Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: The Dalles Substation Expansion and Updates

Project No.: P02699

Project Manager: Mike Henjum, TEPS-TPP-1

Location: Wasco County, OR

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities; B1.15 Support Buildings; B1.19 Microwave, meteorological, and radio towers;

Description of the Proposed Action: To improve reliability and facilitate maintenance access, BPA proposes to expand and make related communication and equipment service upgrades at three substations: The Dalles substation, the Big Eddy Substation, and the Discovery Substation. The Dalles Substation is in Section 32, Township 2 North, Range 13 East. Big Eddy Substation is located 5 miles to the east of The Dalles Substation at Section 31, Township 2 North, Range 14 East. The Discovery Substation is located approximately 1.5 miles north of The Dalles Substation at Section 28, Township 2 North, Range 13 East.

The Dalles Substation construction actions would include adding a new bus tie; removal of high side fuses, rod gaps, and exterior control and facility structures; installation and replacement of switches, breakers, disconnect switches, and transformers; replacement of rigid risers with seismic risers; and installation of concrete footing mitigations to select footings within the yard to address cracking and surface degradation. Also, a new exterior modular substation control house, upgraded station service, and new substation entrance service roads with new parking area and security entrance gates would be constructed. The existing sewer drain field would be removed along with the construction of a new storm water retention pond. Other improvements would include the removal and replacement of the existing 80-foot-tall communication tower and antenna with a 25 foot by 25 foot concrete foundation to support a new 60-foot-tall monopole structure, and the installation of new communication equipment. The substation yard would be expanded by approximately 0.6 acres to facilitate this work. The expansion area would be rocked and landscaped and enclosed with a new substation yard fence.

The Big Eddy Substation construction actions would involve removing the existing three-legged 28-foot-tall communication structure and communications antenna located on the NE side of the control house at the Starr Complex and replacing it with a new 40-foot-tall monopole structure on the existing concrete slab located east and adjacent to the control house and north the Big Eddy 230kV storage facility. Upgrades to the new monopole structure would involve the installation of new communication equipment, and updated Relay-to-Relay Transfer Trip (RRTT) relays to communicate with the new communication structure at The Dalles substation.

The Discovery Substation actions would involve replacing communication circuits for transfer trip and update transfer trip equipment for Discovery Substation to The Dalles Substation.

The Federal Columbia River Transmission System Act directs BPA to construct, acquire, operate, maintain, repair, relocate, and replace the transmission system, including facilities and structures appurtenant thereto. (16 United States Code [U.S.C] § 838i(b)). The Administrator is further charged with maintaining electrical stability and reliability, selling transmission and interconnection services, and providing service to BPA's customers. (16 U.S.C § 838b(b-d)). The Administrator is also authorized to conduct electrical research, development, experimentation, tests, and investigation related to construction, operation, and maintenance of transmission systems and facilities. (16 U.S.C § 838i(b)(3)).

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; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024), 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. [1]

SYLAS DAUGHTREY

Digitally signed by SYLAS DAUGHTREY
Date: 2025.05.01 13:36:24 -07'00'

Sylas Daughtrey
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

KATEY GRANGE

Digitally signed by KATEY GRANGE
Date: 2025.05.01 15:05:59 -07'00'

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

[1] BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to DOE's own regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021, to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

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: The Dalles Substation Expansion and Updates

Project Site Description

The project sites are located at BPA's The Dalles Substation, the Big Eddy Substation 230-kV Starr Complex control house, and the Discovery Substation. All substation locations are in Wasco County, OR. All project activities would occur within the fenced-in area of the substations, inside the existing control house and facilities, or outside in previously disturbed graveled and paved areas. A small area of irrigated vegetation is present within The Dalles Substation project site. No waterbodies or wetlands are present within the footprints of the three project sites. The Dalles and Big Eddy Substations are both located 0.75 miles south of the Columbia River while Interstate 84 (I-84) is located approximately 0.5 miles north of both project areas of The Dalles and Big Eddy. Discovery Substation is located approximately 0.5 miles east of I-84 and 0.25 miles west from the Columbia River. Land use surrounding The Dalles Substation primarily consists of residential areas with industrial businesses and large retail stores to the northwest of the substation. The Big Eddy control house is located adjacent to a series of rural roads and a steeply sloped area that runs downwards to Fifteen Mile Creek which is located approximately 0.25 miles north of the project site. Land use surrounding the Big Eddy project site is primarily agricultural fields and residential areas with dispersed trees, shrubs, and various grasses throughout the surrounding area. The Discovery Substation is surrounded by industrial buildings and facilities to the east and south, undeveloped scrub grass land and rocky outcrops to the west, as well as Chenoweth Creek which is located approximately 500 feet north of the substation yard and runs west-east.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Pursuant to its responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and implementing regulations 36 CFR 800, BPA initiated consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) case number 24-0969, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Nez Perce Tribe on March 18, 2025. BPA has previously determined that the Big Eddy Substation is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places with Oregon SHPO concurrence. The Dalles Substation and The Big Eddy 230-kV Control House is a contributing resource.

