

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Marker Ball Replacements - Phase 5

**PP&A No.:** 5016

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

**Location:** Northern Idaho and Eastern 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 remove and replace approximately 213 marker balls on three transmission lines in Kootenai, Nez Perce, and Shoshone counties, Idaho; and Spokane 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. Existing marker balls are yellow, orange, or white in color, and are 24-36 inches in diameter. New marker balls would be the same colors, but are all 36 inches in diameter, constructed of metal, and have an improved clamping system to better secure them to transmission lines. Construction is proposed for June and July 2024.

BPA proposes to replace marker balls on the Taft-Bell No. 1, Dworshak-Taft No.1, and Hatwai-Dworshak No. 1 transmission lines utilizing Human External Cargo (HEC) - a two-person crew suspended from a helicopter. Up to 13 helicopter landing zones are necessary for helicopters to land and take off, refuel, and stage crew and equipment. Flatbed trucks, trailers, or similar vehicles would be used to haul materials and equipment. Grading, vegetation removal, or other potentially ground-disturbing work would not be performed at helicopter landing zones or associated access roads.

**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/ Oden Jahn*

Oden W. Jahn

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

*/s/ Sarah T. Biegel*

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer      Date: May 24, 2024

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:** Marker Ball Replacements - Phase 5

### Project Site Description

The proposed action is located in Kootenai, Nez Perce, and Shoshone counties, Idaho; and Spokane County, Washington. The proposed action would occur within, and adjacent to, BPA's right-of-way (ROW) and access roads for select spans of the Taft – Bell No. 1, Dworshak – Taft No. 1, and Hatwai – Dworshak No. 1 high voltage transmission lines (Table 1).

The ROW in the project area measures between 105 and 150 feet wide, and the marker ball spans range between 541 feet to 3,949 feet in length. Elevations of the structures in the project area range from 1,159 feet to 4,870 feet above sea level; however, flight paths and access roads that would be used for this project cross over terrain up to 5,875 feet near Dworshak-Taft 74/4-75/1 and Marcus Cook Peak. Ten marker ball spans occur on United States Forest Service (USFS) - Idaho Panhandle National Forest (Table 1). The remainder occur on other public and private lands.

**Table 1- Marker Ball Spans**

Operating Name	SPAN	MB Qty	Span Length (feet)	Structure or LZ	Ground Elevation (feet above sea level)	State, Township, Range, Section	County
Hatwai-Dworshak No. 1	8/4-9/1	4	3007	8/4	1363	IDT36NR3WSEC6	Nez Perce
				9/1	1159	IDT36NR3WSEC6	
				HDLZ1		IDT36NR4WSEC12	
Dworshak-Taft No. 1	59/4-60/1	15	3005	59/4	2821	IDT45NR3ESEC13	Shoshone
				60/1	2734	IDT45NR3ESEC12	
				DTLZ1		IDT45NR3ESEC12	
				DTLZ2		IDT45NR3ESEC14	
Dworshak-Taft No. 1	65/1-65/2	14	2821	65/1	3423	IDT45NR4ESEC3	Shoshone
				65/2	3432	IDT45NR4ESEC10	
				DTLZ3		IDT45NR4ESEC3	
Dworshak-Taft No. 1	68/3-68/4	13	2700	68/3	4213	IDT46NR4ESEC26	Shoshone
				68/4	4044	IDT46NR4ESEC23	
				DTLZ3		IDT45NR4ESEC3	
Dworshak-Taft No. 1	70/4-71/1	19	3849	70/4	4085	IDT46NR5ESEC13	Shoshone
				71/1	3997	IDT46NR5ESEC7	

