

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Big Eddy – Spring Creek Insulator Replacement

Project No.: P01294

Project Manager: David Pulley, TIPL

Location: Wasco, Oregon and Klickitat, 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: The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace conductor insulators on the Big Eddy-Spring Creek No. 1 230 kV transmission line. BPA owns and operates this transmission line, located on private, Federal, and state lands within Wasco County, Oregon and Klickitat County, Washington. This transmission line is supported by steel lattice structures. BPA would perform non-ground disturbing maintenance activities on 174 structures along the 47 miles of transmission line between the Big Eddy Substation to the line terminus at the Spring Creek Substation. The insulators on following structures would not be replaced: 40/1, 40/4, 41/1, 41/2, 42/2-42/6, 4/4, 5/3, 8/4, 9/1-9/3, 39/3-39/5.

BPA would replace, or install hardware and equipment along transmission line structures, including but not limited to; cross-arm brackets, insulators, connectors, bracing, jumpers, peaks, and associated overhead protected ground wire hardware. Additionally, an approximately 0.5 acre material staging yard would be constructed in the existing gravel parking area south of the Spring Creek substation yard. The storage yard would be fenced with an 8-foot-high chain-link fence with access to the yard provided by a new 24-foot-wide gate. Access to the yard would follow the existing substation access road to the east.

The project activities would be performed from September 2026 through early 2027, weather and conditions permitting. The proposed maintenance actions would primarily occur using a helicopter for majority of the structures. A few sites could require bucket trucks, light duty pickups, and ATVs where the current access road network can support access without road surface improvements. Maintenance crews would consist of approximately one-to-two workers from the helicopter and one-to-two workers on the ground as safety observers. Temporary cribbing may be utilized to level and stabilize bucket truck out-riggers as needed. Temporary material storage, staging, helicopter landing and refueling areas would occur throughout the line corridor sited within areas that provide existing access and would not require additional permanent impacts for the use of the sites. Refueling sites would include the required spill protection onsite. Work sites would be accessed using BPA's existing access road system and the proposed work would not require ground-disturbing activities or access road improvements. No planned in-water work would occur within areas near waterways including the Columbia River.

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 *DOE 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 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.

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FOR
Nicholas Johnson
Environmental Protection Specialist

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Concur:

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FOR
Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

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Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Evaluation

This checklist 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: Big Eddy – Spring Creek Insulator Replacement

Project Site Description

The project area is confined to the immediate access roads and structure landings within BPA's transmission lines or adjacent easements along the Big Eddy – Spring Creek transmission corridor. The proposed work areas span from the Big Eddy Substation located 0.5 miles south of The Dalles dam and terminate at the Spring Creek substation in unincorporated Klickitat County, Washington 44 miles northeast of The Dalles, Oregon.

Access to the project area would be along existing compacted access roads, as well as vegetated and non-vegetated structure landings. Temporary material and helicopter landing sites are sited on existing improved surfaces like parking lots and grassy fields throughout the project area. The predominant vegetation in the area is common native and non-native grasses, shrubs, and tree species that are typical of the Cascade steppe ecoregion. Land use surrounding the project area ranges from agricultural, livestock rangeland, rural residential, and conservation lands. The Columbia River and several intermittent waterways and two perennial creeks, Five-mile and Eight-mile creeks, intersect the right-of-way throughout the project area. Project actions do not occur within the ordinary high-water mark of jurisdictional waters.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation on the Big Eddy-Spring Creek Insulator Replacement and Impairment Remediation Project on May 3, 2022, with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN), the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Nez Perce Tribe, the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) – Portland District, the United States Forest Service (USFS) – Gifford Pinchot National Forest, the United States Forest Service – Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA), the United States Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-Spokane District, Washington States Parks and Recreation Department, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). BPA received a response from DAHP on November 3, 2022, concurring with the proposed Area of Potential Effect (APE). The CTUIR and the YN responded on May 17, 2022 and May 18, 2022, respectively, recommending cultural resources surveys. BPA did not receive any other responses within 30 days. On January 6, 2026, BPA sent a no adverse effect to historic resources determination for the BE-SC Insulator Replacement Project located on non-YN owned lands on January 6, 2026. DAHP concurred on January 6, 2026, and ORSHPO concurred on February 3, 2026. No additional response was received within 30 days.

