

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Benton-Franklin No. 1 Transmission Line Switch Installation and Structure Reconfiguration

Project No.: L0488

Project Manager: Lisa Henry, TIPF

Location: Franklin County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities; B1.24 Property transfers.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to install new disconnect switches and associated dead-end structure between the existing 13/7 and 13/8 structures on BPA's Benton-Franklin No. 1 115 kV transmission line located in Franklin County, Washington. BPA would own and operate the new disconnection equipment consisting of three vertical break parallel switches, grounding platform, connection jumpers, and revenue metering equipment. This proposal would facilitate Franklin County Public Utility District's (PUD) interconnection request to service increased future loads at their existing Railroad Avenue substation. Franklin PUD would construct, own, and operate a new Railroad Avenue Tap transmission line and associated substation hardware connecting the proposed disconnect switch assembly and the Railroad Avenue substation. New metering equipment owned by BPA would be installed within existing communications racks inside Franklin PUD's Railroad Avenue Substation.

BPA would replace the current wood pole H-Frame structures 13/7 and 13/8 with like-in-kind new 80-foot-tall structures. The new structures would facilitate an approximate 25-foot span height increase to allow the new disconnect switch assembly and platform to be built within BPA's existing Rights-of-Way (ROW) easement underneath the transmission line. The proposed height increase is needed to safely locate and operate the new switch equipment and grounding platform. To increase the current height of the existing transmission line span configuration, BPA would need to install new conductors and fiber optic cables spliced in between structures 13/6 and 13/8. The new structures would be installed approximately 20 feet ahead online to the south of the current structure locations.

Existing structures would be removed by excavating around the bases of the poles and lifting the poles out of the ground. If the existing wood pole structures are unable to be safely removed from their current ground locations, they would be cut approximately two feet below grade and retired in place. Any remaining holes would be backfilled to ground level with clean backfill material, and excess soil would be dispersed onsite at level grade. The old structure poles and associated hardware would be hauled offsite and disposed of in accordance with all applicable regulations.

Standard transmission line construction vehicles and equipment would be used to complete the proposed action, such as a boom truck, bucket truck, backhoe, truck-mounted auger, pulling and tensioning equipment, and light-duty work trucks. No access road improvements or site

preparation (i.e., grading or graveling to establish landings, materials and equipment staging areas, etc.) would be required. The proposed action would temporarily disturb up to approximately 1.0 acre and permanently disturb less than 0.1 acre. The anticipated construction window would last approximately 2 to 3 weeks, with an estimated completion date of late November 2026.

BPA would grant Franklin PUD access and use of approximately 0.5 acres of current BPA easements near the proposed 13/8 structure and new disconnect switch assembly. The land use grant from BPA to Franklin PUD would allow Franklin PUD the ability to operate, access, and interconnect their new Railroad Tap transmission line conductors into the proposed new disconnect switch assembly dead end structure. The nearest Franklin PUD Railroad Tap structure would be located outside BPA's current easement. No new temporary or permanent BPA easements would be required for this project.

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.

Nicholas W. Johnson
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.

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Project Site Description

The project site is located within BPA's 115-kV Benton-Franklin No. 1 transmission line right-of-way between 13/6 and 14/1 (Township 10 North, Range 30 East, Section 30) located 6 miles northwest of Pasco, Washington. Ground disturbance would occur within previously-disturbed areas that currently are covered in parts by crushed rock with little to no vegetation, routinely mowed common grasses, forbs, and weeds or are near areas under active cultivation. The mixed Eolian sands within the project area are not classified as hydric. No wetlands or water bodies are mapped within or near the project site. The project site is in a rural area, and surrounding land uses are rural residential properties and agricultural lands. Access to the project site would occur along existing ROW access roads adjacent to the county West Vineyard Drive Road.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated Section 106 consultation on November 17, 2025, with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). On November 17, 2025, DAHP concurred with BPA's delineation of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). No other comments were received from consulting parties. BPA sent the cultural survey report and determination of effects letter with a finding of no adverse effect to historic properties to the consulting parties on April 22, 2026. DAHP concurred with BPA's determination with the stipulation of an unanticipated find plan on April 27, 2026. No other comments were received from the other consulting parties on the determination of effect.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would 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. Please provide the project sponsor with a copy of BPA's Post-Review Discovery Protocol.
- Should there be a change to the project design that would expand the project footprint, please contact me to determine if further review is necessary under Section 106. Additional consultation and field inventory may be necessary to address certain design changes.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would result in up to approximately 1.0 acre of minor and temporary soil disturbance from excavation to remove and install transmission structures and new switch assembly and grounding platform as well as from soil compaction and rutting due to vehicle and equipment use. Installing new transmission structures and switch

stands would permanently disturb less than approximately 0.10 acres of soil. Standard erosion and sediment control best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to prevent sediment migration off site. Temporarily disturbed soils would stabilize as vegetation is reestablished and would eventually return to near pre-existing conditions following completion of the proposed action. The proposed action would not impact geology.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no documented occurrences of any special-status plant species, including plants listed under the Endangered Species Act, near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat would be impacted. The proposed action would temporarily crush, strip, or bury up to approximately 1.0 acre of low-growing and common weeds, grasses, and forbs and agricultural crops. Installing new transmission structures and switch stands would permanently remove approximately 0.10 acres of vegetation. Standard construction BMPs would include revegetation with an appropriate seed mixture, if required. Temporarily disturbed areas would eventually return to near pre-existing conditions following completion of the proposed action.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary wildlife disturbance could occur from elevated noise and human presence during construction. It is expected that most species would be able to temporarily move out of the area during construction and then would likely reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed action. There would be no permanent impacts to wildlife habitat. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status wildlife species, including wildlife listed under the Endangered Species Act, near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat would be permanently impacted.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water bodies, floodplains, or fish-bearing streams are located within or near the project site. Standard erosion and sediment control BMPs would be implemented to prevent erosion and sedimentation from impacting any off-site water bodies and floodplains. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact water bodies and 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 the project site. Standard construction BMPs would be implemented to prevent erosion and sedimentation from impacting any off-site wetlands. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground excavation would not reach depths to ground water, and standard construction BMPs would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate 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 could temporarily and intermittently impact agricultural land uses within the project site due to blocked access and nearby residential properties could be temporarily and intermittently impacted due to construction noise. No crop damage is anticipated as the construction window is likely to occur outside the growing and harvesting season for the agricultural areas. There would be no permanent land use impacts following completion of the proposed action. The project site is not located in a specially-designated area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, the presence of equipment and general construction activities, including vegetation disturbance, would cause temporary visual impacts. The new transmission structures would be minorly adjusted in height compared to the existing structures. Although the new switch stand assembly is new, it matches the current use and visual ascetics. The final appearance of the project site would be consistent with the existing visual quality of the area, and the project site is not located in a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would produce minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions in the local area. There would be no permanent 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 the use of vehicles and equipment during construction, which could intermittently exceed current ambient conditions. Construction noise could be audible from nearby residential properties. Noise impacts would be temporary and would only occur during daylight hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). There would be no permanent 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 easements from the underlying landowners. BPA would notify, involve, and coordinate with underlying and adjacent landowners, as necessary. No other involvement or coordination is needed for this project.

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

Signed:

Nicholas W. Johnson
Environmental Protection Specialist