

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Reston-Fairview 17/5 Impairment Repairs, North Bend District, Access Road Maintenance Project

Project No.: 3862

Project Manager: Randall Browning, Access Road Engineer – TFLF-TPP-3

Location: Coos County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to address impairment along the Reston-Fairview transmission line in Coos County, OR. A large rock outcropping is present under the existing transmission lines at this location and the distance from the ground to the overhead power line does not comply with the NESC standards. The proposed work is necessary to ensure ongoing safe and reliable operation of the transmission line and to maintain power delivery in the region, and to ensure the line meets current NESC and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) standards. The proposed project includes the following features:

- Removal and dispersion of rock and soil material under the existing transmission lines using a combination of blasting, rock fracturing via rock drilling and expansion foam, and/or mechanical removal. Approximate volume of removal is estimated at 40 cubic yards (CY) and would impact less than 1-acre of vegetation.
- Minor access road repairs including repairs to the existing roadway approach near the East Fork Coquille River bridge and a new access road gate.

The proposed action would involve leveling the ground surface at the location of the impairment (rock outcropping) to regulated standards by way of blasting, rock fracturing, and/or mechanical removal, followed by excavation if needed to ensure adequate transmission line conductor clearance between the transmission lines and the ground surface. All proposed work would occur within the existing, vegetated right-of-way corridor on steep forested/shrubby terrain. The impairment site would be accessed using the existing shared BPA access roads network, though equipment and personnel may be required to traverse off road to access the proposed site uphill of the existing access road. The impairment is located on privately-owned land within the BPA right of way.

Equipment used to perform this work may include a combination of the following: blasting material and equipment including noise-reducing blast mats, rock drill, dump trucks, bulldozers, backhoes, excavators, chainsaws, and work trucks. Because of the steep terrain, it is expected that most removed material would disperse downslope of the impairment sites and no mechanical redistribution would be required. Material that settles on the access road directly beneath the rock outcropping would be removed and/or side cast within the existing right of way. Less than 1-acre of vegetation is anticipated to be removed or impacted, limited to early seral mixed coniferous/deciduous trees and upland shrubs located within the area immediately surrounding the rock outcropping.

This work is proposed to be conducted during the 2018-2019 construction season. Total project activities are expected to take two to four weeks. All project activities would be limited to outside of

the nesting season for the marbled murrelet and the northern spotted owl (March 1-September 30). If prior to or during construction activities the proposed action may result in adverse impacts to resources that are not described within this categorical exclusion, coordination with the appropriate agencies and a reevaluation of effects may be warranted.

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, July 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/ John Wiley
John Wiley
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel
Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: June 14, 2018

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: Reston-Fairview 17/5 Impairment Repairs, North Bend District, Access Road Maintenance Project

Project Site Description

A site evaluation was conducted by an Otak biologist on August 16, 2016. The project area is located in rural unincorporated Coos County, OR immediately south of the town of Sitkum, OR within a low-elevation valley in the Coast Range identified as Brewster Valley, which is at the base of a broad floodplain carved by the East Fork Coquille River at an elevation of approximately 600 ft. The river valley floodplain is approximately 0.25-0.5 miles wide in the project area, characterized by low-growing pasture grass and floodplain wetlands, and is primarily managed for cattle grazing. A few widely spaced rural residences are present within the valley bottom. The valley floor is surrounded by steep forested hillslopes composed primarily of Douglas-fir trees (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) to the north and south with the nearest peaks at approximately 1,800 ft. in elevation. Land use in the project area is primarily privately held within the valley floor, and a mix of BLM-managed lands and privately held timber lands within the surrounding slopes.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Explanation:

Archaeological inspections of four Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) impairment corrections locations were conducted on March 28, 2017, by Heritage Research Associates, Inc. to locate any surface evidence of prehistoric or historical archaeological artifacts, features, or sites. No prehistoric or demonstrably historical archaeological artifacts, features, or sites were identified in or near these four project locations. These project areas have only a low potential for surface or buried archaeological materials, based on the local topography. No additional archaeological investigations are recommended for these impairment corrections projects. In the event that archaeological or historical materials are discovered during project activities, work in the immediate vicinity would stop, the area would be secured, and the SHPO and the environmental project lead would be notified. Work would not commence until the SHPO has cleared the area (pers. comm. Brian O'Donnchadha, June 9, 2016).

2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Explanation:

The project includes removal of soil and/or rock under the transmission lines in one area identified as impairment sites for a total of 40 cubic yards of removal of soil and rock. The soil is proposed to be

dispersed onsite in upland locations. Due to the steepness of the slope, soil and rock material may disperse downslope of the impairment work and no mechanical dispersal may be required. No prime farmlands have been identified within the areas proposed for cut or fill. Therefore, the proposed action would have limited impacts to geology and soils.