Notes:

To ensure avoidance during construction, BPA would include the following in the project's mitigation implementation table and construction plans as sensitive areas needing additional protection in the form of avoidance/temporary fencing.

- Structure 4/5: Confine vehicles to north side of structure.
- Structure 5/4: Confine vehicles to existing road and landing.
- Structure 37/1: Confine vehicles to west side of structure.
- Structure 14/2: Confine vehicles to north side of structure.
- Structure 14/5: Confine vehicles to south half of structure.
- Structure 16/3: Confine vehicles to existing road and landing.
- Structure 8/3: Confine vehicles to north/east side of structure.
- Structure 6/1: Confine vehicles to existing road and landing.

2. Structure 5/5: Confine vehicles to existing road and landing. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ground-disturbing activities in the proposed action. Therefore, geology and soils would not be impacted due to the implementation of the proposed action.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No Federal or state special-status plant species were found to occur within the project area of potential impact. Project activities would be limited to within the existing managed transmission line right-of-way corridors, structure landing sites, and associated access road networks. No new landings, access roads or vegetation maintenance are planned for this project. Some temporary disturbance could occur to local plant species along the access routes and structure landing sites during access; however, these impacts would be minor and not expected to have permanent negative impacts to local plant populations.

Notes:

- Crews would wash equipment before and after accessing work areas to limit the dispersal of noxious weed species.
- Crews would access areas when weather conditions permit and remain on existing road prisms and structure landings.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed project is within 0.5 miles of four recorded golden eagle nesting sites located along the northern bluff of the Columbia River between the line operating miles 6 through 9. Crews would avoid working in the areas adjacent to the known golden eagle nesting sites during the critical nesting period. Local wildlife in the project area is likely to experience temporary disturbance from elevated noise and human presence. This disturbance is anticipated to be temporary and there is adjacent habitat for wildlife to use during the construction periods. All project activities would be confined to the existing transmission line right-of-way and existing access roads. No trees or potential habitat would be modified as a result of the proposed activities. No other Federal or state special-status species are present within the project area of potential impact.

Notes:

- Crews would perform work within operating miles 5 through 10 from October 1 through December 3 which is outside the golden eagle breeding and nesting season.
- Helicopter operations would avoid flying within 1,000 feet of eagle nests during the period of January 1 through September 30.
- Helicopter ingress and egress into project work areas would avoid low altitude crossings of the Columbia River, which have the greatest potential for migratory bird presence during the project timeline.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No planned work would occur within water bodies, floodplains, or fish habitat. Project activities and site access would occur within existing access road and landing footprints and would not impact known adjacent water resources areas located throughout the project area. There would be no impact on these resources as a result of this project.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No known wetland areas occur within the proposed project work areas. Project activities and site access would occur within existing access road and landing footprints and would not impact any adjacent wetland areas that could occur throughout the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No planned ground disturbance would occur as a result of the project. Therefore, groundwater and aquifers would not be impacted due to implementation of the proposed action.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area transects the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, Columbia Hills Historical State Park, BLM, USACE, USFS, and several state and private conservation parcels. There could be temporary disturbance to nearby recreationists of these areas located near the work areas. These disturbances would be temporary and limited to approximately 2 days for each structure work area. There would be no direct recreational disturbances and there are ample alternate locations for the public to recreate during the short project work periods for each location. BPA provided project information to the CRGNSA-USFS to coordinate actions within the national scenic area. No other project activities would impact specially-designated areas. Land use would not change permanently as a result of the project activities.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Structures modifications and maintenance would be consistent with the current design and would not change the overall visual appearance post construction. There would be no impact on visual quality as a result of the project.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project could have a small, temporary impact on air quality from vehicle emissions and dust generated during construction and flight operations. No other impacts to air quality would occur from the proposed actions of the project.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours Monday through Friday. Helicopter operations would consist of approximately 20 flights a day to ferry crews and equipment from staging areas to structures. No prolonged hovering is anticipated. The overall noise of the transmission infrastructure would not change as a result of this project.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would help maintain reliable power to the region by replacing aging transmission infrastructure that has reached the end of its service life. During project implementation, all standard safety protocols would be followed. The proposed action would not impact human health or 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: Private landowners, USFS-Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, Tribes, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the United States Bureau of Land Management, Washington State Parks and Recreation Department, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Washington Department of Natural Resources have been notified and coordinated with through BPA realty. No other landowner coordination is required 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: **NANCY WITTPENN**
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