

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Aerial Patrols of Bonneville Power Administration Transmission Line Corridors through 2028

Project Manager: Multiple

Location: Multiple locations in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Montana, California, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance; B3.2 Aviation activities.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to conduct aerial patrols using either fixed wing or helicopter aircraft along BPA operated high voltage transmission line corridors throughout the BPA service territory. Aircraft could be equipped with laser imaging, detection, and ranging (LiDAR) sensor equipment along with other remote imagery sensors. BPA uses LiDAR and imagery data from aerial patrols to determine the health of transmission line equipment along with identifying any potential hazards from transmission line obstructions (encroachments), transmission line clearance (impairments), or vegetation as required by North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) regulations.

BPA would conduct patrols as daytime flight missions to scan transmission corridors at approximately 100 feet above ground level. Ingress and egress into transmission line corridors would be conducted at altitudes that are in accordance with applicable flight rules for the airspace within which the flights are located. Aircrew would avoid overflying restricted airspace and would comply with the local airspace procedures. Flight operations would begin and terminate from airport facilities.

Aircrews would not overfly habitat for sensitive wildlife species during noise-sensitive periods. Crews would not conduct field landings or fly below 50 feet above ground level. Flight missions and routes would be reviewed by the BPA NEPA lead to ensure that the activities fall within the range of those described in this Categorical Exclusion prior to initiating work. Site specific conservation measures would be identified for each flight mission and those measures would be implemented in addition to any other applicable local, state, and Federal laws and regulations.

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:

Katey 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: Aerial Patrols of Bonneville Power Administration Transmission Line Corridors through 2028

Project Site Description

Existing transmission rights-of-ways located throughout BPA's service territory, including Idaho, Oregon, Washington, western Montana and small parts of eastern Montana, California, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA Historian and Archaeologist reviewed proposed activities and determined that these types of activities do not have the potential to cause effects to historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities would not require ground-disturbing activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed actions would not have any impacts to plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Flight operations would not impact Federal or special-status species or habitats. Flight operations would avoid designated critical habitat areas and abide by timing restrictions for ESA-listed species that have associated breeding or nesting periods. There are several state-sensitive bird species located within and near the projected flight areas that could be disrupted during flight operations. However, any disruptions to the state-sensitive bird species would be temporary and brief as the planned flight operations are single transient flights 100-feet above ground level, which does not involve any off airport landings, prolonged loitering, or hovering over the transmission corridors. Some local wildlife species

may temporarily flush from or avoid the area during flight operations but would likely return after the completion of the brief flight operations timeline. Only minor, temporary impact to special-status wildlife species is expected.

Notes:

- Aircraft would not be operated within the disturbance limits of known or suspected populations of special-status wildlife species (e.g., ESA-listed, state-listed or state-sensitive, migratory birds, bald and golden eagles) without implementing avoidance and minimization measures (e.g., daily and seasonal timing restrictions, disturbance buffers, and additional species-specific measures, as required). These avoidance and minimization measures would be included in pre-flight risk assessments, as necessary.
- In the unlikely event that the operation of aircraft inadvertently has an effect on wildlife species, BPA would require that the patrol mission be halted until a BPA environmental lead can assess the effects in consultation with appropriate wildlife management agencies.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed actions would not impact water bodies, floodplains, or fish present in the project area.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no planned field landings; therefore, no impacts would occur to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project actions 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.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not result in any changes to the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of dust and vehicle emissions during flight operations would be expected; however, there would be no substantial changes to air quality during or after the flight missions.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Aircraft flight noise would be temporary and would occur during daylight hours.

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: There are known areas of contamination throughout the BPA service territory. However, the project would not affect those areas as there are no planned activities on the ground. Flight operations would not include field landings and the altitude of flight would not cause soil disturbance from aircraft operations.

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 staff would coordinate with the appropriate parties to obtain all flight clearances prior to conducting the flight operations. No other notifications would be required for the flight operations.

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 November 20, 2023
Nicholas Johnson Date
Environmental Protection Specialist