

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Digital Substation Control House installation at the Paul D. Johnson Substation

Project No.: P06222

Project Manager: Michael McClintock, TEPF-CSB-1

Location: Clark County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.7 Electronic equipment; B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to install a new digital substation control house inside the Paul D. Johnson Substation, located within the Ross Complex. The new control house would be about 25 feet wide by 40 feet long and would serve as a functional pilot testing facility focusing on pre-fabricated manufactured building models for control houses. The control house would provide a facility for BPA staff to perform research and development tasks, including transmission network system simulations and emergency restoration efforts that would support the BPA's field operations and maintenance activities.

Station service would be connected to the new control house via underground trenching and splicing cables into nearby existing conduits and vaults. Equipment staging would occur on previously disturbed areas in the substation and access to the site would use established roads. Construction equipment would include trucks, an excavator, and common construction tools.

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 1021.102 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. ¹

Becky Hill
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 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: Digital Substation Control House installation at the Paul D. Johnson Substation

Project Site Description

The project site is located on BPA fee-owned property within BPA's Ross Complex located in Vancouver, Washington. The Ross Complex is split north-south by a riparian corridor associated with Cold Canyon Creek and Burnt Bridge Creek, which are designated freshwater critical habitat for Lower Columbia River coho salmon. This east-west riparian corridor connects the creeks and their floodplains to freshwater-forested shrub wetlands located along both sides of Highway 99 and Interstate-5. The Paul D. Johnson Substation is in the southern portion of the Ross Complex, southwest of the ABC parking lots, about 250 feet south of NE Ross Street, and about 400 feet west of NE 15th Avenue.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On March 24, 2025, the BPA archaeologist and historian reinitiated the December 21, 2021, Section 106 consultation process with an expanded Area of Potential Effect (APE) map. The consulting parties included the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Washington State Department of Transportation, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). DAHP concurred with BPA's APE and determination. No responses were received from the other consulting parties.

BPA continues to find that the overall Ross Vancouver Control Center undertaking, which includes the Paul D. Johnson substation, would result in an adverse effect to historic properties in the historic district (resolved in May 2022 by the execution of a Memorandum of Agreement between BPA and DAHP). However, there are no historic properties within the expanded APE that would be affected by the installation of a new control house in the Paul D. Johnson Substation.

Notes:

- An Inadvertent Discovery Plan, with contact information for the BPA cultural resources lead, would be supplied to the construction contractor prior to commencing construction work. Should cultural resources be discovered during project activities, then all project work in the area must stop, and the cultural resources lead must be notified immediately.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The new digital control house and station service installation would require some excavation and trenching within the Paul D. Johnson Substation yard. Less than 1 acre of existing graveled area could be disturbed. Best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to prevent the migration of sediment off-site.

Notes:

- Test soils for hazardous materials, which if found, would be disposed of off-site according to local, state, and federal regulations.

- Implement a BPA-approved Erosion and Sediment Control Plan (ESCP) that is guided by Washington Department of Ecology's Stormwater Management Manual for Western Washington.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status plant species or suitable habitat for special-status plant species are present within the project area. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on special-status plant species or habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary disturbance of wildlife could occur from elevated noise during construction. Because the work would occur on the Ross Complex where human activity is frequent, any generalist wildlife species present are likely already habituated to human presence and noise.

No special-status wildlife species or suitable habitat is present within the project area. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on special-status wildlife species or habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No water bodies, floodplains, or special-status fish species are present within the project area. During construction, BMPs would prevent indirect impacts to off-site waterbodies, floodplains, and special-status fish and fish habitat. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact water bodies, floodplains, fish, or fish habitat.

Notes:

- Implement a BPA-approved ESCP that is guided by Washington Department of Ecology's Stormwater Management Manual for Western Washington.
- Maintain an oil/fuel spill kit on-site during construction to address containment, cleanup, and disposal in the event of a spill.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No wetlands are present within the project area. BMPs would prevent impacts to off-site wetlands. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on wetlands.

Notes:

- Implement a BPA-approved ESCP that is guided by Washington Department of Ecology's Stormwater Management Manual for Western Washington.
- Maintain an oil/fuel spill kit on-site during construction to address containment, cleanup, and disposal in the event of a spill.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

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 an oil/fuel 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 installation of a new digital control house and station service infrastructure at the Paul D. Johnson Substation is consistent with the surrounding land uses at the Ross Complex. While the Ross Complex contains a historic district, the proposed action would not impact land use or specially-designated areas, including the historic district.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The installation of a new control house at the Paul D. Johnson Substation is visually consistent with the existing infrastructure at the Ross Complex. While the public has access to NE 15th Avenue and NE Ross Street, the change in visual quality would be negligible.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction activities would result in a minor and temporary increase in dust and vehicle emissions in the local area. BMPs, such as turning off vehicles when not in use, would be implemented to limit the amount of emissions released in the local area.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, use of vehicles and equipment and general construction activities would create noise above current ambient conditions. However, noise impacts would be temporary and intermittent and would only occur during typical working hours (approximately 7am to 7pm). Construction-related noise would not likely be audible from residential properties surrounding the Ross Complex. 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: Construction would be completed by qualified professionals who would follow all applicable safety requirements as detailed in their BPA-accepted site-specific safety plan, in accordance with BPA Contractor Safety and Health Requirements for Prime and Subcontractors, and any additional state, local, or authority having jurisdiction requirements. The safety plan would be maintained on-site during construction and updated, as needed. Construction areas within the Paul D. Johnson Substation would be secured by the perimeter security fence when construction crews are not present. Therefore, the proposed action would not be expected to impact human health and 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: Surveys of the project area have not indicated hazardous substances or contaminants. A qualified industrial hygiene firm has written a Hazardous Materials Management Plan for implementation in the unlikely event that problematic materials are identified during the project. This firm would be available for additional sampling and direction throughout the project to ensure that hazardous substances or pollutants are not released in an uncontrolled manner.

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 proposed action would occur on BPA fee-owned property. Therefore, no landowner notification, involvement, or coordination would be required.

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

Signed:

Becky Hill
Environmental Protection Specialist