

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Chief Joseph – Snohomish No. 3 & 4 and Chief Joseph – Monroe No. 1
Emergency Access Road Project

PP&A No.: 7141

Project Manager: Donna Martin (CONTR) – TELF-TPP-3

Location: Snohomish and King Counties, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 – Routine Maintenance, B4.6
Additions and Modifications to Transmission Facilities

Description of the Proposed Action:

BPA proposes to perform routine access road maintenance and reconstruction between Chief Joseph substation and Monroe substation in the 86 – 105-line miles of the Chief Joseph-Snohomish No. 3 & 4 and Chief Joseph-Monroe No. 1 transmission lines. BPA access roads are typically 14 foot wide, two-track, compacted dirt roads, or compacted gravel roads. Proposed access road work falls into the following categories:

- Access road reconstruction – Approximately 7 miles of existing access roads that have deteriorated to the point of being unusable by construction equipment would be reconstructed. This includes vegetation removal, road prism reconstruction, grading, widening, gravelling, and installing drainage features or culverts. Vegetation removal would affect grasses, forbs, shrubs, saplings (less than 6 inches dbh) and may include limbing or pruning of existing trees.
- Access road improvements – Approximately 7.5 miles of existing access roads would be improved with minor adjustments, including cleaning, shaping, and compacting the existing road surface; gravelling; or installing drainage features.
- Access road new construction – Approximately 365 linear feet of new access roads would be constructed within the cleared right-of-way. Construction activities would include vegetation removal, road prism shaping, grading, gravelling, and installation of a new bridge across the stream below the structure.
- Direction of travel – Approximately 2.5 miles of direction-of-travel roads would be accessed for construction activities. Direction of travel roads are existing roads that would be used in their current condition without any improvements or upgrades and would be maintained in good or better condition during and after construction. Aggregate may be added to the existing surface and compacted with a roller, but no clearing or work would occur outside the existing road prism. No new easements or ROW would be necessary.

Approximately 30 culverts would be repaired or replaced at existing stream or drainage crossings. Approximately 46 cross drain culverts would be installed or replaced. Two fords would be installed on existing access roads. Each newly constructed ford would consist of rock (riprap and coarse aggregate) embedded in the stream channel to a depth of approximately 18 inches; the finished grade of the fords would be even with the adjacent stream bed and bank.

Nine new bridges are proposed to be installed in the Project Area. They would be replacing existing culverts and fords which are undersized for standard transmission line maintenance vehicles. The bridges would be steel-framed prefabricated structures that fully span the stream channel.

Slide stabilization will be required at approximately 23 locations in the Project Area. These areas have experienced varying degrees of sediment and tree debris on access roads, thereby inhibiting access for transmission crews. Soil will be moved and smoothed, and banks will be reshaped and stabilized.

Nine structure landings would be improved from their current condition. These permanent structure landings are used to provide space for equipment and vehicles during construction and maintenance. These landings are within the cleared ROW and would be improved from their current conditions.

BPA is proposing to split the work into two phases. Phase 1 would include access road improvements, reconstruction, landings, non-fish bearing cross drain culverts, and slide stabilizations. Phase 2 would consist of access road new construction, bridge installations, culverts requiring fish passage and/or additional Clean Water Act permitting, and any work that was not included during Phase 1 due to obstructed access until permitted activities were completed. General equipment used for this type of project includes graders, rollers, bull dozers, excavators, backhoes, and dump trucks. Up to 15 trees may be removed over the duration of the project. The location where these trees may be removed is not known but is possible throughout the duration of the project.

Work is currently proposed for the summer and fall of 2026 and 2027. However, due to potential unforeseen challenges, the project may proceed until December 2032.

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 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.

/s/ Brenna Bettis

Brenna Bettis

Biological Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel Date: July 17, 2026

NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation, Appendix A

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: Chief Joeseph – Snohomish No. 3 & 4 and Chief Joseph – Monroe No. 1 Emergency Access Road Project

Project Site Description

The Chief Joeseph – Snohomish No. 3 & 4 and Chief Joseph – Monroe No. 1 Emergency Access Road Project is located in north-central Washington, specifically within Snohomish and King Counties, Washington. The project would occur within, and immediately adjacent to BPA's right-of-way (ROW) and access roads on the Chief Joseph-Snohomish No. 3 & 4 and Chief Joseph-Monroe No. 1 transmission lines. The project area is predominately located in the North Cascades Lowland Forests ecoregion in northcentral Washington. The ecoregion is characterized by low mountains, broad glaciated valleys, and glacial-fed rivers. Productive temperate rainforests have developed under the mild maritime climate and are dominated by western hemlock, Douglas-fir, and western redcedar. The project area is primarily located on Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest land, as well as State, and private land. The land-use surrounding the project area ranges from rural residential, timber lands, and National Forest.

