Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Sixmile Canyon Substation Construction and Ashe-Slatt Number 1 Line Modifications

Project No.: L0510

Project Manager: Charla Burke, TIPS-TPP-1

Location: Morrow County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 Code of Federal Regulations [C.F.R.] Part 1021): B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities; B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities; B1.7 Electrical equipment; B4.7 Fiber optic cable; B1.24 Property transfers.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to construct the new 500/230-kilovolt (kV) Sixmile Canyon Substation. Sixmile Canyon Substation would be sited along the existing BPA 500-kV Ashe-Slatt No.1 transmission line approximately 7 miles west of Boardman in Morrow County, Oregon. The new substation facility, located on a 110-acre parcel BPA would acquire prior to construction, would connect to the existing Ashe-Slatt No.1 500-kV transmission line. The parcel and approximately 0.2 acres of permanent easement land rights would be purchased from the Port of Morrow. Approximately 2 acres of temporary construction easements would be acquired from the Port of Morrow. The project is in response to UEC's line and load interconnection request for increased electrical load-serving capacity in the region.

Approximately 42 acres of permanent impacts as described further below would result from substation yard development, installation of new structures, and access road construction. Work and staging areas for project construction would result in approximately 30 additional acres of temporary impacts. Construction equipment at the substation site and transmission line work areas would include line trucks, cranes, graders, excavators, bulldozers, augers, forklifts, and light-duty vehicles. Following construction, temporarily disturbed work areas would be stabilized and reseeded, as appropriate. Construction is anticipated to start in late spring 2026 and last approximately 18 months.

The 34 acre substation yard development would include grading, excavating, and placing imported crushed rock and fill material. The yard would contain 500/230-kV power transformers and supporting substation yard equipment, dead-end structures, and a control house. Below-grade supporting infrastructure would include grounding, conduit, water pipes, secondary oil containment, concrete footings, and a stormwater drainage and on-site treatment system.

The existing Port of Morrow water delivery system would be extended to supply potable water to the control house via a newly installed 2-inch-diameter water service line. Wastewater and sewage from the control house would be managed on-site through installation of a self-contained septic system comprised of a buried septic tank, conveyance pipes, and an access hatch.

One lattice-steel transmission structure would be removed from the existing Ashe-Slatt No.1 500-kV transmission line. Five new lattice-steel transmission structures would be constructed to interconnect the substation to the existing Ashe-Slatt transmission line. Temporary work space for the transmission structure work would be 150 feet by 150 feet. New conductors would be installed creating two new transmission lines: Ashe-Sixmile Canyon No.1 and Sixmile Canyon-Slatt No.1. The new structures would be between 115 and 230 feet tall and equipped with conductors, insulators, ground wire, signage, and fall protection. The structures would have concrete footings with rebar approximately 30 feet deep. Upon completion, all existing lattice-steel structures on the Ashe-Slatt No.1 line would require updated signs.

BPA would authorize Umatilla Electric Cooperative (UEC) to construct and operate approximately 750 feet of UEC 230-kV transmission line on the BPA fee-owned substation parcel. The line would originate from within Sixmile Canyon Substation, requiring installation of four double-circuit, steel monopoles on BPA property. The poles would be between 80 and 85 feet high and would require concrete foundations.

The substation communication system would be connected by splicing into an existing fiber optic cable on the Coyote Springs-Slatt No.1 line. The splices would require two new precast, 4-foot-square concrete vault boxes embedded 4 feet into the ground. The two new fiber optic lines would be trenched 4 to 5 feet deep over a total distance of 0.4 mile from the vaults into the Sixmile Canyon Substation yard and connected to communication equipment inside the new control house.

Approximately 1,030 feet of new gravel access roads would be constructed and approximately 2 miles of improvements would be made to existing roads to transmission line and fiber optic cable work areas within the existing BPA ROW. Access roads would have a minimum 12-foot-wide gravel driving surface with 2-foot-wide shoulders, resulting in a permanent 16-foot-wide impact area. A new 20-foot-wide, approximately 0.8-mile-long paved access road would be constructed to the new Sixmile Canyon Substation entrance.

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)). Further, BPA processes requests for interconnection and provides interconnection services under the terms of an open access transmission tariff adopted by the Administrator in accordance with section 212(i)(2)(A) of the Federal Power Act. (16 U.S.C § 824k(i)(2)(A)). BPA authorizes the use of and manages its fee-owned lands pursuant to its authority under sections 2(e) and 2(f) of the Bonneville Project Act. 16 U.S.C. § 832a(e)-(f).

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.102 of the Department of Energy's (DOE's) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (57 *Federal Register* [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 *U.S. Department of Energy 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 C.F.R. 1021.

2) The proposed action has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.
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.

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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.

