

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Transmission Line Marker Ball Replacement Phase III Project

PP&A No.: 4444

Project Manager: Dianne Wilson – TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Modoc County, California

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance; B3.2 Aviation Activities.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to remove and replace marker balls on two transmission lines in Modoc County, California. As part of BPA's wildfire mitigation effort, BPA noted that plastic and fiberglass marker balls can fail at their attachment point on conductor or ground wire, potentially igniting and falling to the ground to start wildfires. Phase 3 construction would start in late 2022 into the spring of 2023.

BPA proposes to replace marker balls on Canby Tap to Malin-Hilltop No. 1 and Malin-Hilltop No. 1 lines utilizing Human External Cargo (HEC), or a crew suspended from a helicopter. For replacements on these lines, helicopter landing zones are necessary for helicopters to land and take off, as well as for staging crew and equipment. Access road improvements are not anticipated at this time. Large flatbed trucks or similar vehicles would be used to haul materials and equipment but use of loaders, excavators, or other heavy equipment is not anticipated.

BPA may utilize either helicopters or drones to examine marker balls prior to replacement and to inspect marker balls following replacement for proper installation.

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/ Anthony Gibson

Anthony Gibson

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel Date: September 14, 2022

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: Transmission Line Marker Ball Replacement Phase III Project

Project Site Description

The project is located in the most northeastern section of California in Modoc County. The project area traverses mostly agricultural land and spans one body of water. Work would occur on privately-owned land and US Forest Service (USFS) land located within the Modoc National Forest. See Table 1 below for Township, Range, Section Number, and County information.

Table 1. Township, Range, Section Number, and County Information

Line Corridor	Spans(s)	Township, Range, Section	County, State
Canby Tap to Malin-Hilltop No. 1	7/11 to 8/12	T42N, R9E, SEC25	Modoc, CA
Malin-Hilltop No. 1	50/3 to 50/4	T43N, R10E, SEC29	Modoc, CA

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Following a review of the potential project impacts to cultural resources, BPA has determined that this undertaking would result in No Historic Properties Affected or No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties.

The BPA Historian review has shown that marker ball replacement is considered normal, in-kind repair work and would not adversely affect the National Register eligibility of any transmission lines.

Under Federal law, BPA has the responsibility to protect cultural resources that are inadvertently discovered on BPA-owned land or during federally funded projects. Should cultural resources be encountered during project implementation, all activity would be immediately discontinued and BPA cultural resource staff would be contacted. BPA's cultural resources staff would work with tribes and the California SHPO to address the inadvertent discovery as quickly as possible.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance is anticipated for the project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minimal disturbance to vegetation is anticipated. Vegetation may be crushed in those locations where equipment would be accessing marker balls. There would be no effect to ESA-listed plant species. No impacts to state or other sensitive species are anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In general, the project would have minimal impacts to wildlife and habitat related to temporary disturbance associated with elevated noise and human presence. There would be no impacts to ESA-listed wildlife species. No impacts to state-listed and other sensitive species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground-disturbing activities in any river, stream, or other waterbody along the project and no riparian vegetation would be impacted. The project would have no effect to ESA-listed, state-listed, or other sensitive species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground-disturbing activities in wetlands along the project.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to groundwater or aquifers are anticipated due to the lack of ground disturbance.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Marker ball replacement is considered routine transmission line maintenance and BPA notified the USFS Modoc National Forest office of the project. No change in land use would occur; project activities would not impact existing land uses; and there would not be any recreational or operational disruptions.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have a minimal impact to visual quality. Replacement marker balls would be similar to the existing marker balls, and consistent with other marker balls along the transmission line.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of vehicular emissions and dust may occur temporarily during construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary construction noise from construction activities 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: No impacts to human health and safety are anticipated.

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 and environment staff have coordinated the proposed project activities with USFS and private landowners.

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

Signed: /s/ Anthony Gibson Date: September 14, 2022

Anthony Gibson – EPR -4
Physical Scientist (Environment)