

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Fiber Installation on BPA Fee-owned Property at Troy Substation

**Project No.:** LURR 20240106

**Project Manager:** Darlene Bridges

**Location:** Lincoln County, Montana

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights-of-way

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to allow Northern Lights Inc. (NLI) to install underground fiber underneath existing equipment located on BPA fee-owned property at BPA's Troy Substation in Lincoln County, Montana. Two-inch fiber conduit would be installed by excavating a trench 30 inches deep and 18 inches wide underneath NLI's existing overhead lines on the east side of the BPA property. The total trenching length would be approximately 330 feet. All fiber would feed information to an existing communications box located 35 feet outside the fenced substation perimeter. A 10-foot-tall monopole structure would be installed approximately 6 feet from the communications box to support a new side-mounted antenna; the antenna height would not exceed the height of the pole. Coaxial cable would be installed underground from the communications box to the antenna. All groundwork would be accomplished using a mini excavator and no work would occur within the fenced perimeter of the substation.

BPA authorizes the use of and manages its fee-owned lands pursuant to its authority under sections 2(e) and 2(f) of the Bonneville Project Act. 16 U.S.C. § 832a(e)-(f).

**Findings:** In accordance with Section 1021.102 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; 90 FR 29676, July 3, 2025 [Interim Final Rule]) and *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures* (dated June 30, 2025), BPA has determined the following:

- 1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021;
- 2) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion; and
- 3) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal (see attached Environmental Evaluation).

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.<sup>1</sup>

Justin M. Olmsted  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

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 the interim final rule to revise DOE NEPA regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021 and NEPA Implementing Procedures (dated June 30, 2025), 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:** Fiber Installation on BPA Fee-owned Property at Troy Substation

## **Project Site Description**

The proposed action would occur on BPA fee-owned property adjacent to Troy Substation approximately 1 mile southeast of Troy, Montana (Township 31 North, Range 33 West, Section 19). The BPA property is immediately adjacent to US Highway 2. Ground disturbance would occur outside the fenced perimeter of the substation below NLI overhead equipment, which is characterized by common grasses and weeds. Troy Substation is situated approximately 800 feet northeast of Lake Creek and 0.3 miles southwest of the Kootenai River bordering the Kootenai National Forest. No wetlands are present within or near the project site. The surrounding land use near the project area is primarily forested with scattered small businesses and infrastructure, including the Troy Dam Reservoir on Lake Creek to the southwest and a Lincoln County landfill approximately 1,000 feet to the north.

## **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 Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) (case number 20250604012), Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, and the Montana Department of Transportation on June 4, 2025.

The Montana SHPO concurred with BPA's delineation of the Area of Potential Effects (APE) and the finding of no adverse effect to historic properties on June 23, 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, the applicant would be required to notify BPA and halt work in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Approximately 1,300 cubic feet of soil would be temporarily displaced to install the conduit and the antenna pole. Fiber would be routed through the conduit and trenches would be backfilled using the existing soil to match the preexisting ground condition. Overall, the proposed action would have minimal impact to soil and no impact to geology.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vegetation within the project area would be crushed, covered, or removed during trenching, however, NLI would reseed the project site with a regionally appropriate seed

mix. There are no documented occurrences of federal, or state listed special status plant species present within the worksite. Overall, there would be temporary, minimal impact to plants in the area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary disturbance of normal wildlife behavior may occur from elevated noise and increased human presence during project implementation. However, the project site is located on the outskirts of the City of Troy, Montana near other commercial businesses and development including an active Lincoln County landfill. Wildlife species that may be present in the area are likely habituated to human activity, including construction, vehicles on US Highway 2, and railroad traffic. It is expected that most wildlife species that could be present would be able to avoid the project site during construction and would likely reoccupy temporarily disturbed areas following completion of the proposed action. No special-status wildlife species or wildlife species protected under the federal ESA are expected to occur near the project site. Overall, the proposed action would have minimal impact on wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project site is located between Lake Creek and the Kootenai River. The Kootenai River is designated Critical Habitat for bull trout, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and White sturgeon, an ESA-listed endangered species. The project area is separated from these water bodies by roads, railroads, and natural land features. The proposed actions would not include any work within these water bodies and standard construction best management practices (BMPs) would be used (i.e., sediment and spill control). Refueling equipment and hazardous materials storage would not be authorized on BPA property. Therefore, the proposed actions would not impact waterbodies, floodplains, or federal and state listed special-status fish populations.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands located within the project area. Therefore, the proposed actions would not impact wetlands.

#### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbance is unlikely to reach depths to groundwater and no new wells or other uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed. BMPs would prevent impacts from unintended spills to groundwater or aquifers. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

Notes:

- Maintain a spill kit on-site during construction to address containment, cleanup, and disposal in the event of a spill.

#### **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would be consistent with the current land use on BPA fee-owned property and would not impact specially-designated areas.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary impacts to visual quality would occur due to the proposed actions, however, the site would return to its near-existing visual condition shortly after construction activities. The additional 10-foot-tall pole and antenna would not be overtly noticeable in comparison to the existing structures on the property. Overall, the proposed actions would have minimal impact to visual quality.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Small amounts of fugitive dust and minor vehicle emissions would occur during construction activities; however, these would stop following the completion of the proposed actions. No permanent changes to air quality would occur following project completion.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor and temporary vehicle and construction noise would occur during daylight hours until construction is complete. No new sources of noise would occur upon project completion. Overall, noise impacts are expected to be low.

## **12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: NLI and their contractors would follow BPA and OSHA safety standards and would submit a safety plan for BPA's review and approval prior to commencing construction work onsite. The project would not create any new safety hazards or use materials that could threaten human health and safety. No new impacts to human health and safety are anticipated.

### **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 would occur on BPA fee-owned property.

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

Signed:

Justin M. Olmsted  
Environmental Protection Specialist