

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Bonners Ferry Substation and North Bench Substation Fiber Installation

Project No.: LURR20240382 and LURR20240389

Project Manager: Amanda Raymond – TERR-BELL-1

Location: Boundary County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights-of-way; B4.7 Fiber Optic Cable

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to allow Northern Lights Inc. (NLI) to install conduit and fiber at the BPA-owned Bonners Ferry and North Bench substations.

NLI's proposed work at the Bonners Ferry substation would include an excavator-dug trench to install 2.5-inch-diameter conduit and fiber outside the east side of the substation fence on BPA property. The trenching would be approximately 2 feet wide, 1.5 feet deep, and 80 feet in length. This trench would extend from Blue Sky Road, north along the eastern substation fence, to a fiber cabinet owned by NLI on the east side of the substation.

At the North Bench Substation, NLI would hand-dig approximately 25 feet of 0.5-foot-deep trenches to install 2.5-inch-diameter conduit and fiber in the substation yard.

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

Jessica A. Heppler
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.

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Project Site Description

The project site at BPA-owned Bonners Ferry Substation is on the east side of the active substation in Boundary County, Idaho (Township 62 North, Range 1 East, Section 35). Ground cover at this project site consists of a graveled parking area just outside the east side of the substation perimeter fence. Outside of the substation property, the surrounding area may be characterized primarily as a mixture of privately owned timberlands and sparse residential. The National Wetland Inventory and Soil Survey data from the Natural Resources Conservation Service indicates no nearby wetlands or hydric soils in, or near the project area. The National Hydrography Dataset indicates the closest surface body of water is a seasonal creek approximately 600 feet to the north of the project site.

The project site at BPA-owned North Bench Substation is within the substation grounds in Boundary County, Idaho (Township 62 North, Range 1 East, Section 11). Ground cover within this project site consists of the graveled grounds within the substation fencing. Outside of the substation property, the surrounding area may be characterized primarily as a mixture of agricultural and light industrial land uses, with some sparse residential. The National Wetland Inventory and Soil Survey data from the Natural Resources Conservation Service indicates no nearby wetlands or hydric soils in, or near the project area. The National Hydrography Dataset indicates the closest surface body of water is a seasonal creek approximately a 0.25 mile to the north of the project site.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: The BPA archaeologist initiated Section 106 consultation on January 22, 2025, with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians and the Idaho Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). On January 22, 2025, SHPO responded via email, assigning the North Bench Substation Installation of Conduit and Fiber project SHPO Project No. 2025-240, and the Bonners Ferry Substation Conduit and Fiber Installation Project SHPO project No. 2025-241.

On January 22, 2025, the BPA archaeologist notified the consulting parties of BPA's determination that implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no effect to historic properties. The Idaho SHPO concurred on January 23, 2025, for the Bonners Ferry Substation Conduit and Fiber Installation Project and Idaho SHPO concurred on January 24, 2025 for the North Bench Substation Installation of Conduit and Fiber Project. BPA did not receive any other responses.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: There would be temporary soil disturbance from the trenching equipment and hand digging. However, all digging activities would be occurring in areas of previous disturbance either within, or just outside the substations and would be restored to pre-project condition after excavation. Geology is not anticipated to be affected.

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

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Ground disturbance is anticipated where the trenching would be occurring. However, trenching efforts at both substations would occur in areas that are graveled and maintained to prevent vegetation growth. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status plant species, or plant species protected under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) occurring at either project site. Therefore, the proposed project would result in No Effect to protected plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Temporary disruption of normal wildlife behavior could occur from elevated noise and human presence during project implementation. However, wildlife species in both project areas that could be present are likely already habituated to human activity, including vehicle traffic and other activities associated with substation operation. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status wildlife species or wildlife species protected under the federal ESA, and no such species or suitable habitat are expected to occur at the project sites. Therefore, the proposed project would result in No Effect to protected wildlife species.

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

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: The project sites are not located in, or near any surface waters or fish bearing streams and they are not located within a floodplain. Project activities are not anticipated to affect surface waters, fish or fish-bearing streams.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: The project sites are not located within, or near wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Soil disturbance is unlikely to reach depths affecting groundwater or aquifers. Therefore, the proposed action would not substantially impact these resources.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: There would be no change in land use or specially designated areas as a result of these project actions.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: There would be limited and temporary visual changes to the project areas. All project activities are occurring within, or adjacent to, an operating substation and in areas already disturbed and graveled intentionally to prevent vegetation growth. Project activities are not expected to substantially affect visual quality in the short term and would have no effect on the permanent visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Temporary and minor dust and vehicle emissions would increase in the local areas from vehicle and equipment use during project implementation. There would be no long-term impact to air quality following completion of the project actions.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Project-related noise would be temporary and intermittent and would occur during daylight hours. Operational noise would not change from current ambient conditions.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: The projects would not generate or use hazardous materials and would not create conditions that would increase risk to human health and safety. No impact to human health and safety is expected as a result of project activities.

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: The project sites are on BPA fee-owned property. There are no other landowners that would need to be notified or involved.

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

Signed:

Jessica A. Heppler
Environmental Protection Specialist