BPA does not own the property on which the transmission lines are located but rather has easement rights to operate and maintain the transmission lines and access roads. The cleared transmission corridors are approximately 200 feet wide. Vegetation in the ROW and access road corridors are periodically managed to remove tall-growing tree species and promote low-growing grasses and shrubs. The topography ranges from valley bottoms to low lying mountain ridges. Elevation in the proposed work locations generally ranges from 400 – 1500 feet.

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, on March 11, 2026, BPA initiated a consultation memo to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Lummi Nation, the Nooksack Indian Tribe, the Samish Indian Nation, the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe, the Spokane Tribe of Indians, the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians, the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, the Tulalip Tribes, the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, the Nisqually Indian Tribe, the Puyallup Tribe, the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe, the Suquamish Tribe, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). The memo specified that the BPA would be acting as lead federal agency, with concurrence from the United States Forest Service, Mt. Baker-

Snoqualmie National Forest. On March 11, 2026, the Washington State DAHP concurred with BPA's delineation of the Area of Potential Effects (APE) and assigned DAHP #2026-03-01664-BPA to the consultation. On April 11, 2026, the 30-day response period expired. No other comments were received from consulting parties.

On April 28, 2026, BPA shared a summary report of a cultural resources survey of the APE and a draft Determination of Effect memo with the USFS, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest for comment and concurrence. On May 4, 2026, the USFS, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest responded with minor comments on the report and concurrence with the Determination of Effects memo. On May 8, 2026 BPA shared a summary report of a cultural resources survey of the APE and a Determination of Effect memo with: the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Lummi Nation, the Nooksack Indian Tribe, the Samish Indian Nation, the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe, the Spokane Tribe of Indians, the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians, the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, the Tulalip Tribes, the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, the Nisqually Indian Tribe, the Puyallup Tribe, the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe, the Suquamish Tribe, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). Between May 8, 2026, to May 12, 2026, BPA received concurrence with BPA's determination of no historic properties affect from the Samish Indian Nation, Washington State DAHP, and the Suquamish Tribe. No other comments were received from consulting parties, and on June 8, 2026, BPA determined that the project would have no effect to historic properties.

Notes:

- 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. A copy of BPA's Inadvertent Discovery Protocol will be included in documents given to the contractor on award.
- Should there be a change to the project design that would expand the project footprint, BPA contractor is to contact BPA's Cultural Lead 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 with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed project involves ground disturbing activities, including access road improvements, reconstruction, and new construction, bridge construction, culvert cross drain and stream crossing repairs and replacements, ford work, structure site landings, and slide stabilizations. Road cuts and ground disturbance would be relatively minimal, and new road construction is only proposed within the disturbed cleared right-of-way. These actions have the potential to cause localized soil erosion, compaction, and sedimentation. To ensure these impacts remain minor and temporary, the project will implement standard erosion and sediment control Best Management Practices (BMPs), and any disturbed, un-rocked soils would be stabilized with hydromulch and native seed or weed free straw and native seed. Additionally, culvert and bridge installations would be engineered to maintain natural stream flow and prevent bank undercutting.

Notes:

- BPA's access road contractor would develop and implement an erosion control plan to minimize erosion and sedimentation on the project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access road improvements would disturb the vegetation that is immediately adjacent to or growing within the existing road footprint. The 365 linear feet of new road footprint is planned within the cleared and disturbed right-of-way; therefore, impacts to vegetation would be limited. Those un-rocked, disturbed areas would be seeded and monitored to ensure revegetation.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list on June 5, 2026, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to analyze the proposed project's impacts to plant species protected under the ESA. No ESA-listed plant species are present in the project area; therefore, the project would have "No Effect" on ESA-listed species.

BPA corresponded with U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest staff. No special-status plant species or habitat were identified during discussions with USFS staff. BPA has determined that project Activities would not lead to a negative trend for special-status plants.

