

Hills Creek-Lookout Point Transmission Line Rebuild Project

Finding of No Significant Impact
Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA-1967
November 2021

INTRODUCTION

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings for its proposal to rebuild the Hills Creek-Lookout Point No. 1 Transmission Line and improvements to the associated access network.

In 2017, BPA completed a Final EA and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the rebuild project. The project was then put on hold for several years. In 2020, BPA updated the designs for the transmission line and access road network, which resulted in additions to the Proposed Action that had not been analyzed during the original environmental assessment. These additions consisted of installation of temporary backup generators adjacent to the Oakridge Substation; additional tree removal along the edges of the right-of-way corridor; and adjustments to the access road transportation plan. In 2021, BPA completed a Supplemental EA to address additional resource impacts not addressed in the 2017 EA.

Based on the analysis, BPA has determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required and BPA is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action is not the type of action that normally requires preparation of an EIS and is not without precedent.

Attached is a Mitigation Action Plan that lists all the mitigation measures that BPA and its contractors are committed to implementing.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

The Supplemental EA, Mitigation Action Plan, and this FONSI will be posted on BPA's project website: www.bpa.gov/goto/HillsCreekLookoutPoint.

The 2017 EA, MAP, and FONSI are also posted to the project website.

PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, BPA would rebuild the 26-mile-long transmission line, improve the access road system and foot-trail network, and remove trees and other vegetation that pose a danger to safely and reliably operating the transmission line. BPA would remove and replace 224 wood-pole transmission structures; realign segments of line miles two and three; replace wood pole structures with steel monopole structures in line mile five; replace existing conductors, overhead wire and counterpoise; replace two disconnect switches; establish a temporary material storage yard; helicopter landing pads, and tensioning sites; enhance the access road and trail system; acquire new access road rights along the transmission line and new easements in line miles two and three; and remove trees and other vegetation.

BPA is working now to determine the best way to sequence the work over the next two to three years (2021 through 2024). BPA will issue a public notification of the construction schedule once it is determined.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, BPA would not rebuild the transmission line or upgrade access roads as a single coordinated project. BPA would continue to operate and maintain the existing transmission line in its current condition, replacing aged and rotting structures as they deteriorate, maintaining access roads to allow access to structures on an as-needed basis, and managing vegetation for safe operation. The structures that are currently located in the rock fall area of line mile two and the landslide area of line mile three would be repaired in their current locations, but would be susceptible to future damage from rock falls and landslides.

The No Action Alternative would likely result in more frequent and more disruptive maintenance activities than has been required in the past. The overall scale and scope of the repairs that would be done under the No Action Alternative would be smaller than what is planned under the Proposed Action. The maintenance program addresses immediate needs to keep the transmission line functioning, and would likely not include more comprehensive improvements such as access road work to improve water runoff and installation of fish-passable culverts. Access road work under the No Action Alternative would be limited to enhancements necessary to allow access to specific structures for as-needed repairs and maintenance.

COMMENTS ON SUPPLEMENTAL EA

BPA sent a public letter regarding the Supplemental EA on October 18, 2021 and BPA accepted public comments on the Supplemental EA until November 1, 2021. The letter provided information about the proposed modifications, requested comments on the Supplemental EA, and described how to comment (i.e., through mail, fax, telephone, and BPA's project website). BPA posted this on the project website to provide information about the Proposed Action and the EA process: www.bpa.gov/goto/HillsCreekLookoutPoint.

BPA received one written comment, posted at the project website during the comment period. The comment was largely in support of the transmission line rebuild but the commenter was concerned about the number of trees proposed for removal and suggested reducing loads to counteract conductor sag and consider using taller replacement poles. BPA has designed the project to increase structure heights in some locations. BPA has carefully selected trees for removal that pose a risk to the transmission line operating safely and providing reliable electrical transmission. The trees proposed for removal would be spread out along the 26-mile-long project length, except for in the right-of-way realignment areas in line miles 2 and 3, where the new right-of-way needs to be cleared of trees.

SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

To determine whether the changes to the Proposed Action have the potential to cause significant environmental effects, BPA analyzed the potential impacts of the proposal on human and natural resources and presented them in Chapter 3 of the Supplemental EA. The potential impacts associated with the 2020-2021 additions to the Proposed Action are summarized below. The Proposed Action, with implementation of selected mitigation measures, would have no significant impacts. The following

discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

Land Use, Recreation and Transportation

Impacts to land use, recreation and transportation have not changed since the 2017 EA and FONSI.

The recent changes to the Proposed Action would continue to have low impacts to land use, recreation and transportation.

- There would be no long-term impacts to recreation. There may be temporary noise disruptions to recreationalists at Diamond View Park, near where the backup generators would be located. The developed areas of the park, including the parking lot, basketball court, and mountain biking course would be accessible while the backup generators are near the location.

Geology and Soils

Impacts to geology and soils have not changed since the 2017 EA and FONSI. The Project would continue to have low impacts to geology and soils.

Vegetation

Impacts to vegetation have not changed substantially since the 2017 EA and FONSI. The Project would continue to have low impacts on vegetation.

- Approximately, 1,400 additional trees would be removed for the project, spread out along the entire 26-mile-long right-of-way corridor and access road network.
- Up to 30 trees would be made into habitat trees by removing the top of the trunk and girdling the base of the trunk, to create tree 'snags' which are dead, standing trees which can be used by many species for roosting and nesting.
- Approximately 115 native trees and shrubs would be replanted to mitigate effects to riparian areas.

