South of Tri-Cities Reinforcement Project

Finding of No Significant Impact
Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA-2291
March 2026

INTRODUCTION

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings for its proposal to construct a new substation and 18-mile-long 115-kV transmission line in Benton County, Washington (Proposed Action or Project). The Project would increase the long-term electrical capacity of the transmission system in the Tri-Cities area to address reliability concerns and anticipated increased demand for electricity.

BPA developed an environmental assessment (EA) evaluating the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. The EA was released for a 30-day public comment period in May 2025. BPA received 75 unique comments on the Draft EA (May 2025). Responses to those comments are presented in Appendix G of the Final EA. The Final EA also includes changes in response to public comments.

BPA is relying on the Final EA, and based on its analysis and public comments received, 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), as amended (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 committing to implement.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

A notification of FONSI availability will be distributed to interested parties and other potentially affected parties. The Final EA, which is incorporated into this FONSI by reference, and FONSI will be posted on BPA's project website: www.bpa.gov/nepa/south-of-tri-cities.

PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, BPA would build, operate and maintain a new 500-kV/115-kV substation west of the Tri-Cities load area in Benton County, Washington. The new Webber Canyon Substation would tie into the existing 500-kV Ashe-Marion No. 2 transmission line. The existing Ashe-Marion No. 2 transmission line would be split into two circuits, Ashe-Webber Canyon No. 1 and Webber Canyon-Marion No. 1, and structure signage would be updated accordingly.

BPA would also build and maintain a new 18-mile-long 115-kV transmission line from the Webber Canyon Substation to the existing Badger Canyon Substation in Richland, Washington. BPA considered two routing options—the Canal Option and the Railroad Option—for the Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon No. 1 transmission line as part of the Proposed Action. BPA's preferred routing option is the Railroad Option.

The Proposed Action would include installation of fiber optic cable for system communications in three locations:

- Along the entirety of the proposed Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line;

- Along 12 miles of right-of-way for the 115-kV McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 transmission line between Badger Canyon Substation and the Kennewick Radio Station; and
- Along 22 miles of right-of-way for the existing 500-kV Ashe-Marion No. 2 transmission line south of the new Webber Canyon Substation.

BPA would also build new access roads and improve existing access roads for Project construction and future operations and maintenance activities.

The Project would involve minor modifications to four existing BPA substations—Badger Canyon, Ashe, Marion and McNary—and Benton PUD's Nine Canyon Substation to improve operations as part of the reinforcement project. The improvements at most of the substations would be limited to work inside the control houses. At Badger Canyon Substation, an additional bay would be constructed within the existing rocked yard to accommodate the Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line.

The Project is estimated to start in early 2026 with construction of Webber Canyon Substation. Construction of the Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon No. 1 transmission line is estimated to start in late 2026. The Project is expected to be completed in 2028.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, BPA would not build the Webber Canyon Substation, the Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line, or modify Badger Canyon, Ashe, Marion, McNary, and Nine Canyon substations. BPA would also not install fiber optic cable along the McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 or Ashe-Marion No. 2 transmission lines or construct or improve associated access roads. The Ashe-Marion No. 2 transmission line would not be modified to interconnect at Webber Canyon Substation, and there would be no associated sign replacements on the transmission structures. The Tri-Cities load area would not have improved transmission capacity to address load growth and the reliable delivery of power would continue to be at risk from unplanned line or substation outages that could lead to a loss of power to the area during periods of peak demand.

SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

To determine whether the Proposed Action has 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 EA. The potential impacts associated with 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.

Soils and Geologic Hazards

Impacts to soils and geological hazards from the Proposed Action would be **low to moderate.**

- The Proposed Action would not impact faults or occur in areas of high liquefaction risk.
- Most of the Project area has soils that are highly susceptible to erosion. Erosion associated with ground clearing and disturbance would be reduced by using best management practices during and after construction. This would include the prompt use of erosion control materials that are appropriate for windy conditions in the Tri-Cities area (e.g., blankets and hydromulch instead of straw) and seeding of exposed soils. New and improved access roads would include water bars, drain dips and other features designed to reduce erosion and minimize impacts on soil and adjacent water bodies.

- With the Railroad Option, up to 91.8 acres of high-quality agricultural soils in the Project area would be permanently removed for the Webber Canyon Substation, transmission structures, equipment access landings and new access roads. This acreage represents a relatively small amount of high-quality agricultural soils compared to the overall quantity in Benton County (approximately 550,000 acres).
- Cropland topsoil would be separated from substrate for reuse after disturbance to minimize loss of soil productivity in areas temporarily disturbed by construction activities.

Vegetation
Impacts to vegetation from the Proposed Action would be **low.**

- Up to 104.0 acres of vegetation would be permanently removed for the installation of Project infrastructure and up to 331.9 acres of vegetation may be crushed, removed, grubbed or cut during Project construction. Most of the impacts would occur in previously-disturbed, cultivated croplands.
- No impacts to Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed or sensitive plant species are anticipated.
- With the Railroad Option, approximately 13.3 acres of Eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*), Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*) and Pacific willow (*Salix lasiandra*) would be removed within and immediately adjacent to the transmission line right-of-way (ROW).
- Temporarily impacted areas, including the areas of tree removal, would be revegetated with an appropriate native groundcover (or a landowner-requested groundcover) to prevent erosion and to limit the introduction of undesirable plant species.

Waterways and Water Quality
Impacts to waterways and water quality from the Proposed Action would be **low.**

- No permanent impacts to streams are expected from the Proposed Action.
- Up to approximately 1,200 linear feet of streams could be temporarily impacted by the Proposed Action from access road work, structure installation and removal work areas and other temporary work areas. These temporary impacts would result from increased sediment and turbidity from soil and vegetation disturbance and vehicles traveling within approximately 10 to 50 feet of the streams crossed by the Project. These areas would be restored to previous conditions to the extent practicable. Most of the streams that could be temporarily impacted are intermittent.
- New underground fiber optic cable in the Webber Canyon-Marion No. 1 ROW would cross a perennial stream, resulting in temporary impacts to approximately 130 linear feet of the stream bed and banks. The impacts would result from installing work area isolation (e.g., sand bag coffer dam) and trenching. Impacts would be minimized by working within the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in-water work window (August 1-September 30) and restoring the area to the extent practicable following construction. BPA would obtain permits, as needed, pursuant to the Clean Water Act.
- Groundwater withdrawal from a new well at Webber Canyon Substation would be minimal and a septic system and stormwater management system would treat wastewater and stormwater runoff to protect groundwater and surface waters.

Wetlands and Floodplains
Impacts to wetlands and floodplains from the Proposed Action would be **low**.

- The Proposed Action would not alter the existing floodplain elevation or reduce flood storage capacity because of the very limited amount of fill within the floodplain**.** Construction activities within 100-year floodplains would include the use of some temporary work areas, improvement of several access roads and installation of underground fiber optic cable.

- Up to 0.7 acre of delineated palustrine emergent (PEM) wetlands would be temporarily impacted by the Proposed Action as a result of structure installation and removal and other temporary work areas. Impact minimization measures, such as implementing spill prevention plans and installing fencing or flagging around wetlands to prevent encroachment on adjacent wetlands, would be implemented. After construction, these areas would be restored to their previously disturbed conditions to the extent practicable.
- A total of approximately 0.1 acre of permanent PEM wetland fill would occur to construct a new access road and a transmission structure for the Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line. The small permanent removal of wetland soils and vegetation would have a low impact on wetlands and wetland functions, and BPA would obtain permits, as needed, pursuant to the Clean Water Act.

Fish and Wildlife

Impacts to fish and wildlife from the Proposed Action would be **low to moderate.**

- No adverse effects are anticipated on ESA-listed species such as northern spotted owl or species proposed for listing, such as the Monarch butterfly. Signage change activities (the only Proposed Action component within northern spotted owl habitat) would occur outside the breeding and nesting season. No in-water activities or ground disturbing activities would occur within 2 miles of the Columbia or Yakima rivers, which provide habitat to ESA-listed fish.
- Temporary impacts to common wildlife species would be low because most of the species are mobile and would disperse from construction activities. Any incidental mortality from construction would be minor and would not have the potential to affect regional population levels.
- With the Railroad Option, approximately 13.3 acres of trees would be removed, which would reduce nesting habitat. Birds that are displaced due to tree removal from the Railroad Option could establish nests in other areas, such as the Amon Creek Natural Preserve to the northeast.
- Tree and other vegetation removal would be scheduled to occur outside of the nesting season (March 15 to August 31) in areas with supporting habitat features, when practicable, to minimize impacts to migratory birds. If tree clearing is needed during the nesting season, BPA would conduct a pre-construction nesting bird survey prior to the tree removal. If active nests are found, trees would not be removed until the young have fledged.
- Most of the Project would be built in cropland and developed areas, which are already heavily altered habitats.
- Suitable habitat for bald eagles exists within the Project area, particularly near the Columbia River. No bald or golden eagle nests are recorded within 1 mile of the Proposed Action. If an eagle nest is discovered, construction activities within 0.5 mile of the identified nest would not occur during nesting season (January through September) to minimize the chance that construction near active nests could cause parents to abandon nests, resulting in chick or egg mortality.
- The Proposed Action may impact ferruginous hawk. To minimize potential impacts, construction would not occur within 0.6 mile of an active ferruginous hawk nest during their nesting season (April 1 through August 15), or until a biological construction monitor confirms that young have fledged.
- The new Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line may impact birds, including sandhill cranes, that migrate through the Project area, by creating a collision risk if the line is not visible. BPA would install bird flight diverters where they would intersect areas with a higher risk of avian collisions, including in and around Scouten Canyon, to reduce the risk of bird strikes.
- On fiber optic wood poles and transmission structures that would have new guy wires, BPA would install yellow and orange striped guy wire guards for increased visibility to reduce bird and terrestrial animal strikes.

Cultural Resources
Impacts to cultural resources from the Proposed Action would be **low**.

- The Yakama Nation conducted a Traditional Cultural Places Study of the Area of Potential Effects (APE) and concluded that there are Traditional Cultural Places that are recommended as eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The proposed Webber Canyon Substation and the new 18-mile-long wood pole transmission line are new elements on the landscape that would introduce visual effects to a Traditional Cultural Place. This would have an adverse effect on the viewshed within the APE. No known named-places associated with the Traditional Cultural Place would be physically impacted and although the new elements would be visible from parts of the surrounding Horse Heaven Hills, their scale on the landscape and viewshed would be considered minimal given the large size of the Traditional Cultural Place, and the distance from the Horse Heaven Hills.
- Other cultural resources identified in the APE that are eligible for listing on the NRHP would be either avoided by or be located parallel to the Proposed Action. As such, the Proposed Action would not cause impacts that would adversely affect characteristics that make these resources potentially eligible for listing in the NRHP.
- BPA's Post-Review Discovery Plan would be followed during Project construction should previously unidentified cultural resources be encountered during Project construction.

Land Use and Transportation
Impacts to land use and transportation from the Proposed Action would be **low to moderate.**

- BPA purchased an 187-acre Washington Department of Natural Resources-managed property from the state of Washington. The property had previously been used for agriculture. The footprint of the facility would occupy approximately 31.4 acres, which would preclude future agricultural use of this portion of the property.
- BPA would compensate landowners at fair market value for easements on approximately 208 acres (for the Railroad Option) of land for a 100-foot-wide ROW to build and maintain the Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line. Of this total, the ROW would cross approximately 199 acres—including 55 acres owned by BNSF Railway—of private property, 5 acres of Washington DNR-managed land, 2 acres of Benton County land, and 2 acres of BLM-managed land.
- The Proposed Action would involve the permanent conversion of up to 37.5 acres (Railroad Option) of land for new access roads.
- Construction activities would temporarily limit land use within the ROW and in temporary work areas. Construction activities could temporarily disrupt or restrict access to existing croplands and interrupt agricultural uses. BPA would plan construction activities to minimize temporary disturbance, displacement of crops and interference with agricultural activities to the extent practicable and compensate landowners for crop damage.
- Long term crop cultivation within the ROW would be negotiated, with provisions for crop damages, when a new easement is purchased. Within the new easement areas, landowners could grow vegetation that is up to 4 feet tall, but would be prohibited from placing permanent structures and tall-growing vegetation that could interfere with the safe operation or maintenance of the transmission line.
- Temporary traffic delays during conductor stringing could occur where the Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line crosses Interstate 82 and local roads. The impact of temporary traffic delays would be mitigated through the preparation of traffic control plans in coordination with Benton County, City of Kennewick, and City of Richland officials and with the use of flaggers.

Recreation
Impacts to recreation from the Proposed Action would be **low to moderate.**

- The Proposed Action could temporarily disturb visitors to the southern portion of Amon Creek Natural Preserve due to dust and noise from adjacent construction activities and vehicles and helicopters accessing Badger Canyon Substation. Some temporary access closures to portions of the preserve could also disrupt use patterns for up to 4 months during construction, though access to most of the 75-acre preserve would be unchanged. Construction would occur in the daytime and sound muffling devices would be used on construction equipment to mitigate noise impacts. There would be no permanent impacts on the preserve resulting from the Proposed Action.
- Recreational use of a small portion (less than 5 percent) of the BLM- and DNR-managed parcels crossed by the Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line would be restricted for approximately 4 to 6 weeks during construction.
- Helicopters used to replace aerial markers at the top of the first structure in every line mile of the renamed Webber Canyon-Marion No. 1 transmission line would pass through public lands used for recreation. Disturbance to recreationists from noise would be limited as crews working from a helicopter would spend approximately 30 minutes at each structure. Impacts to recreationists would be negligible from crews accessing each structure on the renamed Ashe-Webber Canyon No. 1 and Webber Canyon-Marion No. 1 transmission lines as a single pickup or ATV would travel existing roads and signage would be replaced using hand tools.

Noise, Public Health and Safety
Impacts to noise, public health and safety from the Proposed Action would be **low to moderate.**

- The use of heavy equipment, increased worker vehicle trips and the intermittent use of helicopters would all contribute to construction noise. Noise-sensitive areas within 400 feet of construction sites could be exposed to temporary noise levels of 77 on the A-weighted decibel scale (dBA). Temporary noise impacts would be mitigated by using sound muffling devices on construction equipment, limiting equipment idling and only operating helicopters and heavy equipment during the day. It is estimated that a helicopter would not be in any given line mile for more than 3 hours during Project construction.
- Modeling of the 115-kV Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line indicates that the maximum anticipated corona-generated noise level at the edge of the ROW during wet weather conditions would be 14 dBA, a noise level that is not typically noticeable.
- The Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line electric field levels would be within the BPA design limits, and magnetic fields would decrease quickly with distance, approaching common ambient levels within 200 feet.
- BPA's construction contractor would implement standard fire prevention best management practices to mitigate the risk of fire ignition. This would include appropriately storing fuels and providing fire watchers at work areas where power-driven equipment is used during fire season or whenever fire danger is high. During fire season, daily state fire agency condition reports would be reviewed and required work restrictions and closures would be implemented as necessary.
- Fire retardant pole wraps would be installed on the new Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon wood transmission structures and the existing wood transmission structures on the segment of the McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 that would be strung with fiber optic cable. The fire-retardant material would enhance protection of these transmission lines in the event of a fire in the area.

Visual Quality

Impacts to visual quality from the Proposed Action would be **low to moderate.**

- The Webber Canyon Substation, which would be set back 0.4 mile from the nearest roadway, would be visible from the surrounding rural road network. The installation of new steel lattice towers would be visually consistent with the existing steel lattice towers of the Ashe-Marion No. 2 transmission line. The Project would have little to no impact on dark skies as permanent exterior lighting at the Webber Canyon Substation would be cast downwards and would only be turned on during rare occasions when operations and maintenance work occurs at night.
- Due to its location far from the Horse Heaven Hills ridgeline, the Webber Canyon Substation would not alter scenic vistas from, or views of, this land formation. Most of the Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission structures in Horse Heaven Hills would also not be visible from the more developed eastern part of the Project area because of distance and elevation changes. The line would be visible from some vantage points, however, as it descends from the Horse Heaven Hills ridgeline paralleling South Badger Canyon Road.
- The Webber Canyon-Badger Canyon transmission line would result in changes to the visual environment where the new ROW would be established. The new wood transmission structures would range in height from 45 to 115 feet tall, with most structures in the 70-to-90-foot-tall range. Due to the prevalence of muted brown colors in the landscape, the wood transmission structures would present a low to moderate contrast.
- With the Railroad Option, removal of trees and tall vegetation along East Badger Road and installation of wood transmission structures would be a noticeable visual change for surrounding residents and motorists. This change would occur within the context of a developed area with an existing roadway, railroad and distribution line in the same corridor. Over time, a shrub/scrub vegetation community is expected to resprout in this area.
- The replacement of 13 existing single-circuit structures with 11 taller double-circuit steel monopoles in the existing BPA ROW would be noticeable for sensitive viewer groups, such as recreationists in the adjacent Amon Creek Natural Preserve. This change would be minor as the overall visual character of the transmission line ROW would be similar to existing conditions.
- Fiber optic cable strung on the existing McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 transmission structures and on approximately 37-foot-tall fiber optic wood poles within the existing McNary-Badger Canyon No. 1 ROW and the renamed Webber Canyon-Marion No. 1 ROW would be relatively visually unobtrusive because of its small diameter and the existing transmission infrastructure in the ROW.

DETERMINATION

Based on the information in the 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.

Consistent with DOE's Implementing Procedures, I certify that: 1) BPA has tailored the breadth and depth of the analysis in the EA to not exceed the 75-page limit; 2) BPA considered the factors mandated by NEPA and the EA represents BPA's good-faith effort to prioritize documentation of the most important considerations required by the statute within the Congressionally mandated page limits; and 3) that this prioritization reflects BPA's expert judgment; and that any considerations addressed briefly or left unaddressed were, in BPA's judgment, comparatively not of a substantive nature that meaningfully informed the consideration of environmental effects and the resulting decision. Further, I certify that the EA represents BPA's good-faith effort to fulfill NEPA requirements within the Congressional timeline, that such effort is substantially complete;

and that, in BPA's expert opinion, the analysis contained therein is adequate to inform and reasonably explain BPA's final decision regarding the proposed action.

Finally, consistent with Department of Energy's regulations in 10 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 1022 *et seq*. (Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements), the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to any wetlands as referenced above and presented in Chapter 3 of the EA. Consistent with 10 CFR § 1022.12 and 1022.13, all impacts to floodplains from the Project have been assessed and proper notification provided. As discussed in 10 CFR § 1022.14, Chapter 2 of the South of Tri-Cities Reinforcement Project Final EA includes a description of the Project Action; the alternatives; and proposed mitigation measures to avoid and mitigate any potential impacts from these actions.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

BENJAMIN ZELINSKY

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Benjamin Zelinsky Date
Executive Vice President (Acting)
Environment, Fish and Wildlife