

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Taft-Bell No. 1 Insulator Replacement

**Project No.:** 4805

**Project Manager:** Robert Zeller – TFSF-Bell

**Location:** Mineral County, Montana, Shoshone and Kootenai Counties, ID and Spokane County, Washington

**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 perform in-kind replacement of the electrical conductor insulators at the dead end towers, as well as other critical towers, along the Taft – Bell No. 1 500 kV high voltage line. This work would help to maintain a safe and reliable high voltage transmission system.

Six staging areas and helicopter landing zones (LZ) have been identified and are within the project action area. LZs would be located in previously cleared areas, such as borrow pits and wide areas within and near access roads. Vehicles would remain on existing right-of-way (ROWs, established access roads, structure sites, and landing zones.

To replace the insulators, linemen would access the structures via line truck, light duty pick-up truck, or all-terrain vehicle (ATV), and disconnect the failing insulators and hardware. Helicopters would fly into the transmission ROW, take away the old insulators and bring in new insulators, which would then be installed. Table 1 details the line mile and structure number where insulator replacement is planned, as well as the general locations of the landing zone (LZ) supporting the work.

Equipment would also include a material handler, dump truck, trailer, helicopter mechanic truck, and firefighting water truck/trailer. A small amount of brush clearing may be required for helicopter landing zones. No ground disturbing activities are anticipated and existing access roads would be used to minimize impacts.

Insulator replacement locations are listed below.

Transmission Line	Structure	TRS	County, State
Taft-Bell No. 1	2/3	T20N R32W UP25	Mineral, MT
	13/4	T48N R5E UP17	Shoshone, ID
	14/1	T48N R5E UP18	Shoshone, ID
	18/3	T48N R4E UP3	Shoshone, ID
	19/1	T49N R4E SEC33	Shoshone, ID
	35/4	T50N R2E SEC10	Shoshone, ID

	41/3	T51N R1E SEC27	Shoshone, ID
	41/4	T51N R1E SEC27	Shoshone, ID
	43/1	T51N R1E SEC28	Kootenai, ID
	45/6	T51N R1W SEC24	Kootenai, ID
	46/3	T51N R1W SEC13	Kootenai, ID
	46/4	T51N R1W SEC14	Kootenai, ID
	47/4	T51N R1W SEC14	Kootenai, ID
	49/4	T51N R1W SEC9	Kootenai, ID
	50/5	T51N R1W SEC5	Kootenai, ID
	59/2	T52N R3W SEC13	Kootenai, ID
	61/3	T52N R3W SEC15	Kootenai, ID
	98/2	T26N R43E SEC15	Spokane, WA
	98/4	T26N R43E SEC15	Spokane, WA

BPA would have multiple crews of four to six linemen conducting the work during the period when the transmission line is de-energized. All work would be in accordance with the National Electrical Safety Code and BPA standards.

**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/ Adrienne Wojtasz  
Adrienne Wojtasz  
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange September 12, 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.

**Proposed Action:** Taft-Bell No. 1 Insulator Replacement

## **Project Site Description**

Proposed routine maintenance activities would be conducted along the Taft-Bell No. 1 transmission line. The proposed action is located in far western Montana, northern Idaho, and northeastern Washington. The Action Area is located in the Northern Rocky Mountains level III ecoregion, and crosses through the Lolo National Forest and the Idaho Panhandle National Forest, Bureau of Land Management–managed lands, and private lands. The proposed action would occur within, and immediately adjacent to the Taft – Bell No. 1 high voltage transmission corridor, access roads to the transmission line, and helicopter landing zones established in open areas near the transmission line; generally adjacent to established roadways and borrow pits.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: The BPA archaeologist completed background research and intensive field survey of the proposed project Area of Potential Effect (APE) and determined the project actions would result in No Historic Properties Affected. One previously recorded cultural resource was noted to be within the APE, however, upon field visitation there was no evidence of the site. Additionally, site HRA-3120.07-1 is located within the APE, however given that the site is recommended as not eligible, the project would not impact the sites integrity.

