

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Chenowith-Goldendale Line Mile 7 Impairment Remediation

Project No.: P04870

Project Manager: Lisa Casey, TEPP-3

Location: Klickitat County, Washington

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

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to remedy an impairment on the Chenowith-Goldendale No. 1 115 kV transmission line in Klickitat County, Washington. The impairment is a location where the distance between the ground surface and the energized conductor does not meet the safety and reliability standards. Correcting the impairment would allow the maximum operating temperature of the line from 50C degrees to 100C degrees and reduce the risk of wildfire from the transmission line.

The two-pole wooden structures at 7/7 and 7/8 of the Chenowith-Goldendale transmission line would be replaced with new wooden poles that would be 10 feet taller. The existing poles would be removed and the new poles would be installed in the same location. The work area at each structure would include a 50-foot radius from the structure to allow work vehicles to set up to perform the required work. An approximately 50- by 50-foot landing would be constructed at each structure within the work area for a total of about 0.1 acre (5,000 square feet) of impacts. Proposed work at structure 7/7 would include blading an approximately 200-foot-long by 12-foot-wide access road within the existing BPA transmission corridor easement from Dalles Mountain Road to structure 7/7. Total disturbance for the access road would be approximately 2,400 square feet. The non-rocked portions of the access road and landing areas would be seeded with a seed mix approved by Washington State Parks after construction has been completed.

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

Jeremy Doschka
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 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.

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Project Site Description

The project area is located on BPA transmission line rights-of-way in Section 6, Township 2 North, Range 14 East in Klickitat County, Washington. The project site is located within the Columbia Hills Historical State Park and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The dominant land use is recreation. Structure 7/8 is located on a gentle slope and structure 7/7 is located on a low, rocky ridge above an ephemeral drainage. Vegetation is predominantly grasslands and low shrubs with oak trees associated with adjacent ephemeral drainages. No wetlands or waters are located within the project site.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA sent a combined Initiation of Consultation and Determination of Effect letter to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, Nez Perce Tribe, U.S. Forest Service Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area [CRGNSA], Washington State Parks, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) on September 8, 2025 with a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties. DAHP provided concurrence with the determination via a letter dated September 9, 2025. No additional response was received within 30 days.

Notes:

- Fence the southern portion of the work area near the identified archaeological site south of the ROW.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbing activities would predominantly occur from blading the access road to structure 7/7 (2,520 square feet) and landing construction at both structures (5,000 square feet). Best Management Practices (BMP) would be implemented prior to initiating ground disturbing activities and all disturbed areas would be stabilized and seeded.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal/state special-status plant species present in the project site. Approximately 7,400 square feet of temporary disturbance to grasses and shrubs would result from the access road and landing work. Appropriate BMPs would be implemented prior to initiating ground disturbing activities and all disturbed areas would be stabilized and seeded with a seed mix approved by Washington State Parks.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no documented occurrences of any Federal or state special-status wildlife species near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat is present. The project may have temporary noise and disturbance impacts to local wildlife species related to construction equipment noise and human presence.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not require in-water work or ground disturbance that could produce sediment that could enter nearby waterways.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands in or adjacent to the project site.

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: The project site is located within the CRGNSA and Columbia Hills State Historical Park. Because the proposed work includes replacing poles with taller poles and ground disturbance as part of an impairment project, an information submittal was submitted to the US Forest Service to notify them of the project on August 27, 2025. No response was received. The proposed work would fall under the BPA savings provision of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act and a consistency review would not be required. Project information would also be shared at the Annual Coordination Meeting with the US Forest Service and CRGNSA in the fall of 2025. Park users may be temporarily impacted by construction vehicles on Dalles Mountain Road or from construction noise during daylight hours, but this disruption would be temporary – lasting up to several days and would occur during weekdays outside of the peak use time. Further, there are alternative use areas in the park, so construction would cause a minor disruption to state park users.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The installation of the taller wood would have minimal impacts to visual quality of the existing transmission line and would be visually consistent with the existing transmission line. All ground disturbance would be seeded and would be visually consistent with the surrounding area once it becomes established.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would generate a small amount of dust and vehicle emissions from work vehicles accessing the work locations. The proposed project would not result in changes to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project activities would generate minor noise and would be short-term duration during daylight hours.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers would follow all standard safety protocols. Activities 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: All activities would be coordinated with landowners prior to work beginning. BPA has coordinated with the US Forest Service for work in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area and the Columbia Hills State Historical Park.

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

Signed:

Jeremy Doschka
Environmental Protection Specialist