

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Bellingham Substation Maintenance and Disconnect Switch Replacements

Project No.: P04421

Project Manager: Matt Joerin, TEPP-TPP-1

Location: Whatcom County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.7 Electronic equipment; B4.11 - Electric power substations and interconnection facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes required maintenance at BPA's existing Bellingham Substation in Whatcom County, Washington. The proposed work would include the replacement of one 230 kilovolt (kV) power circuit breaker (PCB), one 115kV PCB, four 230kV disconnect switches, six 115kV disconnect switches, and the transformer tertiary rack.

In addition, the proposed action would replace and relocate a variety of standard 230kV and 115kV substation equipment including capacity voltage transformers (CVTs), disconnect switches, current transformers (CTs), station service, and bus configuration.

The project would consist of demolition and removal of some equipment and concrete footings, excavation and grading, and construction of new equipment footings. Excavation of footings and new footings would be constructed in Bay 5, Bay 6, Bay 17, Bay 18, Bay 19 and Bay 21. Equipment footings in Bay 9, Bay 17 and Bay 19 would be expanded and seismically tied to existing footings. The existing oil containment liner at Transformer Bank 1 will be removed during new footing construction and will be replaced in-kind with a new liner.

All ground disturbance (i.e., excavating to install new footings, grounding, and conduit) would occur within the substation yard. No excavation or ground disturbing project actions would occur outside the perimeter fence. Excess excavated material would be hauled off-site for disposal. General equipment to be used includes cranes, excavators, bulldozers, dump trucks, vacuum trucks, and substation maintenance vehicles.

The relaying and electronic communications equipment would be installed on racks inside the existing control house, and no major interior or exterior building modifications are required.

No new land rights acquisition is required, and the action would not require any new access roads or road improvements. Any temporary material yards or construction staging areas would be identified during design and located in previously disturbed areas inside the substation yard.

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/ Chad Browning

Chad Browning, EPR-COVINGTON
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer Date: January 22, 2024

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: Bellingham Substation Maintenance and Disconnect Switch Replacements

Project Site Description

The proposed project would occur on BPA fee-owned land at Bellingham Substation in Whatcom County, Washington. All proposed ground disturbing activities would occur within the existing footprint of the fenced substation yard. The substation yard consists of compacted, non-native yard rock and is maintained clear of vegetation. Outside of the substation yard, the surrounding area is primarily characterized by rural residential land use interspersed with isolated forest and grasslands and maintained BPA transmission line right-of-way.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All ground-disturbing activities would occur within the previously-disturbed Bellingham Substation yard. Although the substation has been determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the proposed undertaking would not alter the integrity or eligibility of the property. A BPA historian reviewed and documented no potential to effect via e-mail on April 18, 2022. Therefore, the proposed undertaking would have no potential to cause effects on historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Localized ground disturbance would occur during construction in the rocked yard. Standard erosion control measures would be implemented to prevent sediment migration off site. Any excess spoils generated during project activities shall be hauled off site to an approved location.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work in the gravel substation yard; which is maintained free of vegetation. No federal or state-listed plants or designated critical habitat occur within the geographic area of the Bellingham Substation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work in substation yard. A review of ESA-listed species that may be present in vicinity of the proposed project site found no potential to effect listed threatened, endangered, or proposed species, designated and proposed critical habitat, candidate species, state special-status species of concern or priority habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The existing, actively operating project substation is 350 feet northeast from Toad Creek and 800 feet east of Squalicum Creek, the nearest waterways with federal-listed species. Both streams are designated critical habitat for the Puget Sound Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of Steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), per NOAA Fisheries. Typical erosion control BMPs would be implemented and no riparian habitat, water bodies, floodplains or fish-bearing streams are present or would be affected from the work in the electric yard. The project is not in a floodplain. Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) floodplains associated with Squalicum Creek are mapped approximately 140 feet west of the Bellingham Substation.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the electrical yard or in near proximity of the project site.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: According to the US Geological Survey (USGS) National Water Information System (NWIS), three wells occur within 600 feet of the substation yard. Historic records indicate that groundwater occurs 40-52 feet below ground surface in this area. No critical aquifer recharge areas nor any well head, source water or groundwater protection areas occur within or adjacent to the project area. Ground excavation for footings and oil containment upgrades would not reach groundwater depth below the substation yard. Standard construction BMPs and Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures Plan would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers. No new wells or uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action is consistent with current land uses, and the project site is not located in a specially-designated area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The equipment replacements are similar in size and appearance to existing equipment and the associated footing modifications in the substation yard would not have a noticeable impact on the baseline visual quality at the site.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction activities have the potential to result in a minor and temporary increase in dust and emissions in the local area. Standard erosion and sediment controls would be implemented, as needed. There would be no change to air quality after construction is completed.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project site is in a rural area surrounded by trees and other electric transmission line and equipment. The construction activities could temporarily and intermittently increase noise higher than current ambient conditions. However, the increase is not expected to exceed ambient background sound levels from existing land uses near the project site (e.g., vehicular traffic, agricultural activities, BPA right-of-way maintenance).

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All standard safety protocols would be followed throughout project construction, and standard construction BMPs would minimize risk to human 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: No notification required. All work on BPA fee-owned property at an active, operating electrical substation. If needed, a realty specialist would contact adjacent landowner(s) prior to starting construction activities.

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

Signed: /s/ Chad Browning
Chad Browning, EPR-COVINGTON
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: January 22, 2024