Notes:

- Disturbed, un-rocked areas would be seeded with a native seed mix and temporarily stabilized with straw or hydromulched prior to demobilization and monitored to ensure final stabilization goals are achieved.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Access road construction activity would temporarily disturb local wildlife, including mammals and birds, due to human presence and noise from heavy equipment. However, disturbance would be temporary, during daylight hours, and limited to the immediate access road area. The surrounding forest provides ample habitat and cover for any wildlife disturbed by the project's actions.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list on June 5, 2026, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to analyze the proposed project's impacts to species protected under the ESA. Marbled murrelet, gray wolf, yellow-billed cuckoo, North American wolverine, Mt. Rainier White-tailed ptarmigan, bull trout, and northern spotted owl are listed in the project area. Marbled murrelet, northern spotted owl, and bull trout designated critical habitat are also present in the project area. Monarch butterfly and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee are listed as proposed threatened and endangered species in the project area. BPA determined that the project would have "No Effect" on gray wolf, yellow-billed cuckoo, North American wolverine, Mt. Rainier White-tailed ptarmigan, Monarch butterfly, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee, "may effect, not likely to adversely affect" for northern spotted owl and bull trout, and "likely to adversely affect" marbled murrelet. BPA determined that the project would have "No Effect" on designated critical habitat for marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl, and "may effect, not likely to adversely affect" designated critical habitat for bull trout. On June 5, 2026, BPA submitted a Biological Assessment with request for formal and informal consultation and concurrence to the USFWS Washington Fish and Wildlife Office. BPA received a Letter of Concurrence and Biological Opinion from USFWS on June 22, 2026 (consultation code 2026-0052288). During construction, BPA's access road contractors would implement daily and seasonal timing restrictions with suitable northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet habitat (see Appendix A).

BPA corresponded with U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest staff. USFS did not note any special-status species in the project area. Due to the limited scope of the project and seasonal and daily timing restrictions to be implemented for ESA-

listed species, BPA has determined that project activities would not lead to a negative trend in viability for any unknown special-status wildlife found within the project area.

Notes:

- See Appendix A for Best Management Practices regarding timing restrictions for ESA listed species.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Several waterways are present within and near the project area, including the South Fork Skykomish River, Tye River, Alpine Creek, Beckler River, Barclay Creek, and Bridal Vail Creek. No work is planned in or near these waterways, however work is proposed in connecting tributaries off the SF Skykomish River, Tye River, and Bridal Vail Creek. These tributaries are noted as perennial and intermittent streams that are composed of cobbles and fine sediments embedded with gravels, that provide spawning habitat, designated essential fish habitat, and designated critical habitat to native coho (EFH), chum, chinook (Puget Sound ESU/EFH), and pink salmon, steelhead (Puget Sound DPS), bull trout (ESA), and other native fish such as coastal cutthroat trout. BPA is proposing to install 9 new bridges, 7 of which are within systems containing listed species and other native fish such as coastal cutthroat trout. These will be steel modular bridges ranging in length from 50 – 100 feet to meet proper 100-year flood event conditions based on the systems size. There are 7 new culverts proposed that have been noted to contain listed species and other native fish such as coastal cutthroat trout. These culverts would be designed to meet proper fish passage guidelines as described by state and federal laws.

Due to the presence of ESA-listed chinook salmon and steelhead and designated critical habitat in the SF Skykomish River, Tye River, and Bridal Vail Creek, BPA would consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the proposed action prior to construction. Activities that require consultation would be completed in Phase 2 of the proposed project. BPA and NMFS have a standing biological opinion for impacts to ESA-listed species under NMFS jurisdiction for routine access road maintenance activities (WCRO-2013-0007). Tributaries where work is proposed are not explicitly mapped as critical habitat themselves, however, they receive protection under the ESA because they may directly influence water quality, quantity, and biological productivity of the mainstem waters.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an official species list on June 5, 2026, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to analyze the proposed project's impacts to species protected under the ESA. BPA determined the proposed project activities "may effect, not likely to adversely affect" bull trout and designated critical habitat for bull trout. On June 5, 2026, BPA submitted a Biological Assessment with a request for informal consultation and concurrence to the USFWS Washington Fish and Wildlife Office. BPA received a Letter of Concurrence from USFWS on June 22, 2026 (consultation code 2026-0052288). The project area is located within the Coastal Recovery unit, and work is not proposed in waters that are USFWS designated bull trout habitat or critical habitat. Only connecting waters and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) noted bull trout distribution systems were found in the project area. Due to the proximity to listed waterways, BPA's access road contractors would implement BMPs that can be found in Appendix A.

