Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Lower Granite – Hatwai Access Road Improvements

Project No.: P03072

Project Manager: Donna Martin – TPP-3

Location: Whitman, Washington and Nez Perce, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance; B1.24 Property Transfers.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to conduct routine maintenance on access roads providing access to electrical transmission infrastructure along the Lower Granite – Hatwai No. 1 500 kV transmission line corridor located in Whitman County, Washington and Nez Perce County, Idaho. Work would occur over about 26 miles along the line between operating Mile 9 through the end of the corridor at the Hatwai substation.

BPA would improve approximately 23.5 miles and reconstruct a half mile of current access road routes within the project area. About 6.7 miles of new access roads would be constructed. The current access roads within the project area are about 12 to 14 feet wide compacted two-track dirt roads or engineered gravel roads. Access road work would consist of three tiers: improvements, reconstruction, and new road construction. Access road improvements consist of light blading of existing road surface, placement of rock, and compaction. Access road reconstruction consists of heavier blading of existing road surface to remove ruts and washouts, placement of rock, and compaction. New access road construction consists of blading a new access road footprint to establish the road prism, placement of rock, and compaction within a 24-foot-wide footprint. For this proposed action, the majority of the new road construction would occur within the existing BPA transmission right-of-way, which is managed to promote low-growing vegetation and maintain electrical safety clearances, or historically utilized road surfaces that have been previously disturbed. Some additional road easements would be acquired for approximately 2.8 miles of the proposed new routes that occur outside existing right-of-way easements.

To support the longevity of the road surfaces and vehicle accessibility, several stormwater drainage features such as drain dips, water bars, cross-drain culverts and fords would be added or repaired to facilitate stormwater flow off the road surface. A total of 22 culverts would be repaired, cleaned or replaced with like-in-kind new culverts. Additional work consists of repairing 8 drain dips and 2 existing fords within intermittent creeks. Clearing vegetation and debris through a combination of hand and mechanical methods from ditches, cross-drain culverts, and other drainage features. Repair of existing drain dips, water bars and existing or destroyed cross-drain culverts would be of the same dimensions and would not require excavation greater than was necessary to install the original drainage features. Cleaning the culvert beds would include removal of debris and would not affect the existing width to depth ratio. All preventative maintenance would be completed in a manner that minimizes disturbance, but restores

engineered drainage features to their original capability, thus preventing larger scale washouts, landslides, and sedimentation into waterbodies.

Additional supporting work for this project includes replacing 25 gates and improving 42 existing landings, 1 slide stabilization, and 5 turnarounds. Landings and turnaround installations are approximately 60 feet by 40 feet in dimensions and would be graded and graveled to allow modern equipment such as electrical line trucks (including equipment with outriggers) to access the structure sites and perform maintenance. Removal of existing damaged or malfunctioning gates and replacement with new gate of similar type and color in same location as previous gate. Gate removal/replacement would not require excavation greater than was necessary to install the original gate. The slide stabilization area occurs within the previously-disturbed road prism that was washed out. Stabilization would be approximately 40 foot in length that consists of importing soils and adding reinforcement material on the uphill side of the road in order to prevent subsequent future slides from occurring.

The project is planned to start in the fall of 2025 and would continue within areas as access conditions permit. The planned work window for this project would likely end of during December 2026. Individual work actions, locations and timing would be dependent on weather, fire restrictions and other timing issues. Equipment used could include graders, small excavators, dump trucks, light duty pickups and other like in kind construction equipment.

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]

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[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.

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Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Evaluation

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: Lower Granite – Hatwai Access Road Improvements

Project Site Description

The proposed project is located in southwestern Washington and northern Idaho, specifically within Witman County, Washington and Nez Perce County, Idaho. The proposed action would occur within, and immediately adjacent to BPA's right-of-way (ROW) and access roads on the Lower Granite – Hatwai No. 1 transmission line. The transmission corridor is situated above the north bank of the Snake River, starting approximately 9 miles from the Lower Granite Dam and terminates at the Hatwai substation approximately 6 miles northeast of Lewiston, Idaho. The area traverses farmed terrace sand steep canyon lands.

