

## Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** FY26 Tri-Cities District Periodic Vegetation Management

**PP&A No.:** 6760

**Project Manager:** Cozette DeTray, TFBV-BELL-1

**Location:** Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, and Asotin Counties, Wahington. Union and Umatilla Counties Oregon

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.3 Routine Maintenance; 2.(e)(12) Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres...; 3.(e)(13) Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres...

**Description of the Proposed Action:** BPA proposes to maintain low growing vegetation communities in specific, localized areas in and adjacent to the Lower Monumental-Ashe No 1, Lower Monumental-Hanford No 1, Connell Tap to Benton-Scooteney No 1, Red Mountain-Richland No 1, Tucannon River-North Lewiston No 1, Walla Walla-Tucannon River No 1, Benton-White Bluffs No 1, White Bluffs-Richland No 1, White Bluffs-Stevens Drive No 2, Roundup-La Grande No 1 rights-of-way (ROW) in Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, and Asotin Counties, Wahington. Union and Umatilla Counties Oregon. Vegetation management needs were assessed, and Vegetation Control Cut Sheets were created for the right-of-way corridors and associated access roads along these transmission facilities.

To comply with Western Electricity Coordinating Council standards, BPA proposes to use hand cutting, mowing, herbicidal treatment, or a combination of those methods to manage and maintain vegetation with the goal of removing tall-growing vegetation that is currently or will soon become a hazard to the transmission line (a hazard is defined as one or more branches, tops, and/or whole trees that could fall or grow into the minimum safety zone of the transmission line(s) causing an electrical arc, relay, and/or outage). The overall goal of BPA is to establish and maintain low-growing plant communities along the right-of-way to control the development of potentially threatening vegetation. Work would be done consistent with BPA's long-established vegetation management program, and all herbicide(s) and adjuvant(s) mixture selections would follow the minimization measures identified in the BPA List of Approved Herbicide Environmental Standards & Procedures (ESP)# E-VGM-004.

The corridors in the proposed project area measure approximately 125 feet in width, and traverse approximately 194 line miles. Localized areas within the corridors; approximately 215 acres of ROW corridor, 7 miles of access roads, and 890 structure sites of existing transmission line and access road rights-of-way would be initially treated in the Fall of 2026. Additional vegetation management may be necessary in subsequent years in discrete areas of noxious weeds or where BPA personnel discover vegetation that poses a hazard to the transmission line.

Herbicides would be selectively applied in accordance with their label instructions and BPA-listed buffer distances using spot treatment (stump or stubble treatment, basal treatment, and/or spot

foliar) or localized treatments and cut stubble treatments with chemicals approved by BPA to ensure that the roots are effectively controlled - preventing new sprouts - and selectively eliminating vegetation that interferes with the operation and maintenance of transmission infrastructure. A follow-up treatment of re-sprouting target vegetation would be conducted by fall 2025 and 2026. Additional vegetation management may be necessary in subsequent years of the vegetation management cycle in discrete areas of noxious weeds, or where BPA personnel discover vegetation that poses a hazard to the transmission line.

In addition, BPA proposes to cut approximately 80 danger trees and 20 corridor trees in, or adjacent to, the ROW and to remove limbs or top from 30 trees in, or adjacent to, the ROW. Tree clearing would not be concentrated and would occur in multiple, discrete locations within the 194 miles of rights-of-way. Trees and limbs would be hand cut to maintain the root system and all tree debris would be disposed of onsite, along the ROW, using on-site cut, lop and scatter, or chipping/mulching techniques.

No new access roads, skid trails, decking or staging areas would be needed for the work.

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 and Appendix C 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.

*/s/ Caden Almer*

Caden Almer

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

*/s/ Katey Grange*

Katey C. Grange      Date: January 16, 2026

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:** FY 26 Tri-Cities District Periodic Vegetation Management

### Project Site Description

The proposed action is located within the Columbia Plateau ecoregion in the counties of Benton, Franklin, Walla Walla, Columbia, Garfield, and Asotin Counties, Washington and Union and Umatilla Counties Oregon. The Project Area includes privately-owned land and publicly owned lands such as Washington Department of Natural Resources, US Forest Service (Wallowa-Whitman National Forest), Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs (Umatilla), Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Energy (Hanford Field Office), and US Fish and Wildlife Services. Land use in the project area varies from agricultural, rural residential, and public conservation areas.

The proposed action would occur within, and immediately adjacent to, BPA rights-of-way (ROWs) and access roads for the Lower Monumental-Ashe No 1, Lower Monumental-Hanford No 1, Connell Tap to Benton-Scooteney No 1, Red Mountain-Richland No 1, Tucannon River-North Lewiston No 1, Walla Walla-Tucannon River No 1, Benton-White Bluffs No 1, White Bluffs-Richland No 1, White Bluffs-Stevens Drive No 2, Roundup-La Grande No 1 transmission lines. BPA possesses easement rights for the operation and maintenance of these transmission lines and their associated access roads. This transmission corridor is maintained to control tall-growing vegetation, promoting low-growing species. The topography the transmission line corridor crosses ranges from river valleys, plains, and plateaus. Elevations can vary depending on the specific location within the project area. The project area contains numerous waterways, some of which are fish-bearing, and various wetland areas are also present.

### Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

#### 1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Pursuant to its responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR 800, BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Wanapum Band of Indians, DFW, DNR, the Hanford Tribal Working Group, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) on 10/10/2025. BPA is initiating consultation and has determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no adverse effect to historic properties. No other responses were received within 30 days.