To comply with the Clean Water Act, BPA would conduct wetland and waterway surveys, by a professional wetland scientist, if necessary, in areas where bridges and culverts are proposed. A wetland delineation report would be developed if applicable surveys have not

been previously completed and would be submitted to the Washington Department of Ecology. For project locations that may trigger Clean Water Act permitting conditions (Sections 404/401) BPA would develop a Joint Permit Application for submittal to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Washington Department of Ecology. All stream crossing culverts and bridges would be completed in Phase 2 of the project to allow adequate time for consultation requirements.

Notes:

- BPA would consult NMFS and acquire authorization to conduct proposed actions prior to construction (Phase 2). This includes in-water work within systems containing ESA-listed species, Essential Fish Habitat, and/or native fish species.
- BPA and its contractor would adhere to all NMFS permit conditions.
- BPA and BPA's contractor would follow all listed BMPs in the noted waterways specified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed in Appendix A.
- BPA and its contractor would comply with the Clean Water Act, including consulting with all necessary parties prior to Phase 2 construction and adhering to all permit conditions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: In general, the proposed project runs through upland areas; north Cascades lowland forests. However, wetlands are present within the project area, usually associated with riparian areas as fringe wetlands. In most cases, wetlands would be spanned and no project activity is planned nearby. However, in some locations, construction would occur near wetlands. Specifically, approximately 0.17 acres of access road reconstruction, including a new bridge installation crossing an intermittent stream, has been identified as a freshwater emergent wetland by the National Wetland Inventory. This location is back of line structure 95/1 on the Chief Joseph-Snohomish No. 3 transmission line. Potential impacts to wetlands and waterways in this area would be exempt from the Clean Water Act under its respective maintenance exemptions.

Wetlands are also located adjacent to perennial streams where three bridges are proposed within spans 101/3, and 102/5 on the Chief Joseph – Snohomish No. 3 transmission line. These wetlands were identified by the National Wetland Inventory and would be delineated, if necessary, prior to construction. These wetlands would be identified in the field, and temporary and permanent impacts to these wetlands would be avoided during construction.

Notes:

- Wetlands present in the project area would be delineated and permitted under Section 404/401, if necessary, prior to project implementation.
- Wetland areas, such as those present in line miles 95, 101, and 102, would be identified in the field during construction and flagged for avoidance. Construction crews would be directed to complete all work on existing access road footprint, minimizing impacts to adjacent wetlands.
- Disturbance near wetlands would be minimized as much as possible during construction. Work would be completed in the low-flow late summer period. If flow is present, the work area would be isolated with a coffer dam prior to ground disturbance to minimize water quality impacts. Downstream flows would be maintained at all times. Disturbed, un-rocked areas would be temporarily stabilized with erosion control blankets, in accordance with the project's erosion control plan.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Road construction activity, including grading and blading, would not occur at a depth that would intersect or impact groundwater and aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Current land use consists of private timber lands, National Forest land, private rural residential areas, and high voltage transmission corridor. The proposed project would not alter current land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The current visual profile of the project area consists of high-voltage transmission line corridor and access roads and would not be significantly altered by the proposed project.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would have limited, temporary impacts to air quality due to heavy equipment operation and traffic related to the construction project. However, impacts would be insignificant, and the project is located in remote areas that generally do not have background air quality problems.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would have limited, temporary impacts to noise related to heavy equipment operations. However, construction activity would occur during daylight hours, when potential impacts to people and wildlife would be minimized, and the project is located in remote areas, without many human receptors.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would benefit human health and safety, both to BPA's transmission linemen and vegetation management crews, providing safer transportation to the high voltage corridor, as well as to the general public, as safe reliable power is a public human health and safety concern.

Prior to construction, BPA's access road contractor would submit a Safety Plan to BPA's safety office for review, comment and approval, and the plan would be implemented in the field. All job hazards would be identified in the Safety Plan and mitigated to the extent possible during construction.

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 contacted the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest in January 2026 to discuss the urgent project and potential impacts. Prior to initiating construction in either Phase, BPA would continue to contact additional stakeholders, including private landowners and public landowners such as the State of Washington, to discuss the project and potential impacts. BPA would continue to coordinate with all associated parties as construction start dates approach.

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

Signed: /s/ Brenna Bettis Date: July 17, 2026
Brenna Bettis
Biological Scientist (Environmental)