

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Snohomish-Bellingham Short Fiber Replacement Project

Project Manager: Cynthia Rounds, TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Whatcom County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.6 Additions and Modifications to Transmission Facilities, B4.7 Fiber Optic Cable

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to replace approximately 4.3 miles of existing fiber optic cable on its Snohomish-Bellingham fiber system along the Monroe-Custer No 1. 500 kV transmission line between Structures 71/2 and 75/4. The existing fiber optic cable in this section is damaged and functioning at a limited capacity. BPA would remove the approximately 4.3 miles of fiber optic cable and replace it with a new fiber cable and hardware assemblies. Fall protection devices would also be installed on all towers in this segment. Approximately 1,975 linear feet of existing access road would be improved by adding spot rock and ditch relief improvements. Two 50 by 200-foot landing areas would be constructed near structures 71/2 and 75/4 to accommodate the fiber optic cable pulling and tensioning equipment.

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/ Douglas Corkran

Douglas Corkran
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel February 16, 2022
Sarah T. Biegel Date
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: Snohomish-Bellingham Short Fiber Replacement Project

Project Site Description

BPA proposes to replace approximately 4.3 miles of existing fiber optic cable on its Snohomish-Bellingham fiber system along the Monroe-Custer No 1. 500 kV transmission line between Structures 71/2 and 75/4. The transmission line Right of Way (ROW) in this area crosses through heavily-forested gently rolling hills with areas on either end running within 0.25 mile of rural residential and suburbanizing areas. There are three transmission lines within the 400-foot wide cleared ROW and almost all work would take place within this ROW.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On September 18, 2021, BPA received concurrence from the Washington SHPO, and affected tribes, which include the Lummi Nation, the Nooksack Indian Tribe, the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, and the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, on the determination of no historic properties affected and no cultural resources affected by the proposed project.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Only minor roadwork would take place, which would mostly consist of spot rocking and ditch relief work. This would help reduce soil runoff and erosion. Two small (<0.25-acre) pulling and tensioning sites would be cleared at each end of the project, on flat to gently sloping terrain. No impacts to geology and soils are expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or federally-listed plant species, or critical habitat, is documented in or near the project area. The only ground disturbance would be in previously disturbed areas to refresh ditch outlets and to re-establish a previously cleared area near 71/2 and 75/4 for pulling and tensioning sites. No impacts to plants are expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No federally-listed or special-status species or critical habitat is documented in or near the project area. All work would take place within cleared ROW. Noise and visual disturbance would be minimal and temporary at each work site. No impacts to wildlife are expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The transmission line corridor crosses one fish-bearing stream, and several other streams; however, no in-water work or earthwork is planned in or near these streams. Road improvement would consist of spot rock and ditch relief which would improve water quality in any runoff that might make it into streams. No impacts to water bodies, floodplains, or fish are expected.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands were identified within the project area. All work would take place within existing road prisms or upland areas. No impacts to wetlands are expected.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Only minor amounts of ground-disturbing work are planned and runoff conditions would improve from spot rock and ditch relief work. No hazardous materials beyond common oil and gas products are associated with construction work. Spill kits would be present at all times during construction, and any spills of gas, diesel, oil, or hydraulic fluid would be cleaned up immediately and properly disposed of at a facility licensed to take such materials. No impacts to groundwater and aquifers are expected.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Replacement of the fiber optic system and associated work would not change the current land uses. There are no specially-designated areas within or adjacent to the project area. No impacts to land use or specially-designated areas are expected.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The fiber optic system would be replaced with basically the same materials and hardware. Some additional fall protection hardware would be placed on the existing steel towers, but would not be overtly visible. Overall, any visual changes would be minor and subtle. No changes to visual quality are expected.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor, fugitive dust and exhaust emissions are expected during active construction, but these would be minor and temporary. No impact to air quality is expected.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor construction equipment-related noise is expected during active construction. The completed project would not generate noise. No noise impacts are expected.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No hazardous materials would be generated by the proposed project and EMF levels would not change from existing conditions. No impacts to human health and safety are expected.

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: Adjacent landowners would be notified as required for access.

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

Signed: /s/ Douglas Corkran February 16, 2022
Douglas Corkran ECT-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist