

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Richland Substation to Stevens Drive Transmission Line Rebuild Project
(Update to previous CX issued on June 12, 2024)

Project No.: P02365

Project Manager: Andrew Young TEPL-CSB-2

Location: Benton County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.13 Upgrading and rebuilding existing power lines; B4.11 Electrical power substations and interconnection facilities.

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to rebuild an approximately 3-mile-long segment of the White Bluffs to Richland No. 1 115-kilovolt (kV) transmission line from Stevens Drive Substation south to the Richland Substation within the City of Richland, Washington (see enclosed project map). The rebuild is necessary to ensure unplanned outages in the Tri-Cities area are less likely to occur. Over the past five years, the BPA transmission system has experienced 15 unplanned outages on the Richland – Stevens Drive 115 kV line. Six of these outages were resolved by dispatchers who were able to remotely reclose breakers to restore service without investigation or repairs. Five of these outages occurred during peak loading periods in the spring and summer. If BPA takes no action, these outages could increase in frequency and result in longer, more widespread power interruptions to customers in the area.

The project is needed as BPA has obligations to ensure that its transmission system is safe and reliable and has sufficient capability to serve its customers and to prevent overloading under certain outage conditions of other transmission lines. Between Stevens Drive and Richland substations, the existing transmission line is a single circuit line consisting of wood H-frame and monopole structures. The existing line would be rebuilt as a 115-kV double circuit transmission line (i.e., two transmission lines on the same structure) on steel monopole structures. Along the existing transmission line corridor, the work would include replacing the existing conductors, H-frame wood pole structures, wood monopoles, and all hardware. Rebuilding the transmission line would also require equipment upgrades at BPA's Richland and White Bluffs substations and the City of Richland's Thayer Drive, Stevens Drive, and First Street substations. BPA would expand the Stevens Drive Substation yard (0.75 acre) and the Thayer Drive Substation yard (0.30 acre) in conjunction with the City of Richland to accommodate installation of new disconnect switches, bus work, and dead-end structures. BPA would also remove the existing control building at Stevens Drive Substation.

To facilitate the removal of the existing White Bluffs to Richland No. 1 transmission line, the proposed work would take place at the substations and each structure located along the transmission line. The design of new steel monopoles versus wood pole transmission line would reduce the total number of structures along the transmission line corridor. Some structures would be installed in the same place as the existing transmission structures; however, alternative locations would be required to accommodate new steel monopoles. Most structures, regardless of

their placement, would be expected to remain in the existing established transmission line right-of-way (ROW). Where proposed transmission structures are located outside of existing BPA ROW, BPA would acquire new ROW as part of this proposed action. All newly acquired ROW would be within previously disturbed lands. New ROW is proposed along the north side of Stevens Drive Substation (0.75 acre) to place one transmission structure, and along the north and east sides of Thayer Substation (0.9 acre) to place three transmission structures.

BPA would also replace about 400 total feet of additional existing fences in five different locations with new non-conductive vinyl fencing for those portions of the fence that were outside of the original APE. Additionally, BPA proposes to grade, rock, and asphalt a small portion of the Richland High School bus parking lot where a pole has been removed.

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 the current *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures*, 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.

Christopher H. Furey
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s):
Environmental Checklist
Map of each substation

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.

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Project Site Description

The project is located in Washington state in the City of Richland in Benton County. The transmission line rebuild is located on the west side of Richland about 4,900 feet west of the Columbia River in a corridor of semi-urban residential and commercial development. Richland High School and Goethals Park are directly east of the transmission line. Several nearby substations in the Richland area would have some equipment upgrades inside the existing respective building as part of the project. The City of Richland's Stevens Drive Substation and Thayer Substation gravel substation yards would be expanded to accommodate new equipment. Some wetlands are located on the other side of a four-lane interstate and railway line about 870 feet southwest of Richland Substation. The surrounding area is mostly residential and commercial development with some golf courses and some agricultural development in the broader area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed activities and determined that these activities at the project area do not have potential to cause effects to historic or cultural resources.

The BPA archaeologist sent an updated letter to consulting parties on February 5, 2026, with a determination that the replacement of the additional vinyl fencing and paving of the school bus parking lot area would continue to result in no adverse impact to historic properties. One response was received from DAHP who concurred with BPA's determination.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: There would be minimal soil disturbance for installation of the new steel poles for the transmission line rebuild. Some digging would be necessary for the project. No digging would be needed for work inside substations, but some digging would be involved for the City of Richland's substation yard expansions into previously disturbed areas. Work would be occurring in mostly residential areas.

Notes:

- Use Best Management Practices (BMPs) to limit soil transport by wind and water during construction. Use barriers where necessary to facilitate traffic movements.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Work would be occurring in mostly residential areas with some areas of landscaped grass. Some previously disturbed ground may be cleared where needed for construction.

Notes:

- Re-seed any cleared areas with a BPA-approved seed mix where necessary. Re-seed impacted lawn patches as appropriate.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Work would be occurring in mostly residential areas with some nearby commercial development and parks. Construction of the new rebuilt transmission line and work at the substations is expected to primarily occur during daytime and early evening hours with no effect expected to any listed or special-status species.

Notes:

- Use appropriate BMPs and fugitive dust plan to limit wind erosion.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The Columbia River is about 4,900 feet east of the project area. No streams are within 500 feet of the project area.

Notes:

- Use appropriate BMPs and fugitive dust plan to limit wind and water erosion of soils.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No impact to wetlands. Some wetland areas are near the project area and project work would avoid such areas. Work would be occurring in the project area in areas of generally dry soil that has been impacted by previous development.

Notes:

- Use appropriate BMPs and fugitive dust plan to limit wind and water erosion of soils.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not impact groundwater or aquifers. Infiltration to groundwater and aquifers would not be adversely impacted by the construction as runoff and erosion at the site would be controlled.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action to rebuild the transmission line and expand substation yards on existing substation properties would not change existing overall land use. Some temporary access limitations would occur during construction.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be limited visual changes to the project area or surrounding environment. The completed work with the new steel poles and substation equipment may be noticeable

but would constitute a small overall change to the current visual state as it would be similar to other new transmission lines and substations in the adjacent area and would involve less poles than the previous transmission line.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: A small amount of dust and vehicle emissions would occur during installation. There would be small, sporadic increases in machine exhaust during periods of active work during construction.

Notes:

- Keep dust to a minimum in adhering to BMPs for ground-disturbing actions as also noted in the sections above.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours. No ongoing noise increases expected.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers on the project would be required to follow all applicable state and/or Federal safety standards as much of the work would occur from inside the substation grounds, and if work occurs outside, access to the active work sites would be controlled and monitored.

Removal of the building at Stevens Substation would need to complete a Facility Hazard Assessment by the BPA Safety Office. If the assessment finds the building to contain asbestos or lead, such hazards would need to be remediated prior to disposal.

The rebuild of the line and substation upgrades would improve the reliability of the transmission line and significantly reduce the occurrence of unplanned electrical outages in the Tri-Cities area.

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 project manager would coordinate with neighboring landowners to coordinate access and address any issues during construction.

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

Signed:

Christopher Furey
Environmental Protection Specialist