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Project Site Description

The project site would be located south of Interstate-84, 7 miles west of Boardman in Morrow County, Oregon. The legal description of the project site is Township 4N, Range 24E, Sections 17 to 20. The project site is mostly flat with shrub-steppe habitat disturbed by grazing and other land uses with a mix of native and non-native vegetation common to the Columbia Plateau Ecoregion. The closest waterbody is the Columbia River, 0.7 miles north of the proposed substation. The site is accessible via paved public roads, including a new final approach along Tower Road. Surrounding areas adjacent to the project site are primarily characterized by rural residential, agricultural, and industrial land use, along with the highway corridor, existing transmission lines, and a private airport. Lands within and adjacent to the project site have been extensively disturbed by land use and developments including grazing, railroads, Interstate-84, and previously disturbed transmission line ROW.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office on July 31, 2024. No comments were received. BPA sent a determination of adverse effects to historic properties on July 3, 2025, and completed a signed Memorandum of Agreement on November 10, 2025. An amended consultation letter was sent out to all stakeholders on March 18, 2026, that addressed engineering updates of structure heights, real property purchase and allowing UEC to use the new BPA fee owned parcel for their planned new transmission line. Oregon SHPO concurred on April 29, 2026, no other comments were received.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA's Post Review Discovery Procedure guidelines would be applied. Work would be halted in vicinity of the finds and BPA would be contacted for further required notifications. The integrity of the site and materials would be preserved until further instructions are given.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Permanent impacts on soil and geology would result from the compacting of the soil within the substation yard area, installation of new transmission line structure footings including landing areas and construction of new access road prisms. Soil surface areas would be converted to semi-impervious gravel within the new substation yard and new access rad areas. Temporary impacts would result from the development and use of heavy equipment within project work areas; these disturbances would be temporary and restored after construction. Any excess soil not used for backfilling during construction would be hauled off-site for disposal in accordance with local, state, and federal regulations. Use of standard construction best management practices (BMPs) and a regulatory Erosion and Sediment Control Plan (ESCP) would minimize erosion, sedimentation, and fugitive dust.

Notes:

- Develop and implement the ESCP.
- Upon construction completion, disturbance areas would be graded to match surrounding terrain and seeded or hydroseeded, as appropriate, using an upland, pollinator-supporting native species seed mix.
- Chipped material from brush removal would be spread in areas of ground disturbance not to exceed a depth of 6 inches.
- Woody vegetation material that cannot be chipped and excess soil would be hauled off-site.
- Spill containment and cleanup materials would be stored in construction equipment, staging areas, and work sites.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No federally or state-listed species or designated critical habitat were identified within the geographic area. The project site is dominated by weedy and non-native plant species. A total of 35 to 40 acres of the project area would be permanently converted to a gravel substation yard, new access roads, and transmission line structure footings. Ground disturbance within the work areas would result in temporary, minor impacts on plants by crushing and clearing vegetation. No special-status plants would be impacted by the proposed action.

Notes:

- Upon construction completion, disturbance areas would be graded to match surrounding terrain and seeded or hydroseeded, as appropriate, using an upland, pollinator-supporting native species seed mix.
- Standard construction BMPs would minimize the spread of noxious weeds.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would occur adjacent to a major interstate highway and a small public airport which already create an ambient noise level to which wildlife is likely accustomed. Wildlife would likely move away from project work areas due to elevated human presence and minor temporary noise increases. The project site provides low-value wildlife habitat consisting of non-native vegetation and weedy species. Wildlife surveys were conducted in May 2024 to identify potential special-status wildlife species and habitats; none were observed. The proposed action would have no potential to affect Endangered Species Act-listed threatened, endangered, or proposed species; designated or proposed critical habitat; or other federal or state special-status species or their habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no streams present in or adjacent to the project site that would be impacted by the proposed activities. The proposed action would not impact water bodies, floodplains, or special-status fish species or habitats.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A wetland survey was completed in May 2024 and no wetlands or waters were identified within or near the project site or structure work areas. The proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Ground disturbance is not anticipated to reach groundwater that is 50 feet to 80 feet below the surface in the area, and no new wells or other uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed. The proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

Notes:

- The proposed action includes installation of an oil containment system that would capture oil in the event of equipment failure or spill, minimizing the potential for impacts to groundwater.
- Standard construction BMPs would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project site is not located in a specially-designated area, including airport operations zone. The proposed action is consistent with current surrounding land uses, including power facilities and transportation infrastructure. The project would result in permanent conversion of undeveloped to developed land use in an area zoned for industrial uses. Temporary construction disturbances and impacts to nearby land uses would be minor and occur primarily on BPA fee-owned property or within the existing transmission line ROW and access roads.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The new substation and associated actions would be relatively permanent changes to the landscape but would be a minor addition relative to the other electrical infrastructure and land uses in the area. The facilities would be similar in appearance and consistent with other industrial and electrical facilities and therefore would not have a significant impact. During construction, the presence of construction equipment and general construction activities, including vegetation disturbance, would cause temporary visual impacts.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would result in a minor and temporary increase in dust and emissions in the local area during construction. Standard construction BMPs to stabilize soils would be implemented. New circuit breakers containing sulfur hexafluoride gas, which is a greenhouse gas, would be equipped with monitoring alarms and gauges to reduce any gas leakage to the atmosphere. There would be minor long-term change in air quality following completion of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could temporarily and intermittently produce noise at levels greater than current ambient conditions. Noise impacts would occur during typical working hours (approximately 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.). There would be no long-term change in ambient noise following completion of the project. The nearest noise-sensitive receptors occur approximately 2 to 3 miles from the project site.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action is not expected to have a significant impact to human health and safety. All standard safety protocols would be followed throughout project construction, and use of standard construction BMPs would minimize risk to 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 the 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 Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (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 been coordinating substation development with the Port of Morrow since 2023. The Port of Morrow is the current landowner of the acquisition parcel and lands adjacent to the site where the substation would be constructed. Additional project involvement and coordination have occurred with Morrow County, Burlington Northern Sante Fe Railroad, UEC, Federal Aviation Administration, and Oregon Department of Aviation. No other coordination is anticipated.

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

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