

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Salem – Albany No. 2 Structure 3/4 Urgent Replacement Project

PP&A No.: 4618

Project Manager: Lisa Casey, TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Polk County, OR

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance; B4.6 Additions and Modifications to Transmission Facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to relocate structure 3/4 of the Salem – Albany No. 2 115 kV transmission line in Polk County, OR. In late January 2021, BPA's Transmission Line Maintenance crews were alerted to a slope failure and landslide that was impacting structure 3/4 of the Salem – Albany No. 2 transmission line. Upon inspection, the landslide had destabilized and displaced the three-pole transmission structure. The structure's guy wires were slackened, the cross arm was severely bent, and the structure itself was displaced approximately 5 to 6 feet vertically, and 2 feet laterally. The line was later de-energized due to the risk of imminent failure.

BPA is proposing urgent action to relocate structure 3/4 away from the active slide zone. The new structure location would be located approximately 75 feet to the west, ahead-on-line, which remains geologically stable ground. In order to facilitate the movement of the structure, BPA would obtain additional transmission easement, remove approximately 15 mature oak and fir trees, clear lower growing vegetation, and install a new wood three-pole structure along with associated guy anchors, hardware and conductor. Access road and landing work would likely be minimal due to the existing, paved access to the new proposed structure location, however some grading and placement of rock would be necessary to safely remove the old structure. The old structure 3/4 would be removed and disposed. Disturbed soils would be seeded and stabilized to the extent possible. Equipment would include a transmission line bucket truck, excavator, bulldozer, and light duty trucks.

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/ Aaron Siemers

Aaron Siemers

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange

Date: March 5, 2021

Katey C. Grange

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: Salem – Albany No. 2 Structure 3/4 Urgent Replacement Project

Project Site Description

The project is located in the Willamette Valley of west central Oregon, near the city of Salem, approximately one mile northwest of the Willamette River. The area is within the Valley Foothills ecoregion of the Willamette Valley, characterized by rolling foothills and low mountains, interspersed with streams and rivers that drain to the Willamette River. The western portion of the valley, where the project is located, is generally drier, and historically the home of oak and madrone woodlands, wetlands, and native grassland prairies. Today the area is marked by rural residential developments, pastures, timberland, and orchards.

At the project site, BPA's structure 3/4 is located in a rural residential area on a small hill that has undergone a recent localized landslide. Immediately to the east, the Salem-Albany No. 2 transmission line spans two small creeks; McNary Creek, a small fish stream (coastal cutthroat trout), and a tributary to McNary Creek. These waterways are located in the 3/3 to 3/4 transmission line span, over 300 feet east from the current structure 3/4 location. In addition to these waterway, a small spring is emerging from the toe of the landslide, approximately 50 feet southeast of the 3/4 structure location. During a January 2021 site visit, BPA environmental staff observed a small patch of rush plants in the Juncaceae family within the disturbed soils in the toe of the slide. Rush plants are wetland indicator plants, but do not confirm the presence of wetland.

Vegetation in the project area consists of trees such as white oak and Douglas fir, as well as blackberry, sword fern, and native and invasive grasses. The underlying private landowner has relatively recently cut and cleared trees and vegetation adjacent to and within the transmission right-of-way (ROW), leaving bare ground. In addition to removing vegetation and cutting trees, significant excavation was conducted at the foot of the hill where structure 3/4 is currently situated. Bedrock, what appears to be a loosely consolidated sandstone, is exposed, and large boulders, apparently excavated from the hill, are staged nearby.

The Salem-Albany No. 2 115 kV transmission line is a wood pole line that was rebuilt in 2016. In support of the rebuild project, the project area was surveyed for sensitive wildlife, plants, wetlands, and waterbodies.

The legal description for the work area is listed below:

Township		Range		Section	County	Ownership
7	S	4	W	23	Polk, OR	Private
7	S	4	W	24	Polk, OR	Private

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Oregon Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde on February 9, 2021. BPA received responses from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO Case No. 21-0279) on February 10, 2021 and formal responses from the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde on February 11, 2021. On March 1, 2021, BPA Contract Archaeologist, Katherine L. Tipton, conducted a site preparation visit to discuss actions for the emergency project.

On March 2, 2021, the consulting parties were notified of the tree removal actions to create adequate and safe clearance for the new wood pole structure.

Additional information about future stabilization work has been provided when available to consulting parties, BPA continues to consult on the proposed work.

