

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Emergency Fiber Optic Cable and Pole Replacement near Chief Joseph Substation

Project Manager: James Hall, TPC-TPP-4

Location: Douglas County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights-of-way

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to allow Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet) to perform in-kind replacement of fire-damaged fiber optic cables, wood poles and equipment on BPA fee-owned property. The fiber optic cable was functionally destroyed during the Pearl Hill Fire near BPA's Chief Joseph Substation in 2020.

NoaNet would remove damaged fiber optic cable-related equipment and materials, including up to 10 wood pole structures, above ground conduit attached to the wood poles, small segments of conduit located below ground near the poles, and overhead fiber optic cable. Replacement poles and conduit would be installed within a 10 foot radius of the damaged poles in previously disturbed areas. Replacement fiber optic cable would be installed overhead between the new poles, pulled through the conduit, and spliced with cables in existing customer vaults.

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/ Becky Hill

Becky Hill
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange December 7, 2020

Katey C. Grange 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: Emergency Fiber Optic Cable and Pole Replacement near Chief Joseph Substation

Project Site Description

The project area is located in the Columbia Plateau of southeastern Washington, about 1 mile southeast of the town of Bridgeport. Project activities would occur on BPA fee-owned property within 700 feet of the southern fence line of BPA's Chief Joseph Substation. The Columbia River and Chief Joseph Dam are located about 0.5 miles north of the project area. Low densities of irrigated agriculture crops and crop circles are located near the populated areas of this region.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The BPA archaeologist initiated an emergency Section 106 consultation process with the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation on November 24, 2020. DAHP and Colville representatives concurred with the Area of Potential Effect and the request for an expedited timeline due to the emergency situation. The BPA archaeologist performed the survey and submitted the results via email to the Colville and DAHP on December 2, 2020. Both DAHP concurred with the BPA archaeologist's determination of No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties on December 4, 2020.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event of inadvertent discovery of cultural or historic resources during project activities, all work would immediately stop until the resources can be evaluated by BPA archaeologists and additional consultations with the appropriate parties are completed as necessary.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The fire burned and destroyed nearly all vegetation in the project area, which has increased the risk of soil erosion. Work would temporarily disturb and move soils, but disturbance areas would be stabilized after project work.

Notes:

- All disturbed soils would be stabilized with straw or other acceptable erosion and sediment control methods, and seeded with a native seed mix after project completion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The fire burned and nearly destroyed all above ground vegetation in the project area. No known special-status plant species were documented in the project area prior to the fire and virtually no undamaged vegetation exists in the project area currently; therefore, no impacts to special-status plant species would result from project activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Pearl Hill Fire has disrupted the local ecology and wildlife. Wildlife such as burrowing small mammals and hunting raptors are likely still present in the project area. Columbia sharp-tailed grouse (state-listed as endangered) have been detected within 1,000 feet of the project historically.

Construction in the project area would likely disturb wildlife in the area due to the presence of humans and additional noise. However, the disturbance would be temporary and is not scheduled to occur during typical wildlife breeding seasons. Therefore, little to no impacts to special-status wildlife species would result from project activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is not located in a floodplain, or within 1,000 feet of a water body. No impacts to water bodies, floodplains or fish would occur as a result of this project.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is not located within 1,000 feet of a wetland. Therefore, no impacts to wetlands would occur as a result of this project.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation to replace poles and conduit would not occur at depths that would impact or intersect aquifers and/or groundwater. Therefore, no impacts to aquifers and/or groundwater would occur as a result of this project.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Current land use is substation and utility right-of-way. The project would not change current land use. No specially-designated areas are present in the project area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In-kind pole and equipment replacements would occur. Therefore, no change to visual quality would occur as a result of this project.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary dust may occur as a result of the project's construction activities.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary construction noise may occur as a result of the project's activities.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The purpose of the project is to remedy currently unsafe conditions. No impacts to human health and safety would occur as a result of this project.

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: Project activities would occur on BPA-fee owned property. Close coordination to implement this emergency project has occurred between BPA and NoaNet.

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

Signed: /s/ Becky Hill

Becky Hill, ECT-4
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC

December 7, 2020

Date