

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: North Bonneville-Midway No. 1 Insulator Replacements – Phase 4

Project No.: P01319

Project Manager: Andrew Young, TIPL-TPP-1

Location: Benton and Yakima counties, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance; B3.2 Aviation activities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace insulators and associated hardware and to install fall protection from structure 110/4 to Midway Substation on the 230-kilovolt (kV) North Bonneville-Midway No. 1 transmission line in Benton and Yakima counties, Washington. Mechanical and electrical stresses have degraded the existing insulators and hardware, which could lead to unplanned outages from flash-overs and mechanical failures. Furthermore, transmission structures lack fall protection, which enables transmission line workers to safely climb structures. Therefore, the proposed action is required to maintain the integrity and reliability of the transmission line and to ensure worker safety.

BPA would replace insulators and hardware (e.g., dampers, suspension insulator strings, clamps, armor rods, and/or drop forged hangers) on every existing transmission structure that requires it. Fall protection would also be installed on all structures that do not currently have it. The work would be completed using a helicopter with transmission line maintenance personnel replacing the insulators and hardware while suspended from the helicopter (also known as human external cargo [HEC]). The helicopter would transport the insulators, equipment, and personnel to the structures from eight landing zones and staging areas established at previously-disturbed locations near the transmission line right-of-way (ROW). Additional personnel would use light duty vehicles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) to access the transmission structures on the ground to assist with helicopter operations and support the personnel working on the towers. Vehicles would primarily be operated on existing access roads, with some limited offroad travel potentially required for short distances.

Minor vegetation mowing and/or debris clearing could be required to reduce wildfire risk from vehicles and to make access roads, structure landings, and helicopter landing zones suitable for use. These proposed maintenance activities would not include the construction of new access roads or landings and would not extend beyond existing, previously-disturbed areas. General equipment used for this type of maintenance work includes chainsaws, mowers, and hand tools.

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.

Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
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: North Bonneville-Midway No. 1 Insulator Replacements – Phase 4

Project Site Description

The project site includes BPA's existing North Bonneville-Midway No. 1 transmission line ROW, associated access roads, and temporary helicopter landing zones from structure 110/4 to Midway Substation in Benton and Yakima counties, Washington. Most of the project site is on BPA fee-owned property or within BPA's existing transmission line and access road easements, which are located on private land and on land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), DOE, and the State of Washington. The final 13 transmission structures (from structure 136/3 to Midway Substation) are located on the Hanford Reach National Monument. The transmission line ROW primarily consists of irrigated agricultural lands dominated by row crops and heavily disturbed grazing lands with limited to non-existent native sagebrush and bunch grasses and a preponderance of non-native weedy species. Light duty vehicles and ATVs would be operated on existing gravel access roads and landings, which are largely free of vegetation with some weedy species growing within the road and landing prisms. The eight temporary helicopter landing zones would be located at previously-disturbed locations adjacent to the transmission line ROW. Outside of the project site, the surrounding area has similar land uses along with some rural residential and commercial properties.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On July 12, 2021, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- BLM – Spokane District
- DOE – Richland Operations Office
- Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Yakama Nation)
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR)
- Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWSRO)
- Nez Perce Tribe
- Hanford Technical Working Group (Hanford Tribes) – CTUIR, Nez Perce Tribe, Wanapum Band, and Yakama Nation
- Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)
- Washington Department of Natural Resources

BPA conducted background research and intensive field surveys of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). On November 24, 2025, as per §36 CFR 800.5(b), BPA determined that implementation of the proposed undertaking based on the conditions below would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: WA 2015 065d; DAHP Log No.: 2021-07-04374). Concurrence was received from DAHP on February 2, 2026. No other comments were received.

After BPA made its effects determination, eight helicopter landing zones were identified outside of the original APE. BPA conducted additional research and surveys of the expanded APE. On March 31, 2026, BPA continued consultation and determined that

implementation of the proposed undertaking based on the conditions below would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: WA 2015 065d 01; DAHP Log No.: 2026-03-02105). Concurrence was received from DAHP on April 2, 2026. No other comments were received.

