

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Chief Joseph-Sickler No. 1 Transmission Line Insulator Replacement

PP&A No.: 7151

Project Manager: Craig Wohlsein – TFWK-Grand Coulee

Location: Douglas County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to complete maintenance on the Chief Joseph-Sickler No. 1 transmission line. The work would include replacement of static insulators and vibration dampeners on 221 structures across approximately 45 transmission line miles. The work would be done using helicopters to transport workers between landing zones and the work areas using the human external cargo (HEC) method. Helicopters would be present at each line mile over a period of less than 8 hours. Eight helicopter landing zones would be used to perform the work as well as aircraft refueling operations. Landing zones would be located in previously-disturbed areas and would not require clearing or disturbance for use.

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/ Justin Carr

Justin Carr

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey C. Grange

Date: August 10, 2026

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: Chief Joseph-Sickler No. 1 Insulator Replacement

Project Site Description

The proposed action is located in Douglas county, Washington. The proposed action would occur within and adjacent to BPA's right-of-way (ROW) as well as eight identified helicopter landing zones near the ROW.

The ROW in the project area measures between 400 and 500 feet wide. Elevations of the structures in the proposed project area range from 800 to 4,000 feet above sea level. The transmission line ROW lies on private agricultural lands and some small parcels of WA state lands.

	Location	Landowner	County
Substation	Chief Joseph	BPA	Douglas
Chief Joseph-Sickler-1	8/3	Private	Douglas
Chief Joseph-Sickler-1	13/4	Private	Douglas
Chief Joseph-Sickler-1	20/6	Private	Douglas
Chief Joseph-Sickler-1	26/2	Private	Douglas
Chief Joseph-Sickler-1	33/3	Private	Douglas
Chief Joseph-Sickler-1	39/3	Private	Douglas
Maintenance Headquarters	Sickler	BPA	Douglas

Table 1: Proposed helicopter landing zones.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA sent consultation on June 23, 2025, that detailed the proposed project and determined that the project would result in no adverse effect to historic properties. Consulting parties included the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). No responses were received within 30 days.

Notes: Project Implementation Measures:

- 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.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project activities are not expected to result in soil disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some vegetation may be crushed in landing zones or where equipment would be staged temporarily. There are no identified state listed sensitive species in the proposed action area. Ute ladies'-tresses is potentially present in the action area. Work would be non-invasive to plant species and there is no suitable habitat, therefore BPA has determined there would be "no effect" to Ute ladies'-tresses.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In general, the proposed project activities would have minimal and temporary disturbance (typically up to 8 hours) to wildlife associated with elevated noise and human presence. Gray wolf are potentially present in the project area. Project activities would be minimally invasive and extremely temporary; therefore, BPA has determined that the proposed project would have "no effect" on gray wolf, or the proposed threatened species monarch butterfly and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee. Yellow-billed cuckoo has not been sighted in Washington state since 1996 and there is no suitable habitat for this species within the proposed action area, therefore BPA has determined the proposed project activities would have "no effect" on yellow-billed cuckoo. Transmission Line Maintenance has conducted visual surveys of the line and has not identified bird nesting on transmission towers, or surrounding the areas where work is to be conducted. The actions of the project would have discountable effects on federally protected species under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbing activities in any stream or other water body in the proposed project area and no riparian vegetation would be impacted. The project would have "no effect" to ESA listed fish species including bull trout or any water bodies. Minimization measures would be implemented to prevent runoff contamination.

Notes: The following conservation measures would be implemented during this project:

Helicopter landing zones would be the only areas where fueling would occur in the project area. Standard BMPs would be implemented during fueling operations and include:

- Fueling would not occur within 150 feet of a water resource or conveyance (e.g., a lake, pond, river, stream, wetland, canal, ditch, etc.).
- When possible, fueling would occur on a flat and impermeable surface.
- Spill management and fire suppression equipment would be immediately available.
- Fueling would only be conducted by trained and qualified personnel in accordance with governing laws, regulations, policies, and procedures.
- Workers performing fueling would receive training in proper fueling operations and spill response.
- Fueling equipment would have a kill switch that can immediately stop the fueling operation.
- The flow rate of fueling equipment would not exceed 10 gallons per minute.
- While fueling, the operator would cup an absorbent pad under the nozzle and wait 30 seconds after fueling has stopped to allow all fuel to leave the nozzle. When returning

from the helicopter to the fueling truck, the operator would hold the cupped nozzle upwards.

- Should any fuel be spilled, the soil would be excavated and placed in a plastic bag or container for proper handling and disposal.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetland areas have been identified in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Refueling activities have the potential to impact groundwater or aquifers, but this would be unlikely given the minimization measures that would be employed.

Notes: The measures described above for #5 would minimize the potential for the proposed project to impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur and project activities would not impact existing land uses.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project activities would not change the current visual aesthetics.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would utilize conventional equipment powered by petroleum fuels. Exhaust would temporarily impact air quality in the immediate vicinity while the equipment is in operation. Additionally, dust may be created by helicopter operations. Dust creation would be isolated to small areas and in short duration. Water may be used for dust suppression in some areas. Baseline air quality conditions are expected to return shortly after project activities cease.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project would have noise associated with use of a small helicopter. During project activities, work would take place during daylight hours, for approximately eight hours per day. The project would be relatively short in duration – no more than one day at a single transmission line span. The operational noise of the transmission line would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project area occurs away from any major population centers and the work would be temporary and minimally invasive.

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 realty staff have coordinated the proposed project activities with private landowners.

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

Signed: /s/ Justin Carr

Justin Carr

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: August 10, 2026