The Oregon SHPO concurred with the Area of Potential Effect and the finding of no adverse effect to historic properties on April 16, 2025. No other responses were received within 30 days. In the unlikely event that cultural resources or historic properties are inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

Historical properties and cultural resources have determined no adverse effect for the proposed project.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would require soil disturbance due to the removal of existing trees, shrubs, and vegetation at the Dalles Substation. Soils would be graded and excavated to facilitate the installation of project components, including the expansion of the substation yard. New landscaping within the substation facility would include the addition of native soils and plantings, large rock, and adding crushed rock to the surrounding substation yard and expanded fenced-in area.

No soil disturbance is proposed at the Big Eddy or Discovery substations.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Dalles substation work would involve the removal of the surrounding grass vegetation, two sycamore trees (Plantanus occidetalis), one locust tree (Robinia Psuedoacacia), and approximately 50 feet of arborvitae (Thuja occidetalis). The project work at the Dalles Substation would disturb established non-native vegetation that would be removed. The surrounding construction areas at the proposed Big Eddy and Discovery substations are graveled or paved with little to no vegetation. There are no federal or state special-status species or their habitats that would be impacted from the project. Therefore, the proposed project would have no effect on special-status plant species or habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special status or listed wildlife species are documented in the project areas. Minor and temporary disturbance to common wildlife species would occur from elevated noise and human presence during construction. However, wildlife species that may be present in the area would likely be habituated to this level of human activity given surrounding land uses. There would be no direct impacts to wildlife within the project vicinity due to work occurring inside the enclosed substation. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status species near the project site, and no suitable special status species habitat is present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All three substation construction sites are located beyond 0.25 miles of the Columbia River and are not located within the footprint of the project sites. Therefore, the proposed project would not impact water bodies and floodplains and would have no effect on special-status fish species or habitats.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetland areas are present within or near the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not intersect any groundwater or aquifers. Standard construction BMPs would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The substations are located within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA) in a designated Urban Area. Because the project would be located in a designated Urban Area, the provisions in the CRGNSA management plan do not apply. There would be no change in the current transmission substation facility land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work at the Discovery and Big Eddy substations would occur in the existing substation yards and would have little to no visual change. The work proposed at the Discovery substation would be virtually indistinguishable from current visual quality conditions. The Big Eddy substation would involve a change in the communication tower type and overall height. The removal of the 3-leg 28-foot-tall vertical communication tower would be replaced by a 40-foot-tall monopole structure and would be an improvement to visual quality.

The expanded yard, new control house, and taller communication structure at the Dalles substation would introduce a noticeable change to the visual quality of the site, but this would be minor as they are small changes relative to the overall size of the site and the visual changes would be consistent with the existing substation infrastructure. The removal of the existing vegetation and three existing trees on the west side and entrance to the substation would be noticeable, but these visual changes to the existing vegetation would be countered with the addition of new landscaping and native plantings to improve the visual environment from the west side of the substation and entrance.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not create any new permanent sources of air emissions. Temporary fugitive dust and construction equipment emissions would occur during construction and may briefly affect the immediate construction area. Overall, impacts to air quality would be low.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not create any new permanent sources of noise. Temporary noise emissions would occur during construction which could affect nearby residents during the day during the construction period. Overall impacts to noise would be moderate.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new hazardous conditions would be created by the proposed project. Upgrades and installation of substation and communication equipment is expected to improve the safety profile of the transmission, communications, and substations. Overall, impacts to human health and safety would be low.

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: All construction would take place on BPA fee-owned properties. BPA would be responsible for any surrounding landowner notification or coordination if necessary.

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

Signed: SYLAS DAUGHTREY

Digitally signed by SYLAS DAUGHTREY
Date: 2025.05.01 14:58:43 -07'00'

Sylas Daughtrey
Environmental Protection Specialist