Notes:

- BPA cultural resources staff would continue to review and intermittently monitor construction activity and continue correspondence with consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA's urgent structure replacement project would have some minor impacts to the local geology and soils. For instance, re-grading and excavation would be required to access the area and install the new wood poles at the new 3/4 structure location. However, those impacts would be relatively minor.

The proposed urgent structure replacement project is due to the impacts of a local landslide on the Salem – Albany No. 2 structure 3/4. The hillside where the structure is currently located is no longer stable, likely due to the recent excavation by the landowner, the presence of the small spring, heavy winter rains, or a combination of factors. The landslide will likely progress until a new equilibrium is achieved. As part of the urgent action, BPA proposes to relocate the structure out of the area that is in short to mid-term risk of continued slide. Once the immediate risk is alleviated, BPA would assess the need for longer term stabilization of the hillside, for example, construction of a retaining wall at the foot of the hill, or other measure.

Notes:

- Upon construction completion, BPA would stabilize the construction area with standard erosion and sediment control BMPs, such as seed and straw, or hydro-mulch.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA's urgent construction action that would result in ground disturbance and vegetation crushing would have some limited impacts to the remaining, undisturbed vegetation in the project area. In addition, approximately 15 mature oak and fir trees would need to be removed in order to establish the new transmission easement and to maintain appropriate safety clearances.

BPA obtained an official species list for U.S. Fish and Wildlife on March 4, 2021. Bradshaw's Desert-parsley, Kincaid's Lupine, Nelson's Checker-mallow, water howellia, and Willamette Daisy are listed as threatened or endangered in Polk County. As a part of the 2016 rebuild project, BPA conducted sensitive plant surveys of the transmission right-of-way. No special status plants were identified in the project area. BPA has conducted an effects determination, and the project would have no effect on these species.

Notes:

- Disturbed soils would be seeded with a native seed mix and mulched upon project completion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction on the project would likely disturb wildlife in the area due to the presence of humans and additional noise. However, disturbance would be temporary.

BPA obtained a species list for the project area from the US Dept. of Fish and Wildlife on March 4, 2021. An effects determination was conducted for marbled murrelet, northern spotted owl, streaked horned lark, yellow-billed cuckoo, and Fender's blue butterfly. As a part of the 2016 rebuild project, BPA conducted sensitive wildlife surveys of the transmission right-of-way. No special status species or habitats were identified in the project area. BPA has conducted an effects determination of the urgent action upon threatened and endangered species, and the project would have no effect on these species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The waterways in the general project area would not be impacted by proposed construction activities. The spring is likely ephemeral, and flows in response to seasonal rain events. BPA would avoid this spring to the extent possible during removal of the existing structure, and utilize erosion and sediment control best management practices, such as straw mulch, to limit additional sedimentation into this non-jurisdictional waterway.

Notes:

- Utilize erosion and sediment control best management practices to minimize potential impacts to waterway.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, BPA would avoid the location with wetland indicator plants due to the unconsolidated loose soils of the slide. No construction activity is planned in this area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation for pole installation or landing construction would not occur at depths that would likely intercept groundwater or aquifers. The small spring that was observed in the toe of the landslide near structure 3/4 would be avoided, and impacts to surface water quality would be minimized by implementing erosion and sediment control best management practices during construction, and revegetating disturbed soils upon project completion.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is not located in a specially-designated area. Existing land use, which is predominantly rural residential, would not be affected by proposed project activities.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No with

Explanation: The existing visual profile, which consists of a cleared transmission easement, would be maintained, however some additional large, mature trees would need to be removed in order to establish the new right-of-way. The general project area has recently undergone significant tree and vegetation clearing by the underlying private landowners.

Notes:

- Disturbed soils would be seeded and mulched upon project completion.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some dust may be generated due to construction traffic and general construction activities. The project would have minor, temporary impacts to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some noise may be generated due to construction traffic and general construction activities. However, any noise generated would be temporary.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The current status of structure 3/4 poses a threat to human health and safety due to its compromised state. The structure is a risk for collapse, which could impact the adjacent structures ahead-on-line and back-on-line as well. The proposed action would restore normal, safe operations to the Salem-Albany No. 2 transmission line.

Notes:

- BPA transmission line maintenance and vegetation management crews would implement best safety practices, follow established safety guidelines, and identify all job hazards prior to work beginning each day.

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: BPA would continue to coordinate all proposed construction actions with the underlying landowners and other stakeholders.

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

Signed: /s/ Aaron Siemers Date: March 5, 2021
Aaron Siemers, EPR-4
Environmental Protection Specialist