

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Taft Substation Storage Building Expansion

Project Manager: David Jamison – NWMS-1

Location: Mineral County, Montana

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.15 Support Buildings, B1.24 Property Transfers

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to expand the existing snowcat storage building to include storage of the loader-mounted snow blower machine on BPA-owned property, in Mineral County, Montana (T19N R31W SEC7). The storage building would be 50 feet by 25 feet, built to the south and west, but connected to the existing storage building.

Construction of the building would involve excavating below the current soil level to pour the footings. The foundation of crushed rock, followed by a poured concrete slab would form the floor of the shed approximately 2 feet above the current ground surface. Around the exterior of the shed, gravel and excavated topsoil would be graded to 4 feet out to protect the shed foundation. The driveway out the west side of the building would similarly extend to 4 feet outside the building and would be composed of crushed rock.

BPA also proposes to acquire a road easement for access to the expanded snowcat storage building. This acquisition is for an existing roadway adjacent to BPA property, owned by Northwestern Energy. This easement would be utilized for operation and maintenance activities related to the expanded storage building.

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)).

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.

Jessica A. Heppler
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 on BPA fee-owned property south of Taft Substation in Mineral County, Montana (T19N R31W SEC7). The area in and around the proposed project site may be characterized as industrial use to the west, Interstate 90 and the St. Regis River to the north, and forested timberland to the south and east. Ground cover within the project site consists of disturbed gravel and soil, sparse grass, and shrub species. According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the National Wetland Inventory, there are wetlands near, but not within the project area; however, there are hydric soils present within the project area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: BPA initiated Section 106 consultation on April 7, 2026, with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. BPA determined that the proposed activities would not result in any historic properties affected. The Montana SHPO concurred with the APE and the finding of no historic properties affected on April 27, 2026. No other comments were received.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Some soils would be affected by the excavation of the building footing. These soils would be used in the grading around the building and covered with gravel to prevent erosion and runoff.

Notes:

- Utilize Best Management Practices (BMPs) to limit soil transport by wind and water during construction and during soil storage and disposal.

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

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: There would be some herbaceous plants and shrubs permanently removed to construct the building. No trees would be removed as part of the project actions. There are no known occurrences of Federal, state, or special-status protected plant species within the proposed project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: The North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) and Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) are federally-threatened species that could potentially be present near the project area. Fisher (*Pekania pennanti*), a state species of concern, is a species that also may be present near the project area. However, there are no documented occurrences of Canada lynx, wolverine, or designated critical

habitat for either species present in the project area. Because the work would be occurring adjacent to a substation, a large concrete extraction operation, and highway traffic, the potential for wolverine, Canada lynx, or fisher moving through the area is low. Townsend big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), designated as a state species of concern, is known to roost near, though not within the project area, specifically under overpasses, off-ramps, and bridges associated with I-90. Project activities would occur strictly during daylight hours and would not affect foraging bats at night. Any wildlife species that are present in the project area are likely used to elevated noises and human presence.

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

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: While the building is being constructed in what FEMA has classified as a floodplain, the shed would impact a relatively small area within the floodplain; the floor of the shed would be elevated above ground level, identical to the extant shed. There are no water bodies within the project area, but the St. Regis River is to the north of the project area. West-slope cutthroat trout, a state species of special concern, is known to be present in the St. Regis River. No project activities are planned that would affect habitat in the St. Regis River.

Notes:

- Standard erosion and sediment control BMPs would be used for ground disturbance to protect water resources and avoid and minimize erosion, runoff, and other surface alterations. Any spills would be addressed immediately and follow BPA protocol for cleanup and regulatory notification.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: While there are wetland areas near the project site, no project activities would be conducted within those wetlands or would affect those wetlands..

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Project activities are unlikely to reach depths affecting groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: There would be no change in land use or specially-designated areas as a result of this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: The addition of the storage building expansion is expected to be a minimal alteration to visual quality and would remain consistent with the overall visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Depending on the vehicles and equipment used, temporary and minor dust and vehicle emissions could increase in the local area during project implementation. There would be no long-term impact to air quality following completion of the project.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours. No ongoing noise increase is expected for this area as a result of this project.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Project actions would not generate or use hazardous materials and would not create conditions that would increase risk to human health and safety. No impact to human health and safety is expected as a result of project activities.

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: Acquisition of the road easement for the access road would be directly negotiated between BPA Realty and the landowner.

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

Signed:

Jessica A. Heppler
Environmental Protection Specialist