on the entire ROW and are expected to naturally seed into the areas that would have lightly-disturbed soil predominantly located on the ROW roads.

Monitoring

The entire project would be inspected during the work period; spring, summer and fall of 2022, through 2023. A follow-up treatment may occur after the initial treatment. Additional monitoring for follow-up treatment would be conducted as necessary. A vendor scorecard would be used to document formal inspections and would be filed with the contracting officer.

Findings

BPA finds that the types of actions and the potential impacts related to the proposed activities have been examined, reviewed, and consulted upon and are similar to those analyzed in the Transmission System Vegetation Management Program FEIS (DOE/EIS-0285) and ROD. There are no substantial changes in the EIS's Proposed Action and no significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns bearing on the EIS's Proposed Action or its impacts within the meaning of 10 CFR § 1021.314(c)(1) and 40 CFR §1502.9(d). Therefore, no further NEPA analysis or documentation is required.

/s/ Aaron Siemers
Aaron Siemers, EPR-4
Physical Scientist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange
Katey Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: *March 4, 2022*

References:
Vegetation Control Cut Sheets
Biological Assessment for Northern Spotted Owl; N. Bonneville-Midway No. Periodic Vegetation Management (2/9/2022)