The project area is located within the Columbia Plateau ecoregion in southeastern Washington and northwestern Idaho. The ecoregion is covered in arid sagebrush steppe or grassland. The project is located on privately-owned land, as well as lands managed by the state of Washington Department of Natural Resources. The land use surrounding the project area ranges from agricultural, livestock rangeland, rural residential, and state conservation lands.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation on October 13, 2021, with Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). The Nez Perce Tribe Cultural Resources Program conducted background research and a field survey in 2022, with additional efforts due to design changes in 2024. On June 2, 2025, BPA sent the Idaho cultural report and determination letter with a finding of no adverse effect to Idaho SHPO and the Tribes. BPA sent the Washington cultural report and determination letter with a finding of no adverse effect to DAHP and Tribes on June 3, 2025. On June 4, 2025, DAHP concurred with BPA's determination. The Nez Perce Tribe responded in agreement with BPA's determination. Idaho SHPO concurred with BPA's determination on June 6, 2025. BPA did not receive any further correspondence within 30 days.

Notes:

- A cultural resource monitor would be present during all ground-disturbing activities within 100 feet of the three identified archaeological sites.
- Near the site located within the 23/4 structure, BPA would not grade the segment of existing road within 100 feet of the site boundary and would instead place a 4-inch-thick layer of aggregate.
- Sensitive/monitoring areas would be added to design plans and mapping, including geospatial mapping.
- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would require that work be halted 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: Ground disturbance would primarily occur in existing road prism areas with improvements, reconstruction, landings, pull out areas, gate installations, and culvert replacements. Majority of the new routes are located within areas that have been previously disturbed with cattle grazing or have been used as impromptu roads without surface improvements or easements. New road routes on WA DRN lands are planned to be width increases and occur on either side of existing road prisms. The planned width increased of DNR new road routes would not result in significant impacts to soils. The slide repair would cause soil disturbance that extends beyond the existing road prism, but in the long term after stabilization, the slide repair would result in improved erosion protection. Erosion control BMPs would be implemented during construction to prevent soil loss from project areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A majority of the vegetation removal would occur within previously-established existing road surfaces, roads landings, and approaches. About a 24-foot width of vegetation would be permanently removed in the newly-graveled areas associated with the new access roads, landings, and turn arounds. Non-graveled ground disturbance areas would be revegetated. All proposed work areas were surveyed in 2024 and 2025, no Threatened, Endangered, or special-status plant species would be affected by the project actions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Threatened or Endangered, or special-status wildlife species or habitat would be affected by the actions including in all nearby conservation lands. Minor, short-term disturbance would occur to local wildlife species in the area from noise associated with construction, but there is adjacent habitat and wildlife would resume habitat use upon project completion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No work would occur within jurisdictional waterways. The purpose of the project would be to conduct road maintenance that would prevent erosion and soil loss into waterways. The proposed ford repairs on intermittent waterways would be conducted during the dry season and would result in improved water quality due to improved erosion control conditions post repair. All drainage maintenance would be conducted to restore the flow of water to the original engineered design. Erosion control BMPs would be implemented during construction to prevent sedimentation impacts to nearby waterways.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No work would occur within known wetland areas. The purpose of the work would be to conduct road maintenance that would prevent erosion and soil loss into wetlands. All drainage maintenance would be conducted to restore the flow of water to the original engineered design. Erosion control BMPs would be implemented to prevent sedimentation impacts to any nearby wetland areas.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No excavation would extend to depths that would impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not alter existing land use and is not located in a specially designated area. The proposed work on Washington DNR lands would increase the current road widths in order to accommodate maintenance equipment access. The approximate increase of the current widths on DNR lands would be considered new routes and are located on either side of existing road prisms which would not result in a significant change in use as those areas are currently used as access routes. Temporary road closures could be required on existing routes during the short construction period and would be reopened post project completion. No significant land use changes would occur as a result of the proposed actions.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is currently a high voltage transmission corridor, and would remain so after project completion. Access road work, landings, and gates would be consistent with the existing character and would not result in a substantial change in the overall appearance in the project 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. Work areas are generally located in remote places, without human receptors.

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 work areas are generally located in remote areas.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work 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: BPA would coordinate project activities with landowners and land managers at proposed work locations and would continue to coordinate during construction. BPA has notified Washinton DNR of the planned actions and would continue to coordinate project activities on DNR-managed lands during construction. No other coordination is needed.

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

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