In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA will 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: The proposed vegetation management actions do not result in ground disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Site-specific, localized treatment would be applied to maintain existing low-growing plant communities. Project activities would be limited to the already impacted transmission line and access road rights-of-way and would not substantially alter existing plant communities. Existing naturalized grasses and woody shrubs are present on the entire ROW and are expected to naturally seed into the areas that would have lightly-disturbed soil predominantly located on the ROW roads.

In order to comply with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list for the proposed action on August 15th, 2025. Spalding's catchfly and white bluffs bladderpod are listed under the ESA for the project area. BPA determined that the proposed action would have a "No effect" on Spalding's catchfly and white bluffs bladderpod, as there is not suitable habitat or recorded observations of these plants in the project area.

No special-status state or federally sensitive species would be substantially affected by the proposed action.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In general, the project would have a small impact to wildlife and habitat related to temporary disturbance associated with elevated equipment noise (chain saws and mowers) and human presence. Typically, this temporary disturbance would last less than an hour in any particular treatment segment. With the use of cut, lop, and scatter tree debris disposal, some small animal habitat would be created. Wildlife is anticipated to use adjacent habitat and return to the treatment area soon after the completion of work.

In order to comply with Section 7 of the ESA, BPA obtained an official species list for the proposed action on August 15th, 2025. North American wolverine, yellow-billed cuckoo, monarch butterfly, California condor, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee are listed under the ESA for the project area. No designated critical habitat for wildlife is present in the project area. BPA reviewed historic observation data and habitat in project area and made a determination that the project would have "no effect" to ESA listed wildlife in the project area.

No special-status state or federally sensitive species would be substantially affected by the proposed action.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project area intersects multiple waterways and floodplains as it traverses approximately 194 linear miles in Oregon and Washington. The project does cross several ESA-listed anadromous salmonid critical habitats (Meacham Creek, California Gulch, Dry Creek, Coppei Creek, Whiskey Creek, South Fork Touchet River, Wolf Fork, North Fork Touchet River, West Patit Creek, North Patit Creek, Tucannon River, Pataha Creek, Pow Wah Kee Creek, Alpowa Creek, Snake River, Yakima River). Appropriate herbicides would be used within these locations according to label instructions and applicable ESA consultation minimization measures would be implemented, including herbicide buffers. Herbicide buffers would also be applied to all intermittent and perennial streams in the project area. No ground disturbance would occur, and root systems would be left intact to prevent sedimentation.

Any effects to ESA-listed fish are covered by BPA's programmatic biological agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Endangered Species Act Section 7 Programmatic Conference and Biological Opinion and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation for Standard Local Operating Procedures for Endangered Species to Administer Maintenance or Rebuild Projects for Transmission Line and Road Access Actions Authorized or Carried Out by the Bonneville Power Administration in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho (WCR-2014-1600, September 22, 2016). Through the use of conservation measures, this project is not expected to alter or affect existing habitat and/or distribution, thus it was determined that this project would have No Effect on bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), and bull trout critical habitat.

### Notes:

- Herbicide buffers would be implemented near all ESA-listed anadromous salmonid resident streams and designated critical habitat.
- Trees felled near riparian areas, as applicable, would be felled toward the water to promote fish habitat.
- Root systems in riparian areas would not be disturbed.

## 6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Herbicides would not be applied within wetlands and a buffer up to 100 feet would be established depending on treatment type, potential toxicity, or label advisory for ground or surface water. In those locations with wetlands, appropriate herbicides (mainly Garlon 3A) would be used up to the water's edge, but not over water. No ground disturbance, filling, or excavating of wetlands would occur.

## 7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No use of groundwater is proposed. Herbicide applications would be applied by licensed applicators and would follow label instructions to minimize the potential for groundwater contamination. Further, herbicides would not be applied within 50 feet of known groundwater wells and water sources

## **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur. No specially designated areas are present in the work areas. No disruption to the use of federal and state public lands, including USFS, BLM, BOR, or DOE-managed lands would occur.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be performed within existing transmission line right-of-way. Vegetation management activities and techniques would be similar to what has occurred during prior prescribed management cycles; therefore, there would be a negligible change to the visual quality of the area.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have a limited, temporary impact on air quality from a small amount of vehicle and hand tool emissions and dust generated during vehicle movement.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary noise from vehicles and hand equipment that would occur intermittently and last a few hours in each area.

## **12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would remove potential vegetation hazards to the transmission lines, thus reducing outages and wildfire risk. Herbicides would be applied by licensed applicators in accordance with the label instructions and BPA-approved herbicides to limit the potential for public or worker exposure. Trees would be cleared by contractors who are qualified to work around electrical facilities to minimize the risk of trees falling into the lines and causing injury or wildfire.

### **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 with USFS, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian affairs, Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Energy, HMIS, and US Fish and Wildlife Services. Email was sent directly to HMIS explaining treatment that will be done on Hanford managed land. No special measures or requirements were identified for treatments on federally- and state-managed lands.

Letters, on-site meetings, emails, and phone calls would be used to notify landowners approximately three weeks prior to commencing vegetation management activities. Door hangers would also be used at properties where special treatments are anticipated. Any additional measures proposed by landowners or land managers through ongoing communication would be incorporated into the vegetation management plan during project implementation.

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

Signed: /s/ Caden Almer      Date: January 16, 2026

Caden Almer

Physical Scientist (Environmental)