Notes:

- Provide a pre-construction briefing to the BPA construction crews regarding required avoidance and mitigation measures.
- Vehicle operations would be restricted to established access roads and no off-road vehicle use would be permitted.
- Flag the edges of existing access roads within or immediately adjacent to identified archaeological resource locations and restrict vehicle travel over spur roads to dry season.
- Cultural monitors would be present to observe BPA activities within or adjacent to Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs) and archaeological resources.
- Implement the Post Review Discovery Procedure 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: The proposed action would occur within existing gravel access road and landing prisms. Offroad vehicle travel for short distances and vegetation mowing could cause minor and temporary soil disturbance and compaction. These actions would not result in significant erosion or permanent soil impacts. Standard construction best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented as necessary to prevent erosion and to stabilize temporarily disturbed soils following completion of construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed action would primarily occur within existing gravel access roads and landings, where little to no vegetation is present. In the limited areas where vegetation is present, either within access roads and landings or where off-road vehicle travel is required, vegetation would either be crushed and left in place or mowed to minimize wildfire risk. Standard construction BMPs would be implemented, as necessary, to prevent the spread of noxious weeds and to revegetate temporarily disturbed areas.

Umtanum desert buckwheat (*Eriogonum codium*) is listed as a threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The species is present near Midway Substation on the Hanford Reach National Monument. BPA completed a field survey for the species in May 2025. The closest individual plant was located approximately 90 feet east of a BPA access road. With implementation of the measures below, it is BPA's determination that the proposed project would have no effect on the Umtanum desert buckwheat.

Notes:

- Install flagging along the edge of access roads, no more than 10 feet out from the road shoulder, to ensure that field crews would not stray off existing access roads on the Hanford Reach National Monument.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could result in minor and temporary wildlife disturbance from elevated noise and human presence during implementation. It is expected that most wildlife species would likely be tolerant of the proposed level of activity given ongoing surrounding land uses. In addition, most wildlife species would likely be able to avoid work areas and

would reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed action. No Federal or state special-status wildlife species or habitats are documented within or near the project site. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on special-status wildlife or habitats.

Notes:

- If an active nest is identified on a transmission structure, halt work in the vicinity of the nest until it can be inspected and assessed by BPA.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could result in minor soil disturbance. However, no in-water work is proposed, and standard construction BMPs would be implemented as necessary to prevent erosion and sedimentation from indirectly impacting water bodies, if present outside of work areas. Structure 130/3 is located within the floodplain associated with Dry Creek. No vegetation mowing or other actions that could impact riparian habitat is proposed at this location. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact water bodies, would have little to no impact on floodplains, and would have no effect on special-status fish species or habitats.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present within or near work areas. Standard construction BMPs would be implemented as necessary to prevent erosion and sedimentation from indirectly impacting wetlands, if present outside of work areas. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not result in ground disturbance that could reach depths to groundwater or aquifers. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not result in a change in land use and would not impact adjacent land uses. BPA notified staff of the Hanford Reach National Monument of the proposed action on April 10, 2026. An additional notification was sent on April 21, 2026. No response was received.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The presence of vehicles and equipment and minor vegetation disturbance would cause temporary visual impacts. The new insulators could be a slightly different color and material than the existing conductors. However, this change would be minor and would not be overtly noticeable.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would locally cause a minor and temporary increase in dust and emissions. There would be no significant long-term change in air quality following completion of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would result in minor and temporary noise from helicopters and heavy equipment that would intermittently exceed current ambient conditions. Project-related noise could be audible from properties located near the transmission line ROW. However, noise impacts would be temporary and intermittent and would only occur during typical working hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). Work would progress quickly along the transmission line with noise impacting a given area for no more than a few days. There would be no long-term change in ambient noise following completion of the proposed action.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All standard safety protocols would be followed throughout implementation of the proposed action to minimize risk to human health and safety. Therefore, the proposed action would not be expected to impact human health and 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: The proposed action would occur in areas where BPA has acquired, or would acquire, all necessary rights. BPA has notified and been in coordination with underlying landowners and would continue to coordinate as necessary throughout the proposed action. No additional landowner notification, involvement, or coordination would be required.

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

Signed:

Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist