

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Wautoma-Rock Creek Transmission Line Miles 37 to 43 Reconductor Project.

Project No.: P02678

Project Manager: Tina Edwards, TEPL-CSB-2

Location: Yakima and Klickitat counties, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance, B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities, B1.24 Property Transfers, B3.2 Aviation activities

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to reconductor and replace associated hardware along the Wautoma-Rock Creek No. 1 500 kV transmission line from miles 37 to 43. Replacement is needed because the conductor was damaged by high winds twisting the phases together. The project would also upgrade the transportation system and install fall protection safety equipment within the same project area. The proposed action is needed to maintain reliable power in the region. All work would be in accordance with the National Electrical Safety Code and BPA standards.

Replacing conductor is typically performed with line trucks accessing each structure to first disconnect the existing conductor then pull out the old conductor and finally pulling in the new conductor. Conductor hardware would be removed and replaced. Pulling and tensioning equipment would be staged temporarily at multiple locations under the transmission line and would be used to remove and restring the conductor. Seven of the pulling and tensioning sites would require blading and grading areas ranging in size from 40 feet by 40 feet to 100 feet by 100 feet to allow the equipment to be positioned on flat land. Temporary guard structures would be placed under the transmission line during the reconductoring process to protect public roads and local utilities from the overhead conductor, either by utilizing bucket trucks to prop up wood poles or ground installation of wood pole structures. If required, helicopters and identified landing zones would be used to assist in the reconductoring process.

In support of the proposed project and future operations, upgrades would be made to approximately 9 miles of existing access roads and approximately 0.5 mile of new spur roads would be constructed. In addition to the proposed transportation system improvements, work would include replacement of 2 cross-drain culverts, installation of 3 gates, and the construction of 21 leveled rock transmission structure landing areas ranging in size from 30 feet by 40 feet to 100 feet by 100 feet. The road and landing work would include blading, shaping, grading, brushing, and placing surface rock.

BPA is also proposing to install a fall protection cable safety system along the climbing path of transmission structures within the project area. The cable is connected to the tower with a series of brackets approximately every 10 feet and a top and bottom anchor. Once installed, workers would use the system when climbing the tower by attaching their harness to a specialized pulley which allows them to glide along the safety cable as they climb.

General equipment used for the proposed project work includes: bucket trucks, pulling and tensioning equipment, graders, rollers, bull-dozers, brush hogs, excavators, dump trucks, and industrial mats.

As part of the project, land easements would also be secured for several roads where BPA determined land rights are required for future use to access the right-of-way and to conduct current and future maintenance.

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

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.

Laura Roberts
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: Wautoma-Rock Creek Transmission Line Miles 37 to 43 Reconductor Project.

Project Site Description

The proposed Wautoma-Rock Creek Transmission Line Miles 37 to 43 Reconductor Project would occur on private land in Yakima and Klickitat counties, Washington. See Table below for Township, Range, and Section Numbers. The project would occur in an existing transmission line corridor with the adjacent Spring Creek-Wine Country No. 1 230-kV transmission line. The area is made up of shrub-steppe rangeland interspersed with agricultural lands.

Township	Range	Section(s)
06N	20E	02-04, 09, 10
07N	21E	14, 15, 21-23, 26-31
07N	20E	25, 34-36

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and Confederated Tribes and Bands of Yakama Nation on March 20, 2025. DAHP provided concurrence with the Area of Potential Effect (APE) via a letter dated March 20, 2025. BPA sent a no adverse effect to historic properties determination on May 8, 2025 and DAHP concurred on June 9, 2025. No additional response was received within 30 days.

Notes:

- Exclusion areas depicted on project design and construction maps, combined with fencing, rope, and signage would be used to restrict driving through or conducting any ground disturbing activities on the south side of structure 37/3, immediately east of structure 43/1, and on the north and south sides of the existing access road between structures 42/3 and 43/1.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor impacts, such as movement and compaction, to geology and soils would occur from temporary pulling and tensioning sites and access road and structure landing work. Appropriate Best Management Practices (BMP) would be implemented prior to initiating ground disturbing activities and all unrocked disturbed areas would be stabilized and seeded.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status plant species or habitats occur within the project area. Impacts to plants would be minor to moderate and would consist of approximately 0.1 acre of temporary vegetation removal for pulling and tensioning sites and approximately 3.5 acres of permanent vegetation loss from construction of new spur roads and structure landings. Appropriate BMP would be implemented prior to initiating ground disturbing activities and all unrocked disturbed areas would be stabilized and seeded upon completion of installation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status wildlife species or habitats occur in the project area. The project would have temporary noise and disturbance impacts to local wildlife species related to construction equipment noise and human presence. Noise impacts would be temporary and there is suitable adjacent habitat to access during disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project does not include work that would impact water bodies, floodplains or fish species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands occur within the project area, therefore no impacts to wetlands would result from the proposed project.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to groundwater or aquifers are anticipated as the proposed project ground disturbance would not be deep enough to penetrate groundwater.

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 the project. Easement acquisition would not change the underlying access road use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have minor impacts to visual quality. Existing conductor would be changed with the same or visually similar conductor. Road upgrades and the addition of new spur roads and structure landings would have minimal impacts to visual quality as they would be consistent with the existing transmission line right-of-way.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of vehicle emissions would occur during project implementation. However, there would be no substantial changes to air quality during or after the implementation of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours from the proposed project. No ongoing noise increase is expected as a result of this project.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project implementation, all standard safety protocols would be followed. Therefore, implementation of the proposed action would not impact human health or safety.

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 is in coordination with private landowners.

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

Signed:

Laura Roberts
Protection Specialist