

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Boundary-Sacheen No. 1 and Sacheen-Bell No. 1 Impairment Project

Project No.: P05566

Project Manager: Meadow Nelson, TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Pend Oreille and Spokane counties, Washington

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) proposes to remedy eight impairments along the Boundary-Sacheen No. 1 and two impairments along the Sacheen-Bell No. 1 transmission lines in Pend Oreille and Spokane counties, Washington. Impairments are locations where the distance between the ground surface and the energized conductor does not meet safety and reliability standards. Six of the impairments would be corrected with excavation, two impairments corrected by installing H-frame prop structures, and one impairment corrected by converting the structure type. The transmission line corridor ranges from 250 to 375 feet wide.

For the impairments requiring excavation, heavy machinery would be used to excavate and regrade soils to blend with existing contours. Excavated soils would be spread within the BPA right-of-way (ROW) adjacent to the excavation area and stabilized or hauled away for offsite disposal. Proposed excavation volumes at the impairment sites range from 29 cubic yards to 479 cubic yards with excavation depths not exceeding six feet. In total, approximately 1,124 cubic yards of material would be excavated from work locations totaling approximately 0.65 acres in size. Total fill areas from the excavated soils would be approximately 1.1 acres. The excavation and fill sites would be seeded with a climate appropriate native seed mix, mulched, and monitored to ensure that the sites remain stabilized and revegetate.

For the two impairments requiring H-frame prop structures, the prop structure would be installed in-line with the existing transmission line and pole heights would vary depending on the impairment location. Poles would be embedded between about 9 and 14 feet deep, depending on pole height.

Work to change the structure type at 57/4 would include the construction of a landing at 57/4 (80 feet by 80 feet) and 57/5 (60 feet by 40 feet) to accommodate the impairment remediation between the two structures. Structure 57/4 is being changed to the floating dead end structure type and additional rock would be added to the base to reinforce the anchoring of the structure. Structure 57/5 is a sharp angle structure that requires additional support on either side of the structure.

A summary of the impairment work is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Impairment Work Areas

Structure Number/Span	Transmission Line Name	Impairment Correction	Volume (cubic yards)	Area (square feet)	Fill Area* (square feet)
27/1 – 27/2	Sacheen-Bell No. 1	Excavation	84	2,850	4,500
44/2 – 44/3	Boundary-Sacheen No. 1	Excavation	271	5,060	7,280
45/1 – 45/2	Boundary-Sacheen No. 1	Excavation	479	11,800	17,300
45/3 – 45/3	Boundary-Sacheen No. 1	Excavation	189	5,950	10,225
46/3 – 46/4	Boundary-Sacheen No. 1	Install H-frame Prop Structure	0	0	NA
48/2 – 48/3	Boundary-Sacheen No. 1	Install H-frame Prop Structure	0	0	NA
48/3 – 48/4	Boundary-Sacheen No. 1	Excavation	29	575	4,350
57/1 – 57/2	Boundary-Sacheen No. 1	Excavation	72	1,950	2,480
57/5	Boundary-Sacheen No. 1	Change structure type	0	0	NA

*Fill area does not include impairment area cut boundary

In addition to the impairment excavation, BPA proposes to improve access roads to support the work. BPA access roads are typically 14 feet in width and comprised of dirt and compacted rock. Proposed road work would include approximately 3 miles of improvements, which consists of light blading and addition of rock; 2.3 miles of reconstruction, which consists of heavier blading and addition of rock; 175 linear feet of new road surface, and 500 linear feet of temporary access road. BPA would also construct four new graded and rocked landings around transmission line structures to allow for safe access for continued maintenance of the transmission line. Landing size ranges from 100 feet by 40 feet to 60 feet by 40 feet in dimension and total 0.35 acre. Drainage improvements to the improved and reconstructed access roads would include cross drain culverts, drain dips, rock water bars, and roadside ditches. Additionally, two culverts would be replaced and one new culvert would be installed in drainage features or low areas.

All work would be conducted within the existing high-voltage corridor and on existing easements. Equipment generally used for this work includes an excavator, backhoe, blader, dump trucks, roller-compactor, and light duty trucks.

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

Jeremy Doschka
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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: Boundary-Sacheen No. 1 and Sacheen-Bell No. 1 Impairment Project

Project Site Description

The proposed action would occur within, and immediately adjacent to the BPA ROW and access roads on the Boundary-Sacheen No. 1 and Sacheen-Bell No. 1 transmission lines. The northern portion of the Project Area (Boundary-Sacheen No. 1; line miles 43 to 48) is located on privately-owned land at the eastern base of low mountainous terrain just above the western edge of the Pend Oreille River floodplain. Terrain is characterized by low rolling hills with several streams flowing through the project area; however, no work is proposed in or adjacent to the streams. Several potential wetland areas occur in or near the vicinity of the proposed work. Vegetation consists of predominantly second-growth forest heavily managed for timber. Land use surrounding the Project Area ranges from agricultural, private timber, rural residential, and motorized recreation. Elevations range between 2,085 and 2,520 feet in elevation. The Selkirk grizzly bear recovery zone is located approximately 10 miles north of the northern end of the project area (line mile 43).