3. **Plants** (including federal/state special-status species)



Explanation:

Less than 1 acre of existing vegetation, primarily consisting of second-growth Douglas-fir and native upland shrubs and grass, is proposed for removal as a result of the project, primarily within the existing powerline right of way. No special-status plant species or their habitats were documented to occur within the vicinity or were observed during the field survey due to lack of suitable habitat. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on special-status plant species. The project work would impact less than 1 acre of vegetation.

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



Explanation:

An official federally-listed species list was requested from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Information, Planning and Conservation database (IPaC) on March 5, 2018. Two federally-listed or proposed listed wildlife species or their designated critical habitats under jurisdiction of the USFWS are documented to occur or have the potential to occur in the region, the marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl. Informal consultation for the marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl with US fish and Wildlife was initiated on April 26, 2018, and the concurrence was received on May 24, 2018. Suitable habitat and designated critical habitat for both of these species occurs within the project vicinity. Therefore, a Biological Assessment (BA) was prepared to address impacts to these two species and their designated critical habitats. The BA analysis concluded that within mitigating actions the project may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the northern spotted owl and the marbled murrelet. The project would have no effect on designated critical habitat for these species. Mitigation actions include BMPs to avoid or minimize impacts to these species and the surrounding environment, and include the use of noise-reducing blast mats, and a construction timing restriction to avoid the critical breeding and nesting season for these species. All project activities would be limited to outside of the combined nesting season for the marbled murrelet and the northern spotted owl (March 1-September 30).

The proposed project actions would occur within the existing powerline right of way and would impact less than 1-acre of young Douglas-fir trees, upland shrubs, and grasses as part of the impairment repairs. Any impacts to non-listed wildlife species would be limited to the immediate vegetation and soil removal sites.

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



Explanation:

The project occurs within the East Fork Coquille River watershed. The proposed project is located within the Oregon Coast Recovery Domain for listed Evolutionarily Significant Units (ESUs) and/or Distinct Population Segments (DPSs) of federally protected aquatic species. The Oregon Coast coho salmon is the

only listed ESU that occurs within this recovery domain. Oregon Coast coho salmon are documented to occur in the East Fork Coquille River; however, a natural gradient barrier and documented upstream barrier to coho salmon is present approximately 3 miles downstream of the project area (USDI 2005). Designated critical habitat for the Oregon Coast coho salmon does not occur within the project area. The upstream extent of designated critical habitat for the Oregon Coast coho salmon within the East Fork Coquille River is located approximately 3.25 miles downstream of the proposed project area at the natural gradient barrier. Minor access road repairs including repairs to the existing roadway approach near the East Fork Coquille River bridge and a new access road gate are proposed near the top of bank outside of ordinary high water. No in-water work or work that could result in impacts to any waterways is proposed. The work as proposed is exempt from Corps Section 404 and DSL permit applications. Therefore, the project would have no effect to waterbodies, floodplains, or fish.

6. Wetlands



Explanation:

No naturally occurring wetlands are present within areas proposed for ground disturbance. Work would be limited to upland environments. Therefore, the proposed action would have no impacts to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers



Explanation:

Groundwater and aquifers would not be impacted by the proposed project as the project does not include any groundwater withdraws or aquifer recharge areas. There would be no impacts to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially Designated Areas



Explanation:

No change in land use is proposed as part of the project. No specially designated land use areas were identified within the project limits. The project would not result in changes or impacts to land use or specially designated areas.

9. Visual Quality



Explanation:

There are limited residences within visual range of the work limits. The proposed project is consistent with existing roads. Proposed work would be limited in duration; therefore, there would be no impacts to visual resources.

10. Air Quality



Explanation:

The proposed project would be expected to generate some dust due to blasting. Vehicle and other equipment emissions during construction would be temporary in duration. Therefore, impacts to air

quality would be short term and limited in nature.

11. **Noise**



Explanation:

Noise generated from construction is expected to be localized and temporary in nature and is expected to peak during blasting events. Construction is expected to last approximately two to four weeks. The current level of road use is not expected to change, and no operational noise increases are expected. Measures to minimize noise resulting from blasting will be taken, including the use of blast mats. It is anticipated that any adjacent neighbors would be notified of potential blasting prior to project execution. Therefore, any noise-related impacts would be short term and limited in nature.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation:

The project would develop a site-specific health and safety plan to address any hazards during the proposed work. The proposed work is necessary to ensure ongoing safe and reliable operation of the transmission line and to maintain power delivery in the region. Project activities would not impact human health or 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, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

The Access Road Engineer would contact adjacent and potentially affected landowners prior to project construction.

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

Signed: /s/ John Wiley
John Wiley EP-4
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: June 14, 2018