

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Chief Joseph Substation Transformer Maintenance Project

Project No.: P03611

Project Manager: Diane Bonner, TEPP-TPP-1

Location: Douglas County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.7 Electronic equipment; B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities; B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace a 345/230-kilovolt (kV) transformer and install new oil containment liners around three 345/230-kV transformers at the Chief Joseph Substation located south of Chief Joseph Dam near the City of Bridgeport, Washington. The new transformer would require installation of a new concrete pad footing and removal of the existing concrete footing. BPA would perform related equipment maintenance and upgrades to support the transformer updates by replacing motor-operated disconnects, disconnect switches, electrical bus, and footings inside the substation yard. The proposed action is needed due to age and condition of existing equipment and updates to standards for transmission facilities. The project would improve facility performance and operation.

The new replacement single-phase 345/230-kV transformer would require a new concrete footing that is about 28 feet by 16 feet and is 2 feet thick. Excavation depth would be up to 3 feet below ground surface inside the yard. Three existing single-phase 345/230-kV transformers would have new oil containment liners installed that connect to the site's existing stormwater system with new conveyance pipes to the outfall at the on-site infiltration basin. The project would expand the existing infiltration basin adjacent to the substation yard by an additional 1,500 square feet. Total excavation depth would be 4 feet.

Due to site design considerations, the upgraded oil containment liners would vary in size between about 44 and 52 feet wide and 48 to 55 feet long. The liners would require excavation to an average depth of about 1.5 feet below the surface of the gravel yard. The project would include installation of about 670 feet of new underground conveyance pipe, trenched under the yard at depths between 1.5 feet and 3 feet.

The upgraded oil containment system would require removal of a minimum of about 70 feet of the existing substation transfer track system that was historically used for moving large, oil-filled equipment within the yard. Less than 10 percent of the equipment in the existing yard would be replaced, removed, or upgraded during the proposed project. No alterations would occur on the exterior of the control house, but BPA would update and maintain electronic communications equipment on racks inside the control house.

The project would occur in previously disturbed areas consisting primarily of compacted, non-native yard rock that is maintained clear of vegetation. The project would involve ground disturbance areas inside and outside the fenced substation yard, because the project would

require expanding the infiltration basin outside the substation yard fence. The soil disturbance area for these project elements is approximately 16,600 square feet (0.4 acre). In addition, a roughly 0.5 acre of previously disturbed area adjacent and outside the fence would be used for stockpiling. A total of about 0.9 acres of soil within and outside the existing substation yard would be temporarily disturbed during project construction. Construction work and staging areas would be established within previously developed areas outside the substation and in the substation yard. Chief Joseph Substation is located on BPA fee-owned property, and no new land rights acquisition or realty actions would be required.

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 (BPA) 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/ Jason Almcrantz
Jason Almcrantz, EPI-4
Civil Engineer

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange
Katey C. Grange Date: September 15, 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 Substation Transformer Maintenance Project

Project Site Description

The project site is located less than 1.5 miles southeast of the city of Bridgeport, in Douglas County, Washington. The substation is located roughly 1,100 feet above mean sea level and within Township 29N, Range 25E, Section 26. The fenced substation yard has been heavily disturbed and consists of compacted, non-native rock and is maintained clear of vegetation. The staging area outside the substation fence is a previously developed area consisting of compacted gravel devoid of vegetation. The on-site infiltration basin that lies immediately outside the yard is in previously disturbed area adjacent to the substation fence. The existing basin has unvegetated and graded earthen sides with a rocked basin floor.

The lands within and immediately adjacent to Chief Joseph Substation were extensively disturbed by the development of the substation in 1958. Outside of the substation yard, the surrounding area is characterized primarily by undeveloped lands comprised of shrub-steppe and grasslands with dispersed occurrences of rural residential and agriculture land uses. Roadways, maintained BPA transmission line rights-of-way, and riparian areas associated with Foster Creek also occur near Chief Joseph Substation. Foster Creek, a tributary to the Columbia River, is the nearest perennial waterbody, located approximately 600 to 700 feet downslope and east of the project area at its nearest point(s). Foster Creek discharges to the Columbia River just below Chief Joseph Dam. The Columbia River is located roughly one mile northeast of Chief Joseph Substation. An intermediate drainage occurs 300 feet west of the substation, at its nearest point.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, BPA initiated consultation and determined the project's area of potential effects (APE) with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) on July 28, 2025. DAHP concurred with the APE on July 29, 2025, and no other responses were received. The APE was surveyed and BPA determined that the six National Register of Historic Places-eligible historic properties would not incur adverse effects. On January 9, 2026, BPA submitted the cultural resources survey report and its finding of no adverse effect to historic properties to DAHP and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. On February 2, 2026, DAHP concurred with BPA's determination that the project would have no adverse effect on historic properties. No other responses were received.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA's Post-Review Discovery of Cultural Material Procedure would be followed. Work would be halted in the vicinity of the finds and BPA would be contacted for further required notifications. The integrity of the site and materials would be protected until further instructions are given.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Localized ground disturbance would occur during construction in the existing rocked yard and immediately outside the rocked yard. Installation of the new footings would involve shallow excavation into native soils below the substation yard fill material. The project would generate excess material beyond what could be used as backfill. Standard erosion control measures would be implemented to prevent sediment migration off-site. Any excess spoils generated during project activities would be hauled off-site for disposal at an approved location. Total temporary soil disturbance area would be 0.9 acre.

Notes:

- Develop and implement the Erosion and Sediment Control Plan with standard erosion control measures and construction best management practices (BMPs).
- Any excess spoils generated during project activities shall be hauled off-site for disposal.
- Upon construction completion, regrade and stabilize disturbed soils.
- Store spill containment and cleanup materials in construction equipment and at work sites.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Nearly all work would occur within the existing substation yard, which is devoid of vegetation. Work and staging areas outside the substation yard would occur in developed areas comprised of compacted gravel and maintained clear of vegetation. No federally or state-listed plants or designated critical habitat occur within or adjacent to Chief Joseph Substation; therefore, the project would have no effect on these resources.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Work would generate noise and increased human presence, which could cause effects to local wildlife. Disturbances would generally be consistent with existing substations operation, would be temporary, and would be minor to any nearby wildlife. A species list was generated from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Environmental Conservation Online System, Information for Planning and Consultation website on July 9, 2026, to review if any species that are listed or proposed to be listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) may be present in the area of the proposed action. This list identified three wildlife species with a federal listing status that have potential to occur in the project area: the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*). Most work would be within the existing, rocked substation yard; there is no suitable habitat present for these species within or immediately adjacent to the yard. Minor increases in noise and human presence during construction could have the potential to affect wildlife in proximity to the site; however, these impacts would be temporary, and construction activities would not substantially change the character of the site. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on ESA-listed threatened, endangered, or proposed species; designated or proposed critical habitat; candidate species; state special-status species of concern; or priority habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The ESA species list from USFWS identified bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) as having potential to occur near the project area. The project area is approximately 600 to 700 feet upslope from Foster Creek; however, the creek is not designated critical habitat

and is not known to contain bull trout. Typical erosion control BMPs would be implemented to prevent sediment from leaving the substation yard and surrounding work areas outside of the yard. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact water bodies, floodplains or special-status fish species or habitats.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands occur within the upland area of the existing substation yard or immediately adjacent. The nearest known wetlands are approximately 500 feet to the east and associated with Foster Creek. Typical erosion control BMPs would be implemented to prevent sediment from leaving the substation yard and surrounding work areas outside of the yard. The proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: According to the Washington State Department of Ecology, the nearest groundwater well occurs within Chief Joseph Substation. In 1995, the well had a static water level of 6 feet below ground surface. The proposed action has a maximum excavation depth of 4 feet below ground surface for installation of a new stormwater conveyance pipe. The nearest wellhead protection zone is roughly 0.8 mile north of the substation within the city of Bridgeport. Standard construction BMPs would reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers. No new wells or uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed. The project includes adding oil containment upgrades around transformers that would capture oil in the event of equipment failure or spill and minimize any potential for impact to groundwater in the future. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

Notes:

- A Spill Prevention and Response Plan would be developed to reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could contaminate groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would occur entirely on BPA fee-owned property at Chief Joseph Substation and is consistent with the current land use designation. No specially-designated areas are known to occur within proximity of the proposed action. Therefore, the proposed action does not have the potential to have a significant impact on land use or specially designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The equipment replacements are similar in size and appearance to existing equipment and footings in the substation yard. Therefore, the proposed action would not be a substantial deviation from the baseline visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Construction activities have the potential to result in a minor and temporary increase in dust and emissions in the local area. Standard erosion and sediment controls would be implemented, as needed. There would be no change to air quality after construction is completed.

Notes:

- See conditions outlined in Section 2.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, use of vehicles and equipment and general construction activities could produce noise at levels greater than current ambient conditions. Noise impacts would be temporary and intermittent and would occur only during typical working hours (approximately 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.). The proposed project site is in a rural area surrounded by open space, agricultural fields, dispersed residences, and transmission line right-of-way. The nearest noise-sensitive receptors occur approximately 0.5 miles from the substation. Noise generated by the proposed action would be consistent with routine operation and maintenance of an electric facility. There would be no long-term change in ambient noise following completion of the project.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All standard safety protocols would be followed throughout project construction, and standard construction BMPs would minimize risk to human health and safety. Therefore, the proposed action would have no impact on 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 on BPA fee-owned property at an existing, active electrical substation. No landowner notification, involvement, or coordination would be required.

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

Signed: /s/ Jason Almcrantz
Jason Almcrantz, EPI-4
Civil Engineer

Date: September 15, 2026