Notes:

- To insure that no damage occurs to site HRA-3120.07-1, it is recommended that the helicopters use the highest platform at the mine site in Township 48 North Range 05 East Unsurveyed Parcel 08.
- Should any cultural resources be discovered during project activities, then all project work must stop, and the Environmental Protection Specialist should be notified immediately. No additional review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act is required for this action at this time.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance is anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In order to comply with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), on March 31, 2022, BPA obtained an official species list for the project from USFWS. Whitebark pine is listed as proposed threatened within the project area. However, no vegetation management or tree removal is planned, therefore the project would have “No Effect” on Whitebark pine.

No other Federal/state special-status plants are present in the project area.

On National Forest System lands managed by the Idaho Panhandle and Lolo National Forests, BPA would comply with the Standard Operating Procedures for limiting the spread of invasive species and fire prevention as directed in the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In general, the project would have temporary impacts to wildlife and habitat related to disturbance associated with elevated helicopter and equipment noise and human presence. However the surrounding mountains and forest provides ample habitat and cover for disturbed wildlife.

Project activities would be limited to already impacted right-of-ways and would not substantially alter the footprint or operational noise of the line; therefore, wildlife and associated habitat would be temporarily disturbed by noise during construction, but there would be no long term effect.

The project is located in U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)-modeled habitat for grizzly bear, but is not located in a grizzly bear recovery zone. In order to comply with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), on March 31, 2022, BPA obtained an official species list for the project from USFWS. On April 4th, 2022, BPA submitted a Biological Assessment (BA) to the Idaho Office of the USFWS for the project’s potential effects to grizzly bear and Canada lynx. BPA determined that the project “May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” grizzly bear and Canada lynx, and “may effect individuals and habitat, but is not likely to result in the jeopardy” of wolverine. On June 15th, 2022, USFWS emailed BPA and confirmed that the proposed actions and potential effects from the proposed actions were consistent with those recently analyzed under the Northern Idaho Inspection and Vegetation Management Project (TAILS#: 01EIFW00-2021-I-1822; ECOSphere#: 2022-0054447), with USFWS concurrence, therefore no additional ESA consultation was initiated.

BPA discussed the proposed action with U.S. Forest Service, Idaho Panhandle National Forest Natural Resource Staff in March of 2016. The project’s potential effects to grizzly bear were discussed. USFS did not identify any other non-ESA sensitive species in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No in-water work is proposed for this project. There are no fish in the vicinity of the project area. Standard construction erosion control measures would be utilized to ensure sediment and other contaminants do not enter bodies of water; therefore, water bodies, floodplains, and fish would not be affected by the proposed project activities.

## 6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbing activities are anticipated in wetlands or other water bodies that occur along the project. Erosion control measures would be implemented to prevent sedimentation.

## 7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to ground water or aquifers are anticipated.

## 8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur and project activities would not impact existing land uses.

For those portions of the project crossing the Idaho Panhandle and Lolo National Forests, the *Memorandum of Understanding between the Bonneville Power Administration United States Department of Energy and the United States Forest Service United States Department of Agriculture Regarding Transmission Facilities and Access to Those Facilities on National Forest System Lands Standard Operation Procedures* listed below would be implemented:

- **Section V** Transmission Facilities
- **Section X** Fire control communication and coordination
- **Appendix E** Fire Prevention and Suppression

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have minimal impact to visual quality. The glass insulators would be consistent with other insulators along the transmission line.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have a small, temporary impact on air quality from vehicle emissions and dust generated during construction.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary construction noise and helicopter use would occur during daylight hours. The operational noise of the transmission line would not change.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would allow safe and timely access to the transmission line which would help reduce outage times and maintain reliable power in the region.

### 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 Realty personnel and environmental specialist have coordinated the proposed project activities with the BLM, Idaho Panhandle and Lolo National Forests prior to project initiation and any concerns regarding proposed transmission line maintenance activities have been addressed.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed: /s/ Adrienne Wojtasz September 12, 2022  
Adrienne Wojtasz – EPR-Bell-1 Date  
Physical Scientist (Environmental)