

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Schultz-Wautoma No. 1 Urgent Static Repair

**PP&A No.:** 6838

**Project Manager:** Brent Thompson – TFWF-Schultz

**Location:** Kittitas, Grant and Benton Counties WA

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.3 Routine Maintenance

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to complete urgent maintenance on the Schultz-Wautoma No. 1 transmission line as part of BPA's wildfire mitigation effort. The work would include repair of static pins (the attachment of the overhead ground wire to the transmission structure) on 288 structures across approximately 62 transmission line miles. The work would be done using helicopters to transport workers between landing zones and the work areas using the human external cargo method. This entails the helicopter transporting two line workers from the landing zone to the top of the first structure where they will remove the static pin and replace with new. The helicopter would return to the landing zone where it would pick up two additional line workers and transport them to the next structure. The helicopter then executes a series of leapfrog flights with the two teams until arriving at the next landing zone where the process repeats. Eleven helicopter landing zones would be used to perform the work as well as the use of a fueling vehicle at the landing zones. 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.<sup>1</sup>

/s/ Justin Carr

Justin Carr

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange

Katey C. Grange

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: May 27, 2025

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

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<sup>1</sup> 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:** Schultz-Wautoma No. 1 Urgent Static Repair

### **Project Site Description**

The proposed action is located in Kittitas, Grant, and Benton counties, Washington. The proposed action would occur within and adjacent to BPA's right-of-way (ROW) as well as fifteen identified helicopter landing zones nearby the ROW.

The ROW in the project area measures between 180 and 265 feet wide. Elevations of the structures in the proposed project area range from 500 to 2600 feet above sea level. The transmission line ROW lies on lands managed by Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Department of Defense (DOD), DOE-Richland, WA state, and private lands. The public lands are used for a variety of recreation activities, livestock range lands and military training maneuvers. Span 39/3 to 40/1 lies on U.S. Fish and Wildlife land within the Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge.

15 helicopter landing zones would be used as illustrated in the table below:

	<b>Location</b>	<b>Landowner</b>	<b>County</b>
Substation	Schultz MHQ	BPA	Kittitas
Schultz-Wautoma-1	8/3	BPA	Kittitas
Schultz-Wautoma-1	17/2	Private	Kittitas
Schultz-Wautoma-1	21/1	DOD	Kittitas
Schultz-Wautoma-1	24/4	DOD	Kittitas
Schultz-Wautoma-1	29/3	DOD	Kittitas
Schultz-Wautoma-1	33/3	DOD	Kittitas
Substation	Vantage Substation	BPA	Grant
Schultz-Wautoma-1	38/1	Private	Grant
Schultz-Wautoma-1	44/4	USBR	Grant
Schultz-Wautoma-1	46/1	USBR	Grant
Schultz-Wautoma-1	48/1	USBR	Grant
Schultz-Wautoma-1	52/1	Private	Grant
Schultz-Wautoma-1	59/1	Private	Benton
Substation	Wautoma Substation	BPA	Benton

Table 1: Proposed helicopter landing zones.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA sent consultation on April 21, 2025, that detailed the proposed project and determined that the project would result in no historic properties affected (BPA CR Project No. WA 2025 097, DAHP log no. 2025-04-02553). Consulting parties included the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). DAHP responded on April 21, 2025, concurring with the area of potential effect (APE) and concurred with the determination of effects on May 21, 2025. No other responses were received during the 30-day period. BPA has determined that this undertaking would result in no historic properties affected and as no objections were received during the 30-day period, BPA's responsibilities under Section 106 are fulfilled [§36 CFR 800.4(d)(1)(i)].

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

Potential for Significance: No

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some vegetation may be crushed in landing zones or where equipment would be staged temporarily. Umtanum Desert Buckwheat is a federally listed threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and has the potential to be present in span 55/1 – 55/3 of the project area. There are no landing zones proposed within this span and work would be non-invasive to plant species. There are several BLM sensitive species known to occur within the proposed action area including: sickle-pod rockcress, Hoover's tauschia, Suksdorf's monkeyflower, coyote tobacco, evening primrose, gray cryptantha, Hoover's desert-parsley, and Columbia milkvetch, as well as the state sensitive species annual (dwarf) sandwort. There would be no effect to ESA listed plant species or the identified BLM sensitive species. There are no other federally listed plant species or habitats known to occur in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In general, the proposed project activities would have minimal and very temporary disturbance to wildlife associated with elevated noise and human presence. Gray wolf are potentially present in the project area. Project activities would be minimally invasive and extremely temporary; therefore, BPA has determined that the proposed project would have no effect on gray wolf, or the proposed threatened species monarch butterfly and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee. There would be no work in or near streams, therefore BPA has determined that there would be "no effect" on bull trout. Yellow-billed cuckoo has not been sighted in Washington state since 1996 and there is no suitable habitat for this species within the proposed action area, therefore BPA has determined the proposed project activities would have "no effect" on yellow-billed cuckoo. Transmission Line Maintenance has conducted visual surveys of the line and has not identified nesting birds on

transmission towers, or surrounding the areas where work is to be conducted. The project area is over 15 miles from known active burrowing owl sites on the Hanford Site, 20 miles from the closest known active Ferruginous hawk nest. There are 26 raptor species found in the Hanford National Reserve, which include Swainson's hawk, ferruginous hawk, peregrine falcon, and the bald eagle. The project area is also home to great blue herons, or other wading birds such as egrets, black-crowned night herons, or cormorants. They typically nest in tall groves of trees along the Columbia River. No work would be done within these ideal habitat locations, and no tree removal would occur. The actions of the project would have discountable effects on federally protected species under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

## **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 some water bodies that are habitat for ESA-listed bull trout and salmonid species. There would be no ground disturbing activities in any stream or other waterbody in the proposed project area and no riparian vegetation would be impacted. The project would have no effect to ESA listed fish species or any waterbodies.

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

Explanation: No wetland areas have been identified in the project area.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Refueling activities have the potential to impact groundwater or aquifers, but this would be unlikely given the minimization measures that would be employed.

Notes: The measures described above for #5 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 auditory disruptions less than eight hours in length to recreational users where project activities would take place on public lands on portions of the WA state managed Columbia Basin Wildlife Area and Mattawa ORV Park located on the USFWS Saddle Mountain Management Area.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project activities would not change the current visual aesthetics.

## **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 one day 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: The proposed project area occurs away from any major population centers and the work would be temporary and minimally invasive.

### **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 staff have coordinated the proposed project activities with the BLM, USBR, US Department of Energy, Hanford National Monument, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and private landowners were notified on 2 May 2025. Department of Defense Yakima Training Center was notified on 2 April 2025 and authorization was received on 2 April 2025.

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

Signed: /s/ Justin Carr

Justin Carr

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: May 27, 2025