

Categorical Exclusion Determination
Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Noxon Libby No. 1 Fiber Short Segment Replacement

PP&A No.: 5069

Project Manager: Tina Edwards – TEPL-CSB-2

Location: Sanders County, Montana

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: The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace 6 miles of fiber cable on the Noxon Libby No. 1 transmission line from structure 1/1 to structure 6/1 in Sanders County, MT. The primary method for removing the existing fiber and installing the new fiber would be performed by helicopter and standard line maintenance vehicles such as bucket trucks and utility trucks. BPA would utilize two locations for landing zones for intermittent, short-term helicopter use. There is no access roadwork required for this project. There are no ground-disturbing activities anticipated for this project.

BPA would use landing zones; one is between structures 2/3 and 2/4 in a rocked gravel pit and the second is south of structure 6/1 on an existing rocked area used to store lumber and materials by the landowner. Helicopter use for this project would be at low altitude (<500 m AGL), intermittent, and short duration. BPA would utilize four locations to set up pulling and tensioning equipment; the first would be north of structure 1/2 on an existing access road, the second would be to the north of structure 3/5 on existing access road, the third would be to the south of structure 3/5 on existing access road, and the fourth site would be to the south of structure 6/1 on the existing access road. The Line Crew would then secure the fiber in the towers, splice the new fiber at tower 3/5 and inside existing fiber vaults at 1/2 and 6/1, and then remove the retired fiber. There is existing right-of-way access to this structure and adequate landing space to conduct the work.

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/ Julianna Martin

Julianna Martin

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: August 29, 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: Noxon Libby No. 1 Fiber Short Segment Replacement

Project Site Description:

The project site is located in Sanders County, Montana. The proposed action for structures 1/1 to 6/1 is located south of Noxon, MT and the Cabinet Mountains of western Montana, adjacent to Montana Highway 200 and Noxon Rapids Dam and Reservoir. The region is characterized by forested mountains of mixed coniferous trees dominated by Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine. The project area for structures 1/1-1/5 and 1/8-6/1 is located on privately-owned land, while the project area for structure 1/6 and 1/7 is within the Kootenai National Forest. Land use surrounding the project area ranges from woodland, private timber, and rural residential, to public conservation and timber lands of the National Forest.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, and the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on April 12, 2024. BPA conducted a cultural resources background research review as well as intensive pedestrian survey and subsurface testing of the APE. Background research indicated that two built environment resources were located within the APE; the Noxon-Libby No. 1 Transmission Line and the Noxon Rapids Dam and District. The proposed project would not impact the integrity of the Noxon-Libby No. 1 Transmission Line, nor would it impact any contributing elements to the Noxon Rapids Dam and District (as the project is merely located at the edge of its boundaries). No archaeological resources were identified as a result of the pedestrian survey and subsurface testing. Therefore, BPA sent out a determination letter noting the determination of no adverse effects to historic properties to the consulting parties on July 18, 2024. The Montana SHPO concurred with the determination on August 18, 2024. Work may proceed as planned. If any Post-Review cultural resources are identified during construction, crews are required to stop work within 30 meters of the find and must call the cultural resources lead for appropriate next steps.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All activities would be above ground and only minor ground disturbance is anticipated. All work sites with disturbed soil would be stabilized with a native erosion control seed mix and weed-free straw mulch. Standard construction erosion control measures would be utilized as necessary to prevent soil erosion and migration off site.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status plants are present. Project activities would not substantially alter existing plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Local wildlife could be disturbed by project activities, assuming they are present in the project area. However, disturbance would be temporary, and the surrounding landscape provides ample habitat and cover for displaced animals.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on May 1, 2023. BPA emailed the proposed project and potential effects to protected species to the Montana USFWS field staff on July 10, 2024. Due to potential effects to species protected under the ESA, on July 17, 2024, BPA developed a Biological Assessment for the project and submitted it to USFWS with a request for informal consultation under Section 7 of the ESA. BPA determined that the project “May affect, but is not likely to adversely affect” grizzly bear. BPA determined that the project would have “No effect” on yellow-billed cuckoo, Canada lynx, North American wolverine, bull trout, and candidate species monarch butterfly. After technical review and informal consultation, on July 26, 2024 BPA received a Letter of Concurrence from USFWS, concurring with BPA’s determination.

BPA also consulted with Kootenai National Forest staff on the project activities, and no special-status, non-ESA listed species were identified in the proposed project area for additional protection.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No in-water work is proposed for this project, most of the work being done via helicopter. Standard construction erosion control measures would be utilized as necessary to ensure sediment and other contaminants do not enter bodies of water; therefore, water bodies, floodplains, and fish would not be affected by the proposed project activities.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No work is proposed in wetlands for this project, most of the work being done via helicopter.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project activities are not expected to impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not result in permanent changes or impacts on land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be performed within existing transmission system rights-of-way and access road and would be consistent with the existing viewshed.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Exhaust and dust from helicopter and construction equipment may temporarily reduce air quality in the immediate project area.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

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

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA personnel would have a site-specific best management practices to address any hazards during the proposed work. The proposed work is necessary to ensure ongoing safe and reliable operation of the transmission system and to maintain power delivery in the region.

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 notified private landowners and USFS. No concerns were expressed.

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

Signed: /s/ Julianna Martin

Date: August 29, 2024

Julianna Martin

Physical Scientist (Environmental)