				DTLZ3		IDT45NR4ESEC3	
Dworshak-Taft No. 1	74/4-75/1	18	3574	74/4	4704	IDT47NR5ESEC33	Shoshone
				75/1	4769	IDT47NR5ESEC33	
				DTLZ3		IDT45NR4ESEC3	
Taft-Bell No. 1	13/4-14/1	20	3949	13/4	4870	IDT48NR5ESEC18	Shoshone
				14/1	3770	IDT48NR5ESEC17	
				TBLZ2		IDT48NR5ESEC17	
Taft-Bell No. 1	15/4-16/1	16	3384	15/4	4489	IDT48NR4ESEC7	Shoshone
				16/1	3954	IDT48NR4ESEC12	
				TBLZ1		IDT48NR4ESEC13	
Taft-Bell No. 1	16/3-16/4	8	1855	16/3	3685	IDT48NR4ESEC12	Shoshone
				16/4	3736	IDT48NR4ESEC12	
				TBLZ1		IDT48NR4ESEC13	
Taft-Bell No. 1	28/1-29/1	18	3599	28/1	3036	IDT50NR3ESEC27	Shoshone
				29/1	3147	IDT50NR3ESEC27	
				TBLZ3		IDT50NR3ESEC30	
Taft-Bell No. 1	33/3-33/4	5	1175	33/3	2642	IDT50NR2ESEC13	Shoshone
				33/4	2529	IDT50NR2ESEC14	
				TBLZ3		IDT50NR3ESEC30	
Taft-Bell No. 1	43/1-43/2	12	2475	43/1	3411	IDT51NR1ESEC28	Kootenai
				43/2	3287	IDT51NR1ESEC29	
				TBLZ4		IDT51NR1ESEC29	
Taft-Bell No. 1	51/4-52/1	9	1891	51/4	3102	IDT51NR1WSEC6	Kootenai
				52/1	3208	IDT51NR1WSEC6	
				TBLZ5		IDT52NR1WSEC29	
Taft-Bell No. 1	56/3-57/1	12	2525	56/3	3581	IDT52NR2WSEC22	Kootenai
				57/1	3546	IDT52NR2WSEC21	
				TBLZ5		IDT52NR1WSEC29	
Taft-Bell No. 1	59/1-59/2	16	3249	59/1	3044	IDT52NR3WSEC13	Kootenai
				59/2	3341	IDT52NR3WSEC13	
				TBLZ6		IDT52NR3WSEC18	
Taft-Bell No. 1	66/2-67/1	7	803	66/2	2281	IDT52NR4WSEC14	Kootenai
				67/1	2276	IDT52NR4WSEC14	
				TBLZ7		IDT52NR4WSEC15	
Taft-Bell No. 1	97/5-98/1	3	1248	97/5	2028	WAT26NR43ESEC15	Spokane
				98/1	1960	WAT26NR43ESEC15	
				TBLZ8ALT		WAT26NR43ESEC15	
Taft-Bell No. 1	98/1-98/2	4	541	98/1	1960	WAT26NR43ESEC15	Spokane
				98/2	1965	WAT26NR43ESEC15	
				TBLZ8ALT		WAT26NR43ESEC15	
				TBLZ9		WAT26NR43ESEC21	

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Pursuant to 36 CFR 800.2(c), on August 24, 2023, BPA initiated Section 106 consultation for the Area of Potential Effects with the Coeur D'Alene Tribe, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Kalispel Tribe of Indians, Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, Nez Perce Tribe, Spokane Tribe of Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), and U.S. Forest Service Idaho Panhandle National Forest. BPA's contractor completed a cultural resources survey of the proposed helicopter landing zones. No cultural resources were identified in these areas. BPA sent copies of survey reports and BPA's determination of **No Historic Properties Affected** to the Consulting Parties on March 22, 2024. Concurrence was received from DAHP, Idaho SHPO, and the Spokane Tribe of Indians. USFS Idaho Panhandle National Forest archaeologists also agreed with the report findings and determination. No other responses were received within 30 days.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project activities are not expected to result in soil disturbances.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Whitebark pine are federally listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and have the potential to be present in high-elevation project areas. There are no other Federal/state special-status plant species or habitats known to occur in the project area. Vegetation may be crushed in landing zones or where equipment would be staged for marker ball replacements but this is a temporary impact. There would be no effect to ESA-listed plant species, and no impacts to state or other sensitive species are anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and North American wolverine are potentially present in the project area. Project activities may temporarily disturb individual grizzly bears, lynx, or wolverines if present in the project area at the time of these activities. Therefore, BPA determined that the proposed project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect grizzly bears, Canada lynx, and North American wolverine. The US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with these determinations in a letter dated May 15, 2024. Additionally, non-sensitive bird species may utilize the trees adjacent to the ROW corridor for nesting and rearing, until the young have fledged.

Notes: The following conservation measures would be implemented during this project:

- For all Dworshak-Taft No. 1 and Taft-Bell No. 1 spans in Idaho, helicopters would transit from the municipal airport to the work area at an elevation greater than 500 meters (1,640 feet) Above Ground Level (AGL).

- For all Taft-Bell No. 1 spans in Idaho, marker ball replacement activities would be sequenced to start in the west and progress to the east to minimize the potential of disturbance to grizzly bears that may be in or near the action area. In the unlikely event that weather, or other conditions beyond the control of BPA or its contractor, makes the proposed sequencing unfeasible, sites may be skipped and returned to later, while preserving the west to east progression to the extent practicable.
- Project activities would take place outside of the denning season (October 15 to March 16) to avoid disturbance to denning grizzly bears.
- BPA personnel and contractors performing activities in the ROW and away from their vehicles would be instructed to carry bear spray and know how to properly use it to deter attacking wildlife.
- Overnight camping would not take place during project activities.
- BPA would report grizzly bear sightings to USFWS within 24 hours, or as quickly as practicable, and include date, time, location, photos, direction of travel, presence of a radio collar, and any other descriptive information that might be useful in identifying the bear.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project area spans several canyons containing significant waterbodies, such as the Potlatch River, North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River, the Saint Joe River, Canyon Creek, Steamboat Creek, Leiberg Creek, Barney Creek, Little North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River, East Fork Hayden Creek, North Fork Hayden Creek, and several smaller creeks. Some of the waterbodies are habitat for ESA-listed bull trout. Project activities are not expected to impair the physical or biological functions of fish-bearing or non-fish-bearing water bodies or floodplains in the project area.

Notes: The following conservation measures would be implemented during this project:

- Helicopter landing zones would be the only areas where fueling would occur in the project area. Standard BMPs would be implemented during fueling operations and include:
  - Fueling would not occur within 150 feet of a water resource or conveyance (e.g., a lake, pond, river, stream, wetland, canal, ditch, etc.).
  - When possible, fueling would occur on a flat and impermeable surface.
  - Spill management and fire suppression equipment would be immediately available.
  - Fueling would only be conducted by trained and qualified personnel in accordance with governing laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.
  - Workers performing fueling would receive training in proper fueling operations and spill response.
  - Fueling equipment would have a kill switch that can immediately stop the fueling operation.
  - The flow rate of fueling equipment would not exceed 10 gallons per minute.
  - While fueling, the operator would cup an absorbent pad under the nozzle and wait 30 seconds after fueling has stopped to allow all fuel to leave the nozzle. When returning from the helicopter to the fueling truck, the operator would hold the cupped nozzle upwards.
  - Should any fuel be spilled, the soil would be excavated and placed in a plastic bag or container for proper handling and disposal.

## 6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No wetlands have been identified in the project area; however, wetlands may be found adjacent to the waterbodies listed above. Project activities would not result in soil

disturbances within wetlands; however, refueling activities have the potential to contaminate wetlands that may be adjacent to landing zones.

Notes: The measures described above would minimize the potential for the proposed project to impact wetlands.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Refueling activities have the potential to impact groundwater or aquifers.

Notes: The measures described above would minimize the potential for the proposed project to impact groundwater or aquifers.

## **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; however, there may be temporary disruptions to recreational users where project activities would take place on public lands.

## **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: The proposed project would utilize conventional equipment powered by petroleum fuels. Exhaust would temporarily impact air quality in the immediate vicinity while the equipment is in operation. Additionally, dust may be created by helicopter operations. Dust creation would be isolated to small areas and in short duration. Water may be used for dust suppression in some areas. Baseline air quality conditions are expected to return shortly after project activities cease.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project would have noise associated with use of a small helicopter. During project activities, work would take place during daylight hours, for approximately eight hours per day. The project would be relatively short in duration – no more than two days at a single transmission line span. The operational noise of the transmission line would not change.

## **12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Taft-Bell No. 1 Spans 13/4-14/1, 15/4-16/1, 16/3-16/4, and their landing zones are within the extent of contamination for the EPA's Bunker Hill Mining and Metallurgical Complex Superfund Site. BPA's contractor would develop a site-specific health and safety

plan to address any hazards that may be encountered during the proposed work, including potential exposure to residual mining-related contaminants.

### **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: Taft-Bell No. 1 Spans 13/4-14/1, 15/4-16/1, 16/3-16/4, and their landing zones are within the extent of contamination for the EPA's Bunker Hill Mining and Metallurgical Complex Superfund Site, and residual mining-related contaminants may preexist in the environment in these locations. Suppressing the dust with water is expected to minimize the potential for these contaminants to contribute towards uncontrolled or unpermitted releases.

**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 coordinated with the USFS Idaho Panhandle National Forest and received the appropriate authorization on June 20, 2023. Non-Federal landowners were notified of the project on October 10, 2023.



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

Signed: /s/ Oden Jahn      Date: May 24, 2024  
Oden W. Jahn  
Physical Scientist (Environmental)