Fact Sheet

JANUARY 2026

Transmission line line de-energizations for wildfires

Wildfire frequency and severity continue to be a concern for utilities across the West as wildfires are increasing in number, size, and intensity. As a Federal Power Marketing Administration operating over 15,000 miles of transmission lines, BPA must be vigilant of wildfire risk to its infrastructure by operating in a manner that minimizes any potential risk increase. Mitigation measures include de-energizing transmission lines to prevent wildfires and keep first responders safe.

A wildfire burns near a BPA right-of-way.

Under what circumstances does BPA de-energize its transmission lines due to wildfire?

BPA often receives questions about what wildfire risks or conditions would cause BPA to de-energize its infrastructure. Below are scenarios explaining transmission line de-energization actions due to wildfire risk:

SCENARIO 1

Existing wildfires cause facilities to trip out of service due to smoke or wildfire damage.

BPA has protective equipment that can "trip," or shut off, its transmission lines when certain conditions occur. Damage due to smoke or wildfire can automatically trip a transmission line out of service. Wildfire damage can occur directly or indirectly such as when it causes a tree or branch to fall onto a line. In this scenario, there is not a specific process or procedure to de-energize the line. Rather, protection elements installed on BPA's transmission grid automatically take the line out of service. BPA will not reenergize the line(s) until it has thoroughly inspected its assets in the affected area, replacing any damaged assets as needed..

SCENARIO 2

Bonneville proactively de-energizes infrastructure for safety and wildfire firefighting efforts.

The safety of first responders and communities impacted by an ongoing wildfire-related event is a priority for BPA. In this scenario, BPA may shut off a line or multiple lines to ensure first responder safety and assist wildland firefighting efforts. BPA will not reenergize the line(s) until it has thoroughly inspected its assets in the affected area, replacing any damaged assets as needed.

SCENARIO 3

BPA proactively de-energizes transmission lines to prevent igniting wildfire

BPA's Wildfire Mitigation Plan details the factors and processes that inform BPA when to proactively de-energize a transmission line to avoid potentially starting a wildfire. This process is generally referred to as Public Safety Power Shutoff, or PSPS, and is commonly used by numerous utilities in the Western Interconnection to proactively manage wildfire risks. The PSPS plan, like the encompassing Wildfire Mitigation Plan, does not prescribe specific outcomes; rather, it identifies the factors and decision-making process BPA uses to decide whether to de-energize a facility or not. The PSPS plan also includes the factors and steps BPA will take to reenergize a line after a PSPS event.

Smoke from a wildfire obscures the sun above a BPA substation.