

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Lower Monumental-Ashe Access Road Repair

Project Manager: Donna Martin, TELF-TPP-3

Location: Franklin County, Washington

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

Description of the Proposed Action:

BPA proposes to improve, reconstruct, and reroute a portion of the existing access road along the Lower Monumental-Ashe 500kV transmission line in Franklin County, WA. The existing access road has been damaged by flooding and is in poor condition with drainage problems and sinkholes present throughout, especially in the steeper sections. The damage is currently preventing BPA's maintenance crews from accessing several towers, including a tower which connects a span of conductors with lighted airway markers across the Snake River. The access road is mostly located on private property, with some State Parks land. The access road is approximately two miles long, with about 1,000 feet of washed out roadway.

Approximately 1,000 feet of access road would be slightly relocated to higher ground to prevent future washouts. The remaining sections of road would be regraded, and surfaced with rock where needed. Drainage features such as ditches, water bars, and culvert cross drains would be installed to reduce erosion and flood damage. A gate would be placed at the NW end of the access road near where it intersects with the County road. Construction is estimated to take 2 weeks and would be completed in the summer of 2022.

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 April 4, 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: Lower Monumental-Ashe Access Road Repair

Project Site Description

The approximately two-mile long access road project is located in southeastern Washington, in arid shrub-steppe lands. The first mile of the access road crosses and parallels dryland wheat fields while the second mile runs through a canyon and up the side of a steep ridge. Vegetation within the project area consists of grasses and small shrubs and the area was previously disturbed by agricultural operations and livestock grazing. The nearest residence or commercial area is nearly two miles away from the project area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On February 25, 2022, the Washington DAHP concurred with BPA's determination of No Historic Properties Affected. No other consulting parties commented on the project. An inadvertent discovery plan would be in place during construction. No significant impacts to historic and cultural resources are expected.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would improve the erosive conditions that currently exist within the access road area. No significant impacts to geology and soils are expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no rare plants within the heavily-disturbed project area. Weed species exist throughout the project area; however, the access road project would not significantly change conditions within the project area that would increase weed presence or promote the spread of weed species. No significant impacts to plants are expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Common wildlife species exist within the project area, but no special-status or endangered species were identified in or near the project area. Construction may temporarily disturb these common species, but no significant 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 project area is in an upland area. A portion of the access road runs through a dry wash. Water is only present in the wash during storms or heavy snow melt. The project area sits directly above the Snake River, but no impacts to it or fish within it are expected. Erosion from the access road would be reduced. No significant impacts to water bodies, floodplains, or fish are expected.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is in an arid upland and dry wash. There are no wetlands present in or near the project area. No impacts to wetlands are expected.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is within an arid, hilly upland above the Snake River Canyon. Only minimal surface construction work would take place. No significant impact to groundwater or aquifers is expected.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The existing land use, including the State Parks property, is dryland wheat farming and livestock grazing. No changes to land use are proposed. No impacts to land use or specially-designated areas are expected.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is nearly two miles away from the nearest residence and along a very lightly traveled county road. Some minor visual changes from the improved access roads would occur, but would only be visible from the county road. No significant impact to visual quality is expected.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary and minor fugitive dust and vehicle emissions would occur during construction. No long-term changes to air quality would occur. No significant impact to air quality is expected from the project.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary minor noise from equipment and vehicles would occur during construction. No significant impact from noise is expected.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No hazardous materials except common fuel and oil products would be used during construction of the project. No impact to human health and safety is 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: Underlying property owners have been involved with the project and would be notified about when construction would occur.

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 April 4, 2022
Douglas Corkran – ECT-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist