

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Chief Joseph Powerhouse Poles Access Roads Project

PP&A No.: 6902

Project Manager: Ryan Piche – TFWK-Grand Coulee

Location: Douglas County, WA

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

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to improve access roads leading to the Chief Joseph powerhouse structures located on the Chief Joseph PH-Chief Joseph Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 transmission lines. The proposed project would occur within Douglas County, Washington. The project would be completed in the fall of 2025 and would construct or repair approximately 0.6 miles of access roads between structures 1/1 and 1/3. Proposed road work would include blading, shaping, grading, brushing, and placing surface rock on existing road prisms. General equipment used for this type of road work includes graders, rollers, bulldozers, brush hogs, excavators, and dump trucks.

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

/s/ Justin Carr

Justin Carr

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey C. Grange

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: October 27, 2025

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: Chief Joseph Powerhouse Poles Access Road Project

Project Site Description

The proposed project is located in Douglas County, Washington. The proposed action would occur within and adjacent to BPA's right-of-way (ROW). The ROW in the project area measures approximately 1,200 feet in width.

The proposed project area lies approximately 700 feet from the Columbia River at approximately 1,000 feet in elevation. The area is within the Columbia Plateau ecoregion and is characterized by arid sagebrush steppe and grassland. The proposed project area lies on land managed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, as well as private land.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation, along with a Determination of No Adverse Effect, with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) on September 19, 2025. DAHP provided concurrence with the determination via a letter dated September 22, 2025. No additional response was received within 30 days.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, all appropriate BMPs would be used to implement site specific erosion and sediment control. All disturbed areas would be stabilized and areas outside of the rock areas would be seeded post construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project activities would not impact any special-status species. There would be no effect to ESA listed species. Only necessary vegetation would be removed within the existing road prism. Any disturbed areas would be stabilized and areas outside of the rock areas would be seeded with a geographic and climate appropriate seed mix.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project activities would have minimal and temporary disturbance to wildlife associated with elevated noise levels and human presence. The proposed activities would be limited to approximately 14 days, and the work would occur during daylight hours. There is no suitable habitat for yellow-billed cuckoo, therefore BPA has determined the project activities would have “no effect” on yellow billed cuckoo.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed project activities would occur approximately 700 feet from the bank of the Columbia River near the Chief Joseph Dam. Appropriate sediment and erosion control measures would be implemented to limit the potential for sediment reaching the river.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands occur within the proposed area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Spill prevention measures would be utilized during construction activities. The proposed project activities do not provide a pathway for groundwater contamination.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur and project activities would not impact existing land uses. The proposed project activities would not significantly affect the current function of the land or habitat.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have minimal impact to visual quality and the results would remain consistent with the existing surroundings of the transmission line corridor and associated access roads.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have no significant impact on air quality. There would be temporary and minimal emissions from construction vehicles and dust associated with construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours. The operational noise of the transmission line would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project activity, all standard safety protocols would be followed. Project 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: BPA realty staff have coordinated the proposed project activities with USACE and private landowners were notified on April 30, 2025. A USACE approval letter was received on May 22, 2025.

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

Signed: /s/ Justin Carr

Justin Carr

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: October 27, 2025