

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Auto-Sectionalizing Equipment Installation on Albeni Falls-Sand Creek No. 1

Project No.: P04571

Project Manager: Tina B. Edwards, TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Bonner County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to install new auto-sectionalizing equipment at switch B-169 near structure 14/1 on the 115-kilovolt (kV) Albeni Falls-Sand Creek No. 1 transmission line near Laclede, Bonner County, Idaho (Township 56 North, Range 3 West, Section 30). The proposed action would accommodate a request by Northern Lights, Inc. to shorten the duration of outages on the Albeni Falls-Sand Creek No. 1 transmission line, which have become more frequent in recent years.

New equipment would be mounted on the existing steel-lattice switch structure and would include:

- Auto-sectionalizing relays
- Motor operator
- Batteries and battery chargers to power the auto-sectionalizing relays and motor operator
- Equipment cabinets with heaters to house the auto-sectionalizing relays, motor operated controls, terminal blocks, and batteries

BPA would install two new 115-kV potential transformers (PTs), each mounted on new single pole wood structures installed approximately 30 feet ahead-on-line (AOL) and 30 feet back-on-line (BOL) from the existing switch structure. Conduit with fiber optic cable would be installed within a 24-inch-wide by 36-inch-deep trench between each PT and the existing switch structure. Temporary ground disturbance from vehicle and equipment use would extend no more than approximately 100 feet AOL and BOL from structure 14/1 within the 100-foot-wide right-of-way (total approximate disturbance area of about 10,000 square feet [0.23 acres]). Excavated soil would be used for backfill or spread evenly around the base of the structures. Following completion of the project, disturbed areas would be reseeded with a native, regionally-appropriate seed mix.

Work areas would be accessed using BPA's existing access road system, and the proposed action would not require any new access roads, staging areas, or landing pads. Completion of the project would require the use of light duty vehicles and heavy equipment, such as a truck-mounted auger, excavator, crane, and boom truck.

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/ W. Walker Stinnette

W. Walker Stinnette

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange August 26, 2022

Katey C. Grange Date

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.

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Project Site Description

The project site is located on privately-owned property entirely within BPA's existing Albeni Falls-Sand Creek No. 1 transmission line right-of-way easement near Laclede, Bonner County, Idaho (Township 56 North, Range 3 West, Section 30). Ground disturbance would extend no more than approximately 100 feet AOL and BOL from structure 14/1 within the 100-foot-wide right-of-way in an area that consists of regularly mowed grasses and weeds. Riley Creek is located approximately 350 feet east of the project site and is separated from the site by a densely vegetated buffer. The underlying Bonner soil series is not hydric, and no wetlands are located within the project site. Outside of the right-of-way, surrounding land use consists of rural residential properties interspersed with undeveloped forests and grasslands.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: On May 26, 2022, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (Idaho SHPO)
- Kootenai Tribe of Idaho

BPA conducted background research and an intensive field survey of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). No previously recorded archaeological resources were located within the APE, and no new archaeological resources were identified during the archaeological field survey. The Albeni Falls-Sand Creek No. 1 transmission line is located within the APE and is considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). However, the proposed undertaking would not alter the integrity or eligibility of the transmission line. Therefore, BPA determined on July 8, 2022, that the proposed undertaking would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: ID 2021 062; SHPO Rev No.: 2022-601). Concurrence with BPA's determination was received from Idaho SHPO on August 2, 2022. No other comments were received.

Notes:

- Implement inadvertent discovery protocols in the unlikely event that cultural material is encountered during the implementation of this project. BPA would require that work be halted 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 with conditions

Explanation: Approximately 10,000 square feet (0.23 acres) of temporary soil disturbance would occur from excavation for the new structures and fiber optic cable and from soil compaction and rutting due to vehicle and equipment use. Temporarily disturbed soils would stabilize as vegetation is reestablished and would eventually return to pre-existing conditions following completion of construction. Standard construction best management practices would minimize erosion and sedimentation. The proposed action would not impact geology.

Notes:

- Implement erosion and sediment control best management practices.
- Reseed disturbed areas with a native, regionally-appropriate seed mix.

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

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: The proposed action would crush, strip, or cover up to approximately 10,000 square feet (0.23 acres) of low-growing grasses and weeds. Following completion of the project, disturbed areas would be reseeded with a native, regionally-appropriate seed mix. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status plant species near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat is present.

Notes:

- Reseed disturbed areas 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 disruption of normal wildlife behavior and wildlife displacement could occur from elevated noise and human presence during construction. However, there would be no permanent impacts 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 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: Riley Creek is located approximately 350 feet east of the project site. Standard construction best management practices would prevent erosion and sedimentation from impacting Riley Creek. Therefore, the proposed project 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 the project site. Standard construction best management practices would prevent erosion and sedimentation from impacting off-site wetlands, if present. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not generate or use hazardous materials that would contaminate groundwater or aquifers, and ground disturbance is unlikely to reach a depth that would intersect groundwater. No new wells or other uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could temporarily impact adjacent residential land uses due to construction noise. However, there would be no permanent change in land use following completion of the proposed action. The project site is not located in a specially-designated area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, the presence of equipment and general construction activities, including ground disturbance and minor vegetation disturbance, would cause temporary visual impacts. Installation of two new single pole wood structures would constitute a minor visual change. The final appearance of the site 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 result in minor and temporary noise from the use of vehicles, heavy equipment, and power tools during construction, which could be audible from nearby residential properties. Noise impacts would be temporary and would only occur during daylight hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). There would be no permanent change in ambient noise following completion of the proposed action.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not generate or use hazardous materials and would not create conditions that would increase risk to human health and safety. Standard best management practices would minimize the risk to human health and safety during implementation. No impacts to human health and safety are expected as a result of the proposed actions.

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 within BPA's existing transmission line right-of-way easement, which is located on privately-owned property. BPA has notified the underlying landowner and adjacent landowners of the proposed action. No additional 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: /s/ W. Walker Stinnette August 26, 2022
W. Walker Stinnette Date
Environmental Protection Specialist