

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: New Sun Oak Springs Interconnection and Easement Acquisition (*Update to previous CX issued on April 4, 2019*)

Project No.: G0524

Project Manager: Rasha Kroonen—TEPS-TPP-1

Location: Wasco County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to interconnect a 20-megawatt (MW) solar development project to BPA's electrical transmission system. The solar developer is New Sun Energy Transmission Company, LLC. The point of interconnection would be at the Tygh Valley NWC tap to Maupin-Tygh Valley-1 transmission line in Wasco County, Oregon.

This is an update to the previous CX that was issued on April 4, 2019. This CX has been updated to reflect the addition of one landing at the tap location, increasing the landings from two to three total. Further, an additional plant survey was conducted on June 13, 2024, to assess the current population size of a state-listed species, Tygh Valley milkvetch.

BPA's proposed action to support the interconnection request consists mainly of installing a tap facility to connect the customer's transmission line to BPA's grid, and construction of a new radio tower to support communication requirements.

For the tap installation, an existing 68-foot-tall H-frame structure and a 33-foot-tall disconnect switch structure owned by BPA would be removed. A 55-foot-tall H-frame structure owned by Northern Wasco People's Utility District would also be removed. Three new H-frame structures (45-, 65-, and 75-foot-tall, respectively), along with two new disconnect switch structures (33-foot-tall) would be installed within 150 feet north of the removed H-frame and disconnect switch structure. Blasting may be used to break up bedrock below the surface of the new pole locations. Excavation for the new poles would be to a depth of 10 feet and approximately 5 feet for the switches. The excavated soil would be used to backfill around the newly set poles. Two guy wires would be attached to each of the two tallest H-frame structures.

The existing access road at the tap location would be extended 200 feet to the north and would be 14-foot-wide. Three new 30-foot by 30-foot landings would be installed at the base of the tap structures.

BPA proposes to acquire an additional 0.8 acres of right-of-way easement rights for the new tap structures and additional access road.

Replacement poles and switches, and equipment vehicles would be staged southeast of the tap location.

A construction trailer and smaller materials would be staged on the southern side of Maupin 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.

Beth Belanger
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment: 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.

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Project Site Description

The project areas are in Wasco County, Oregon, near the town of Maupin and the unincorporated community of Tygh Valley.

The proposed tap location is in Section 17, Township 4 South, Range 14 East. The site is in an agricultural field, located just over a half mile west of the Deschutes River National Scenic Area. The following native vegetation occurs at the site in uncultivated areas: sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), rabbit brush (*Ericameria nauseosa*), juniper (*Juniperus* sp.), mullen (*Verbascum thapsus*), yarrow (*Achillia millefolium*), fiddleneck (*Amsinckia* sp.) and wild onion (*Allium* sp.). Additionally, Tygh Valley milkvetch (*Astragalus tyghensis*), an Oregon state-listed threatened plant and endemic species, also occurs at this location. Non-native plants at the site include crane's bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), medusa head grass (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*) and Russian thistle (*Salsola kali*).

The proposed radio tower location is in Section 27, Township 4 South, Range 14 East. The site is at BPA's Maupin Substation, located 2.3 miles east of the Deschutes River. The radio tower would be installed in an area that is devoid of vegetation.

The nearest waterbody to the tap location is Oak Springs Creek, located approximately 800-feet to the southeast. No wetlands or waterbodies are in, or near, the project area. At Maupin Substation, an unnamed stream is located 0.25 miles west of the site. There are no wetlands at either location.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On June 26, 2018, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs (CTWS) and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) were initially notified of the proposed project and provided with a map of the proposed area of potential effect (APE). After completing an archaeological survey of the project area, BPA submitted a no effect determination letter on October 2, 2018, to the consulting parties. On December 4, 2018, SHPO concurred with BPA's determination. The CTWS did not respond to the determination letter.

On September 3, 2024, a BPA archaeologist reviewed the minor changes to the project scope and determined that all the proposed work would occur within the boundaries of the existing APE and that no further archaeological surveys or additional consultation was necessary.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Soils would be excavated and graded to relocate the existing poles and to add the three switch structures; and to install the new radio tower at the Maupin Substation. The maximum depth of soil disturbance for the new poles and radio tower foundation would be ten feet.

During construction, all appropriate Best Management Practices would be used to implement site-specific erosion and sediment control. All disturbed areas would be stabilized and re-seeded.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Tygh Valley milkvetch, an Oregon state-listed endemic species, occurs at the tap location. The population is concentrated along the southerly portion of the existing access road, and west of the project location, closer to the edge of the rimrock. Several individuals are growing in the work area. Up to five individual plants would be impacted during construction. There are no other special-status plants at either project location. Invasive weeds, such as Russian thistle and knapweed (*Centaurea* spp.), would be appropriately controlled prior to construction.

Notes:

- Construction vehicles and equipment would be required to be clean and free of weed plant material and weed seeds, before entering the project location.
- Prior to construction, BPA would mark the identified plants, educate workers about avoidance, and avoid impacts to the plants as much as possible.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Two golden eagle nests have been documented within 0.5 to 1 mile from the project location. There are no other special-status species at the project locations; therefore, there would be no impacts to other wildlife.

Notes:

- No construction work would occur between January 1 and July 15, to avoid the golden eagle's critical nesting period.
- The EP lead would verify that the eaglets have fledged the nest before construction begins.
- Between July 16 and August 31, rock blasting would only occur in the middle part of the day (2 hours after sunrise and 2 hours before sunset) and blasting mats would be used to decrease noise levels.

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 in or near the project areas; therefore, no impacts would occur.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project locations and adjacent areas do not have wetlands; therefore, no impacts would occur.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is unlikely to impact groundwater and aquifers. The maximum depth of disturbance for the project is 10-feet-deep. The nearest Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 10 Sole Source Aquifer is approximately 70 miles northwest of the project location. Spill prevention measures would be utilized during construction activities. The project would not provide a pathway for groundwater contamination.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the land use at either location. The new tap structure is located outside of the Deschutes River National Scenic Area. Therefore, there would be no impacts to either land use or specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The new infrastructure at both locations would be consistent with the current use as a transmission corridor and electrical substation. There would be no substantial change to the visual quality at either location.

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 significant changes to air quality during or after construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The nearest residences are 0.5 to 0.75 miles away from the project location. Construction noise would be temporary and would occur during daylight hours. If rock blasting is necessary, it would be of short duration and would occur mid-day. Additionally, blasting mats would be utilized to muffle noise impacts. Overall, operation noise would not change.

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 and 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 would work closely with the landowners to provide adequate notification of construction timing and potential control of invasive plants. In addition, BPA would obtain the necessary easement for the proposed switch and tap structures, prior to construction commencing.

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

Signed:

Beth Belanger
Environmental Protection Specialist