

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Usk/Colville-Boundary Phase I Access Road Improvement Project

**Project No.:** P05778

**Project Manager:** Donna Martin, TELF-TPP-3

**Location:** Pend Orielle County, Washington

**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 Phase I access road improvements along the Usk-Boundary No. 1 115- kilovolt (kV) and Colville-Boundary No. 2 230-kV transmission lines. All work would be in accordance with the National Electrical Safety Code and BPA standards.

To support future operations and maintenance of the transmission lines, approximately 12.8 miles of existing access roads would be reconstructed or improved and approximately 0.4 miles of new access road would be constructed. Work would also include installation or replacement of 28 cross-drain culverts, cleaning and construction of ditches and other water diversion structures, as well as approximately 2.6 miles of roadside vegetation clearing. Additionally, the proposed work would include the construction of 19 leveled rocked transmission structure landing pads. The landing pads would be approximately 40 feet by 60 feet and would total approximately 1 acre. The road and landing work would include blading, shaping, grading, brushing, and placing surface rock.

General equipment used for the proposed project work includes graders, rollers, bull-dozers, brush hogs, excavators, and dump trucks.

As part of the project, land easements would also be secured for several roads where BPA determined land rights are required for future use to access the right-of-way and to conduct current and future maintenance.

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.<sup>1</sup>

Laura Roberts  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

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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 Evaluation

This evaluation 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:** Usk/Colville-Boundary Phase I Access Road Improvement Project

## **Project Site Description**

The proposed project is located in northeastern Washington within an existing transmission line Right-of-Way (ROW) that contains multiple transmission lines and is maintained to promote a low-growing vegetation community. The project area occurs at approximately 2,000 feet above sea level on predominantly steeper slopes where vegetation is intermixed with bare rocky soils. The project area is surrounded by a mixture of forest lands managed for timber and rural residential land use. Within a mile of the project area, several more densely populated areas occur adjacent to the Pend Oreille River. Surface waters traversed by the project include perennial and intermittent streams. Project location and land ownership listed below.

| Township | Range | Section                 | Ownership                                                        |
|----------|-------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 38N      | 42E   | 1,12,13,15,21,22, 24,25 | Colville National Forest                                         |
| 39N      | 43E   | 20, 21, 29, 30          | Private, Colville National Forest, and Bureau of Land Management |

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On May 22, 2025, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- Kalispel Tribe of Indians
- Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)

By agreement with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and United States Forest Service (USFS), BPA was the lead federal agency for Section 106 for this undertaking.

Background research and field surveys were conducted within the Area of Potential Effects (APE). No archaeological resources were identified within the APE. BPA determined that the proposed undertaking would not adversely affect eligible transmission lines. Therefore, on October 15, 2025, BPA determined per §36 CFR 800.5(b), that the implementation of the project would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA Project No. WA 2023 089; DAHP Log No.: 2025-04-02405). Concurrence with BPA's determination was received from DAHP on October 15, 2025. No other comments were received from the consulting parties.

Notes:

- Implement the Post Review Discovery Protocol in the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during implementation. Discontinue all ground-disturbing activity 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: Minor impacts, such as movement and compaction, to geology and soils would occur from access road and structure landing work. Appropriate Best Management Practices (BMP) would be implemented prior to initiating

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status plant species or habitats occur within the project area. Impacts to plants would be minor and would consist of temporary impacts from roadside vegetation clearing and approximately 1.9 acres of permanent vegetation loss from construction of 0.4 mile of new access road and 19 leveled rocked transmission structure landing pads. Appropriate BMPs would be implemented prior to initiating ground disturbing activities and all unrocked disturbed areas would be stabilized and seeded upon project completion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status wildlife species or habitats occur in the project area. The project would have temporary noise and disturbance impacts to local wildlife species related to construction equipment noise and human presence. Impacts would be temporary and there is suitable adjacent habitat to access during disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area crosses several perennial and intermittent streams. No Federal/state special-status fish species or habitats occur in the project area. Cross-drain culvert installation and construction of ditches and other water conveyance structures would not result in impacts to waterbodies as their locations do not have connections to surface waters.

### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands do not occur within the project area; therefore the project would have no impact to wetlands.

### **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: Temporary disturbance would occur on Colville National Forest and BLM lands timber lands, but little to no land use disruption would occur during this temporary disturbance as the work would be timed to not conflict with timber management activities. New roads and landings would occur within the existing transmission line ROW. There would be no change in land use or specially-designated areas as a result of the project. Easement acquisition would not change the underlying access road use.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Road upgrades and structure landing pads would have minimal impacts to visual quality as they would be consistent with the existing transmission line right-of-way.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of vehicle emissions would occur during project implementation. However, there would be no substantial changes to air quality during or after the implementation of the proposed action.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours from the proposed project. No ongoing noise increase is expected as a result of this project.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project implementation, all standard safety protocols would be followed. Therefore, implementation of the proposed action 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 is in coordination with private landowners and land management agencies.

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

Signed:

Laura Roberts  
Environmental Protection Specialist