Work between structures 57/1 and 57/5 on the Boundary-Sacheen No. 1 line is located on privately-owned land in a low residential area adjacent to Deer Creek. Terrain is relatively flat with rock outcrops; vegetation consists of sparse, secondary growth forested area. Elevations range between 2,200 to 2,330 feet. No wetlands or waters are located within the work areas; however, there is an adjacent waterway and associated wetland that crosses the transmission line corridor between structures 57/4 and 57/5.

Impairment work between structures 27/1 and 27/2 on the Sacheen-Bell line is located on privately-owned land in an active agricultural field at an elevation of 1,980 feet. No wetlands or waters are located within the project area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA sent initiation of consultation letters, dated March 20, 2025, to the Coeur d' Alene Tribe, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, the Spokane Tribe of Indians, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) for the overall project. A cultural survey of the project area took place in April 2025. BPA made a determination that the proposed undertaking would result in no adverse effect to historic properties. The determination and report were sent to the consulting parties on April 21, 2025. No responses were received.

Notes:

- If any cultural resources are discovered during project implementation, all project related activities in the area would stop and BPA's post-review discovery protocol would be implemented and the appropriate parties, including the BPA archaeologist and USFS, would be notified.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Excavation and soil disturbance would be required to excavate ground impairments, improve or build new access roads, construct landings, and install new wood poles for prop structures. Excavation depths for impairments would be no more than six feet deep. Ground disturbing activities would predominately occur in the existing access road easement and transmission line right-of-way. Excess soils would either be spread on site and stabilized with seed and straw or hauled away to an approved offsite location.

Notes:

- Work site footprints would be minimized as much as possible to avoid soil disturbance.
- During construction all appropriate Best Management Practices (BMP) would be used to implement site specific erosion and sediment control.
- Upon project completion, disturbed, un-rocked soils would be stabilized with native erosion control grass seed and mulched with straw, or hydroseeded.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Local plants would be disturbed at the impairment excavation locations, landing sites, prop structure locations, and access road improvement locations. Vegetation would also be disturbed adjacent to the impairment excavation areas where excess material would be spread. Upon project completion, the area would be re-graded to match existing contours and seeded with a native seed mix.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on February 26, 2025. No ESA-listed plants or habitat are present in the project area, therefore, the project would have "No Effect" on ESA-listed plant species. BPA reviewed available data sources, and no special status state species and/or habitat is documented in the project area.

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 ESA, BPA obtained an official species list from USFWS on February 26, 2025. After a review of the habitat within the project area, and recorded ESA-listed species observations, BPA determined that the project would have "No Effect" on Canada lynx, grizzly bear, North American wolverine, yellow-billed cuckoo, and the candidate species monarch butterfly and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee. BPA reviewed available data sources, and no special status state species and/or habitat is documented in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not impact water bodies or floodplains that support resident, anadromous, or ESA-listed fish. Erosion control best management practices combined with the distance to the nearest waterbody would ensure that sedimentation would not enter into any water body.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access road reconstruction would occur within two suspected wetlands within line mile 45; however, wetland impacts would be less than 0.1 acre and covered under a non-notifying Nationwide Permit (NWP) 57 (Electric Utility Line and Telecommunications Activities). BPA would adhere to all permit conditions included in NWP 57.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation would not extend to the depths that would impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change existing ROW land use, nor is the project within a specially-designated area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation of ground impairments would remove existing vegetation and soils resulting in disturbed rocks and soils. Excess material would be spread in an adjacent upland area or hauled away. However, all disturbed soil cuts and fills would be re-contoured to match existing grades as much as possible, seeded with a native seed, and mulched to restore vegetation. The project would also include the addition of new mid-span prop structures in some locations. The new structures would be located along the existing ROW along the same alignment as existing transmission structures. Therefore, the proposed project would not substantially change the existing visual character of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor, local impacts to air quality would occur due to construction activity and vehicular traffic; however, impacts would be temporary and insignificant. There would be no long-term change in air quality following completion of the project.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction activity would generate noise. However, impacts would be local and relatively minor. All project activity would occur during daylight hours, and there would be no long-term change in ambient noise following completion of the project.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation:

The project would have benefits to human health and safety, as the purpose of the project is to restore safety and reliability clearance standards currently affected by the line impairments.

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 coordinate project activities with landowners and land managers at proposed work locations and would continue to coordinate during construction and site restoration.

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

Signed:

Jeremy Doschka
Environmental Protection Specialist