

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Ponderosa Substation Breaker and Transformer Reconfiguration

**Project No.:** G0539

**Project Manager:** Rasha Kroonen - TEPS

**Location:** Crook County, Oregon

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.3 Routine maintenance, B1.7 Electronic Equipment, B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities.

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to reconfigure the current layout of breakers and transformers at BPA's Ponderosa 230kV substation located in Crook County, OR. The reconfiguration of the Ponderosa substation layout would facilitate an additional 600 MW of electrical load input from Ponderosa Solar LLC's proposed solar generating facility that would be located to the north of the Ponderosa substation. BPA would build 660 feet of the new Ponderosa-Hoss No. 1 230kV transmission line that terminates into bay 11 at BPA's Ponderosa substation. Post construction, BPA would own and operate the last 660 feet of the new 230 kV transmission line, which would be comprised of three wood pole "H-frame" structures. BPA would procure approximately 1.5 acres of new property from the adjacent private landowner to the north of BPA's fee-owned parcel associated with the Ponderosa substation. The new BPA parcel would be needed for the BPA-owned section of the new Ponderosa – Hoss No. 1 230 kV transmission line right-of-way (ROW). The proposed new BPA parcel is located to the northwest of the existing fee-owned parcel associated with the Ponderosa Substation. A new 24-foot wide by 670-foot long gravel access road would be built on the new BPA ROW connecting the existing access road system along the north side of the Ponderosa substation with the new Ponderosa – Hoss No. 1 structures. The remainder of the one mile long Ponderosa-Hoss No. 1 230 kV transmission line would be build and operated by Ponderosa Solar LLC.

In order to facilitate the additional load, BPA proposes to develop the currently vacant bay 12 inside Ponderosa substation. BPA would procure and install three new 230kV breakers, voltage transformers, and surge arrestors inside the Ponderosa Substation yard. The Ponderosa – Corral No. 1 230kV line that currently occupies bay 13 would be re-routed and terminated into the new bay 12. Additionally, to provide the required clearance for routing the new Ponderosa – Hoss No. 1 230 kVline the existing 80 –foot tall wood single pole structures 1/1 and 1/2 of the Ponderosa – Corral No. 1 230 kV line would be replaced with new 147-foot tall steel monopole structures, located within 90 feet to the north of the current structure locations. The existing wood structures would be cut about 2 feet below grade and the remaining pole would be left buried in place.

The required RAS and SCADA equipment would be installed inside the Ponderosa substation control house. The breakers located inside the Ponderosa Solar collector station would be connected to a RAS scheme within the control enclosure at the collector station. New data PMUs

would be installed for each of the collector station's transformers in the control enclosure at the collector station. Two new fiber optic communications cables needed for RAS and SCADA control would be routed from the Ponderosa substation to four new communication vaults (CV) located near the new Ponderosa –Corral No. 1 structures 1/1 and 1/2. The communication fibers would be routed from the Ponderosa substation control house to the new communications vaults through two subgrade conduits. The conduit would be installed in two 2-foot wide by 3-foot deep trenches originating from the Ponderosa substation control house. The trench path the first conduit would be approximately 830-feet long, routed from the control house northwest through the substation yard around the breakers and transformers associated with bays 11 and 12 then exiting the yard to the vaults located approximately 155 feet from the existing fence line near Ponderosa –Corral No. 1 structure 1/1. The trench path for the second conduit would be approximately 950-feet long, routed northeast from the control house exiting the eastern fence line and running adjacent northwest to the new vaults located approximately 135 feet from the northeast corner of the substation yard near Ponderosa – Corral No. 1 structure 1/2. After the fiber installation, the trenches would be backfilled matching the existing grade and topography.

Staging of equipment and materials would be inside the substation and on the existing gravel parking lot located to the east of the access road that runs along the north of side of Ponderosa substation.

**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/ Nicholas Johnson

Nicholas Johnson  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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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:** Ponderosa Substation Breaker and Transformer Reconfiguration

## **Project Site Description**

The project location is located in Crook County, Oregon, approximately 7 miles southwest of Prineville. The project area is in Section 33 of Township 15 South, Range 15 East. The project area is surrounded by vacant scrub brush plots that were formerly used for cattle grazing. A PGE substation is located immediately to the southeast of the BPA substation. Several single-family residences are located approximately 1.5 miles west of the project area. There are several solar generation facilities located within 5 miles of the project area. Vegetation near the substation and proposed new right-of-way and access roads consists of many grasses and shrubs that are endemic to the eastern cascades slopes and foothills ecoregion.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On September 27, 2022, BPA initiated Section 106 consultation with Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon and Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). BPA did not receive any responses to the initiation letters within 30 days. A contract archaeologist firm under the direction of BPA archeology staff proceeded with background research and an archaeological survey of the project area. BPA determined that the proposed action would not adversely affect cultural resources and that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would have no adverse effect to historic properties. BPA sent the survey report and determination letters to all of the consulting parties on February 22, 2023. To date, no responses have been received.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minimal soil disturbance would occur. The three new transmission line structures would be installed using an auger and removed soil would be used to backfill the new structures. For the transmission structure replacement, concrete footings would be installed within 5 to 10 feet of the existing location. Trenching for the communication fiber would be dug by hand. All excavated soils would be spread evenly near the new pole locations and used to back fill the old pole locations. Grading would occur to install the new access road and structure landings. Any excess fill would be disposed of in the appropriate manner.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some permanent vegetation loss would occur where the new access road would be installed. The location does not have any Federal or state special-status species present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project location is within and adjacent to an existing transmission right-of-way and substation, which does not have high quality habitat. Some species may temporarily avoid the area during construction. There are no Federal or special-status species or habitats that would be impacted by the project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no water bodies, floodplains, or fish present in the project area; therefore, there would be no effects to these resources.

### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands present within the project area; therefore, there would be no effects to wetlands.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground excavation for the project would be minimal and would not affect groundwater or aquifers.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BPA project would not result in any land use changes. There are no specially designated areas near the project location

### **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The new structures would be similar in height to the surrounding transmission line structures. The project would not result in any substantial changes to the visual quality of the area.

### **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of dust and vehicle emissions would occur during construction; however, there would be no substantial changes to air quality during or after construction.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction noise would be temporary and would occur during daylight hours. Operational noise would not change substantially.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project activities, all standard safety protocols would be followed. 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: 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 staff would notify the underlying landowner of the proposed land purchase and the adjacent landowners of the construction schedule. No other notifications would be required for the project

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

Signed: /s/ Nicholas Johnson May 25, 2023  
Nicholas Johnson Date  
Environmental Protection Specialist