

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** North Bonneville - Midway No. 1 Access Road Stability Improvements

**Project No.:** 20200369

**Project Manager:** Ryan Tanner – TERR-3

**Location:** Skamania County, WA

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights-of-way.

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to allow American Forest Management (AFM) to make improvements to four existing access roads that were damaged in 2023 along BPA fee-owned North Bonneville - Midway No 1 230kVA transmission line right-of-way (ROW) from operating mile 18 tower 4 to mile 19 tower 2.

To support planning, AFM would conduct geotechnical test excavations to help determine road construction methods. AFM would excavate approximately seven test pits using a track-hoe with a 2-foot-wide bucket. The pits would be 2 feet wide and 8-12 feet long, and likely 2-4 feet deep, although some pits may be up to 12 feet deep if loose soils are encountered. Test pits would be backfilled with the excavated soils.

After completing the geotechnical testing, the access road prisms would be improved as needed to improve the slope stability of existing road prisms. Improvements could include adding additional gravel to road prisms and soil stability measures, such as, slope flattening, reconstruction or buttressing and slope reinforcement with soil-nail stabilization or small retaining walls. Where topography and room permit, slopes would be excavated and flattened to a stable angle. In areas where the slope is too steep or lacks sufficient space to be reconstructed, the use of reinforcements would be used. Imported, compacted, granular fill would likely be used. For slightly smaller footprint areas, rip rap may also be used. It is also possible that reinforced soil or grouted riprap be used to achieve steeper slopes within a smaller disturbance area. Disturbed areas would be treated with erosion control fabric and reseeded with native seed mix. Slope correction would occur on the up and downslope prisms including their aprons. Total ground disturbance would be less than 1.5 acres. Equipment used would be dump trucks, a small track-hoe, road grader and pickup trucks.

**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.

Nicholas Johnson  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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:** North Bonneville - Midway No. 1 Access Road Stability Improvements

## **Project Site Description**

The project is located in Skamania County, 8 miles northwest of Stevenson, Washington within Section 21, Township 3 North, Range 9 East. The existing access road connects the North Bonneville - Midway No 1. 230-kV corridor and the county road Bunker Keys. The project is bordered by public lands managed by the US Forest Service to the west and is located approximately 0.5 mile north of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. AFM owns the parcels to the north, east and south of the project area. The project area is surrounded by undeveloped timber stands that have been previously logged within the past 50 -75 years. The topography of the project area varies between 5 to 30 percent slopes.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA Archaeologist made a No Historic Properties Affected determination and sent to the Washington State Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation (DAHP), Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, and the Nez Perce Tribe on August 21, 2024. DAHP concurred on August 22, 2024. No other responses were received within 30 days.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some ground disturbance associated with stabilization of existing road prisms and geotechnical sampling. The total area of ground disturbance is estimated to be less than a half-acre. In the long term, the road stabilization measures would help prevent future soil instability near the access roads.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No listed plant species or habitats occur in the project location. Additional fill and stabilization materials would be sourced from a weed free facility. Local vegetation consisting of mostly grasses in the areas of Geotech investigation could be disturbed during Geotech studies. Areas outside of the existing road prisms would be re-seeded with a native seed mix post construction activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project could briefly impact local wildlife during the two-day construction window, and intermittently during stability improvement actions over a three-day period. The project area is adjacent to the designated Critical Habitat for Northern Spotted Owl located 500 feet to the east and north of the project area. There are no known Northern Owl nesting sites within 0.5 mile of the project area. The proposed improvement actions and access road use timeline would have no effect on the Northern Spotted Owl or designated Critical Habitat. No other special-status species or designated habitat is present within the project area.

Notes:

- Road construction would occur outside the Northern Spotted Owl critical nesting period of March 15-September 30.
- If crews are delayed access due to inclement weather, they would resume activities between October 1, 2024, and March 14, 2025.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water bodies, floodplains, or fish present within or nearby to the project area. There would be no impact to these resources as a result of this project.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No known wetlands are present within the vicinity of the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbance would be limited to surface grading and would not impact groundwater resources.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project does not change the main current use of the high voltage power line right-of-way.

#### **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project is located within the existing transmission right-of-way corridor. The proposed use would not alter the visual aspect of the corridor.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of dust and emissions from equipment and vehicles would occur during construction activities. This would occur within a relatively short duration.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No sustained noise impacts would occur. Intermittent noise is associated with the construction activities for road improvements and brief vehicle noise when traveling the road post-completion.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed project actions do not adversely impact human health and safety. Construction activities would follow applicable health and safety standards.

### **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: Actions would occur on BPA fee-owned property. BPA reality would coordinate any notifications to nearby landowners. No other coordination would be required.

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

Signed:

Nicholas Johnson  
Environmental Protection Specialist