Streams and Fish

Impacts to streams and fish have not changed substantially since the 2017 EA and FONSI. The project would continue to have low impacts on streams and fish.

- Heavy machinery would not be used to remove trees near streams. The trees stumps and adjacent understory would be left intact and erosion control measures would be utilized to prevent sedimentation of streams.
- For tree removal within 100 feet of streams with fish listed on the endangered species list, BPA would mitigate the impacts by planting native tree saplings or tall native shrubs at a 3:1 ratio for removal of trees with a diameter at breast height (dbh) of 14 inches or more, and a 2:1 ratio for removal of trees less than 14 inches dbh.

Wetlands, Floodplains and Groundwater

Impacts to wetlands, floodplains and groundwater have not changed substantially since the 2017 EA and FONSI. Impacts to floodplains and groundwater would continue to be low. The project would continue to have low to moderate impacts on wetlands

- Temporary impacts to wetlands have decreased by about 0.75 acres and permanent impacts have decreased by about 0.5 acres compared to what was reported in the 2017 EA.
- Wetland areas subject to temporary disturbance would be reseeded with wetland appropriate vegetation and monitored for one year or more, and re-seeded as necessary, until vegetation provides 70 percent or more of the density of coverage that was provided by vegetation prior to commencement of earth disturbing activities.

Wildlife

Impacts to wildlife have not changed substantially since the 2017 EA and FONSI. Impacts would continue to be low.

- BPA has completed an additional two years (2019, 2020) of full surveys for Northern spotted owl (NSO), followed by pre-construction surveys in 2021. BPA re-consulted with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in 2021; USFWS concurred with BPA's determination that the project activities may affect but are not likely to adversely affect NSO and its designated critical habitat.
- NSO pre-construction surveys would continue in 2022 and 2023. Full surveys would be conducted, if needed in 2024, for any remaining construction work areas.
- The current design would continue to minimize adverse impacts to NSO critical habitat by: minimizing the clearing of Douglas fir, Sitka spruce, Western hemlock and red cedar trees to the greatest extent possible; and topping mature conifer trees within NSO designated critical habitat when feasible.
- NSO timing restrictions and mitigation measures, as agreed upon by the USFWS, would be implemented during construction. Tree removal would occur between July 16 and February 28, to reduce potential impacts to NSOs and nesting migratory birds. No trees within NSO nest patches would be removed.
- Additional surveys were conducted for peregrine falcon and great gray owl—no occurrences of either species were documented within the project area.
- Peregrine falcon surveys would continue in 2022, following the survey protocol. If any nests are found, construction timing restrictions would be implemented.
- Western pond turtle pre-construction surveys would be conducted within 1,500 feet of known habitat areas. If nests are located, BPA would mark those locations as no work zones during the hatchling emergence time period from April to July. If any hatchlings or adult turtles are located during construction activities, they would be relocated to suitable habitat outside the work area.

Cultural Resources

Impacts to cultural resources have not changed substantially since the 2017 EA and FONSI. There would continue to be no impacts to archaeological resources and impacts to historic resources would continue to be no to low.

- The project has been designed to avoid disturbance of known archaeological resources. If ground-disturbing activities result in an inadvertent discovery of cultural resources, all activities near the find would be stopped per BPA's Inadvertent Discovery Plan. The BPA archaeologist,

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), land management agencies, and affected Tribes would be notified immediately.

Visual Quality

Impacts to visual quality have not changed substantially since the 2017 EA and FONSI. Impacts would continue to be low.

- Minor temporary visual impacts would occur where the temporary backup generators are located near the Oakridge Substation and Diamond Park.

Noise, Public Health and Safety

Impacts to noise, public health and safety have not changed substantially since the 2017 EA and FONSI. However, the backup generators would potentially increase noise impacts to the adjacent residences and Diamond View Park users. Impacts would be low for public health and safety and low to moderate for noise.

- Temporary noise impacts would occur within the vicinity of where temporary backup generators are located near the Oakridge Substation and Diamond View Park. Maximum noise levels to adjacent residences and park users, would be on par with hearing a lawnmower operated from 100 feet away.
- Conversely, the backup generators, if needed, would provide reliable electricity to customers in the area for the duration of any unplanned electrical outages at Hills Creek Dam and would ensure that public health and safety

Air Quality

Impacts to air quality have not changed substantially since the 2017 EA and FONSI. Impacts would continue to be low.

- If used, temporary backup generators would increase emissions. Air quality from backup generator use would be localized and temporary and would not result in violations of air quality standards.

Greenhouse Gases

Impacts to greenhouse gases have not changed substantially since the 2017 EA and FONSI. Impacts would continue to be low.

- Approximately, two additional acres of permanent tree removal would occur along the entire 26-mile-long right-of-way corridor and access road network. If those trees were not removed and allowed to reach full maturity, they would have a carbon sequestration potential of up to 2,766 metric tons of carbon dioxide, which is the equivalent of carbon dioxide generated by 602 passenger vehicles.
- If the backup generators are used at a 75% load capacity 24 hours per day for up to one month, they would emit a maximum of about 60 tons of carbon dioxide and 2 tons of nitrogen oxides. These greenhouse gas emissions are well below the significant emission thresholds that are regulated by the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA).
- BPA, its contractors and agents would obtain any necessary air quality permits and/or provide notification to LRAPA for the placement and potential use of backup generators.

DETERMINATION

Based on the information in the Supplemental EA, as summarized here, BPA determines that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA (42 USC 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

SCOTT G. ARMENTROUT
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