

## Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Grand Coulee Substation Ground Mat Upgrades and Fiber Optic Cable Installation

**Project No.:** P03252, P01407

**Project Manager:** Jay Chester, TEPS-TPP-1/Michael Henjum, TEPS-TPP-1/Micaiah Watkins  
TEPF-CSB-2

**Location:** Douglas and Grant counties, Washington

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.3 Routine Maintenance, B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities, B4.7 Fiber Optic Cable

**Description of the Proposed Action:** BPA proposes to upgrade the ground mat at Grand Coulee substation's 230-kilovolt (kV) switchyard and install fiber optic cable connecting the Grand Coulee substation's 110-kV, 230-kV, and 500-kV switchyards to BPA's existing fiber optic communications system. The proposed project is needed to meet BPA's required operational standards after BPA acquired permanent operational control of the Grand Coulee substation from Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) in November 2025.

To upgrade the ground mat (a buried network of interconnected conductors that provides a low-resistance path for fault currents thereby protecting people and equipment from shock during faults or lightning strikes) at the 230-kV switchyard, approximately two feet of existing yard rock would be excavated. The existing ground mat would be repaired as needed and new ground mat would be installed at the fence line perimeter of the switchyard. Following the repairs and installation, the yard rock would be replaced.

To install the approximately two miles of new fiber optic communication cable between the existing Grand Coulee 115-kV, 230-kV, and 500-kV switchyards, BPA would run cable within an existing BOR underground utility corridor, requiring the installation of two new utility vaults, and running fiber aerially along the existing structures of BPA's Grand Coulee-Foster Creek No. 1 transmission line. Four new fiber-only wood poles would be installed between structure 2/5 of the Grand Coulee-Foster Creek No. 1 line and the south boundary of the 500-kV switchyard. To string the new aerial fiber, approximately three temporary pulling and tensioning sites would be located in the right-of-way (ROW). Once strung, a small amount of trenching would be required to pass the aerial fiber into a nearby existing vault. Additionally, underground trenching would occur within the 500-kV and the 230-kV yards. No new access roads or landings would be necessary for this installation.

General equipment used for the proposed project work includes backhoes, dump trucks, bulldozers, pulling/tensioning equipment, digger derrick, and line 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.

Laura Roberts  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

# 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: Grand Coulee Substation Ground Mat Upgrades and Fiber Optic Cable Installation

### Project Site Description

The proposed project is in central Washington along the Columbia Plateau at approximately 775 feet above sea level. The project area occurs within existing rocked switchyards and an existing transmission ROW that contains multiple transmission lines. The project area outside of the switchyards consists of shrub-steppe habitat, portions of which are used as rangeland. Within a mile of the project area, several more densely populated areas occur adjacent to the Columbia River, however no surface waters occur in the vicinity of the project. Project location and land ownership is listed below.

Township	Range	Section	Ownership
28N	30E	1-3	BOR, Private
29N	30E	34	BOR, Private

### Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

#### 1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: For the ground mat updates portion of the project, BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) on August 13, 2025. BPA sent a determination of no historic properties affected on October 30, 2025 to the consulting parties. BPA received concurrence of its determination from DAHP on October 30, 2025. BPA sent an amended Determination of Effect memo to the consulting parties clarifying that the project also required the need to install, repair, replace, and/or enhance the electrical grounding mat within the substation yard on November 6, 2025. The determination was revised to a no adverse effect to historic properties. BPA received concurrence of its amended determination from DAHP on November 17, 2025. No other comments were received during the 30-day response period.

For the fiber optic installation portion of the project, BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and DAHP on September 3, 2025 which also included a determination of no historic properties affected. BPA received concurrence of its determination from DAHP on December 3. No other comments were received during the 30-day response period.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, work would be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA 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 the fiber optic cable installation 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 minimal and would consist of permanent and temporary impacts (crushing in temporary work areas and removal where permanent facilities are installed) from fiber optic cable installation work. Appropriate BMPs would be implemented prior to initiating ground disturbing activities and disturbed areas would be stabilized and seeded.

### **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 suitable habitat occurs adjacent to the project area accessible to wildlife during construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water bodies occur within the project area; therefore, the project would have no impact to water bodies, floodplains, or fish.

### **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: There would be no change in land use or specially-designated areas as a result of the project. Activities would occur in existing switchyards and transmission line ROW.

### **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Four new fiber-only wood poles would have minimal impact to visual quality as they would be consistent with the surrounding multiple transmission line corridor.

## 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 long-term operational 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 has coordinated and would continue coordination with BOR and private landowners during construction.

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