

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Transmission Line Marker Ball Replacement Phase 4: Group B

**Project Manager:** Dianne Bonner - TEPL-TPP-1

**Location:** Ferry County, Washington

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.3 Routine Maintenance; B1.9 Airway Safety Markings and Painting; B3.2 Aviation activities

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace marker balls between 18/1 and 18/2 on the Keller Tap to Grand Coulee-Okanogan No.2 in Ferry County, Washington. As part of BPA's wildfire mitigation effort, BPA noted that plastic and fiberglass marker balls can fail at their attachment point on conductor or ground wire, potentially igniting and falling to the ground to start wildfires. BPA would like to mitigate wildfire risk by completing replacements of the marker balls identified for Phase 4 before the 2023 wildfire season. Phase 4 construction, Group B, is currently planned for April 2023.

BPA proposes to replace 9 marker balls on Keller Tap to Grand Coulee-Okanogan No.2 utilizing Human External Cargo (HEC), or a crew suspended from a helicopter. Helicopter landing zones (LZ) are necessary for helicopters to land and take off, as well as for staging crew and equipment. The Confederated Colville Tribes (CCT) approved the existing parking lot at the Keller substation as a landing zone for this portion of the project. Access road improvements are not anticipated at this time. Large flatbed trucks or similar vehicles would be used to haul materials and equipment but use of loaders, excavators, or other heavy equipment is not anticipated.

BPA may utilize either helicopters or drones to examine marker balls prior to replacement and to inspect marker balls following replacement for proper installation.

**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/ Anthony Gibson*

Anthony Gibson

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

*/s/ Katey Grange*

Katey C. Grange      Date: March 29, 2023

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:** Transmission Line Marker Ball Replacement Phase 4: Group B

## **Project Site Description**

The project is located in Northeastern Washington. The project area is mostly wooded on mountainous hillsides and spans one creek, Meadow Creek. Work would occur on land managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and owned by the Confederate Colville Tribe (CCT). See Table 1 below for Township, Range, Section Number, and County information.

**Table 1. Township, Range, Section Number, and County Information**

Line Corridor	Span(s)	Township, Range, Section	WA Counties
Keller Tap to Grand Coulee-Okanogan No. 2	18/1-18/2	T03N, R32E, SEC25	Ferry

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Following a review of the potential project impacts to cultural resources, BPA has determined that this undertaking would result in No Historic Properties Affected or No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties.

The BPA Historian review has shown that marker ball replacement is considered normal, in-kind repair work and would not adversely affect the National Register eligibility of the transmission line.

BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Colville Tribes (CCT) History/Archaeology Program on April 19, 2022, via email, to discuss the Area of Potential Effect and need for a possible cultural resources survey. The CCT History Archaeology Program responded that there are no historic properties, that a cultural resources survey would not be needed, and that the CCT approved of use of this area for a landing zone (email from Rebecca Gordon to Anna Neuzil, April 21, 2022).

Under federal law, BPA has the responsibility to protect cultural resources that are inadvertently discovered on federally owned land or during federally funded projects. Should cultural resources be encountered during project implementation, all activity would be immediately discontinued and BPA cultural resource staff would be contacted. BPA's cultural resources staff would work with the CCT and the Washington SHPO to address the inadvertent discovery as quickly as possible.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance is anticipated for this project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minimal disturbance to vegetation is anticipated. Vegetation may be crushed in those locations where equipment would be accessing marker balls. No ESA-listed plant species in project location. No impacts to state or other sensitive species are anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In general, the project would have minimal impacts to wildlife and habitat related to temporary disturbance associated with elevated noise and human presence. The project would have no effect to ESA-listed wildlife species. The project would have no impacts to state-listed and other sensitive species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbing activities in any stream, creek, or other waterbody along the project and no riparian vegetation would be impacted. The project would have no effect to ESA-listed fish species.

Notes: Appropriately stocked spill response kits would be located on vehicles and landing zones used on this project.

### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbing activities. No wetlands identified in the project.

### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to ground water or aquifers are anticipated due to the lack of ground disturbance.

Notes: Appropriately stocked spill response kits would be located on vehicles, other equipment, fly yards used on this project.

### **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur and project activities would not impact existing land uses, and there would not be any recreational or operational disruptions.

### **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have a minimal impact to visual quality. Replacement marker balls would be similar to the existing marker balls, and consistent with other marker balls along the transmission line.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of vehicular emissions and dust may occur temporarily during construction.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary construction noise from construction activities and helicopter use would occur during daylight hours. The operational noise of the transmission line would not change.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to human health and safety are anticipated.

### **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 realty, cultural resource specialist, and environment staff have coordinated the proposed project activities with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Confederated Colville Tribes (CCT).

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

Signed: /s/ Anthony Gibson  
Anthony Gibson – EPI-4  
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: March 29, 2023