

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: FY27 The Dalles District Vegetation Management

PP&A No.: 7029

Project Manager: Jacob Marti – TFBV-THE DALLES

Location: Hood River, Sherman, and Wasco counties, Oregon; Skamania and Klickitat counties, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021: DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures Appendices B and C): B1.3 Routine Maintenance; USDA-35d-USFS Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres...

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to maintain low-growing vegetation communities in specific, localized areas in and adjacent to segments of the Klondike Schoolhouse-John Day No 1, Big Eddy-Ostrander No 1, Knight-Ostrander No 1, North Bonneville-Midway No 1, Celilo-Sylmar No 1, McNary-Ross No 1, Big Eddy-Chemawa No 1, Bonneville PH 1-Hood River No 1, Underwood Tap to Bonneville PH 1-Alcoa Nos 1&2, and Wautoma-Knight No 1 rights-of-way (ROW) in Hood River, Sherman, and Wasco counties, Oregon and Skamania and Klickitat counties, Washington (see Treatment Area attachment). Vegetation management needs were assessed, and Vegetation Control Cut Sheets were created for the right-of-way corridors and associated access roads along these transmission facilities.

To comply with Western Electricity Coordinating Council standards, BPA proposes to use hand cutting, mowing, herbicidal treatment, or a combination of those methods to manage and maintain vegetation with the goal of removing tall-growing vegetation that is currently or will soon become a hazard to the transmission line (a hazard is defined as one or more branches, tops, and/or whole trees that could fall or grow into the minimum safety zone of the transmission line(s) causing an electrical arc, relay, and/or outage). The overall goal of BPA is to establish and maintain low-growing plant communities along the right-of-way to control the development of potentially threatening vegetation. Work would be done consistent with BPA's long-established vegetation management program and all herbicide(s) and adjuvant(s) mixture selections would follow the minimization measures identified in the BPA List of Approved Herbicide Environmental Standards & Procedures (ESP)# E-VGM-004.

The corridors in the proposed project area measure approximately 345 miles in length. Localized areas within an approximate 4,750 acres, 5 miles of access roads, and 35 structure sites of existing transmission line and access road rights-of-way would be initially treated in fall 2026 through fall 2027. Additional vegetation management may be necessary in subsequent years in discrete areas of noxious weeds or where BPA personnel discover vegetation that poses a hazard to the transmission line.

Herbicides would be selectively applied in accordance with their label instructions and BPA-listed buffer distances using spot treatment (stump or stubble treatment, basal treatment, and/or spot foliar) or localized treatments and cut stubble treatments) with chemicals approved by BPA to ensure that the roots are effectively controlled - preventing new sprouts - and selectively eliminating vegetation that interferes with the operation and maintenance of transmission infrastructure. A follow-up treatment of re-sprouting target vegetation would be conducted by summer 2027. Additional vegetation management may be necessary in subsequent years of the vegetation management cycle in discrete areas of noxious weeds, or where BPA personnel discover vegetation that poses a hazard to the transmission line.

In addition, BPA proposes to remove approximately 120 danger trees in, or adjacent to, the ROW. Tree clearing would not be concentrated and occur in multiple, discrete locations within the 345 miles of rights-of-way. Trees and limbs would be hand cut to maintain the root system and all tree debris would be disposed of onsite, along the ROW, using on-site cut, lop and scatter, or chipping/mulching techniques.

No new access roads, skid trails, decking, or staging areas would be needed for the work.

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 and Appendix C of 10 CFR 1021 and DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures;
- 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/ Samantha Rinker

Samantha Rinker

Biological Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel Date: September 30, 2026

NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Treatment Locations, Environmental Checklist, Sensitive Species Conservation Measures

Treatment Locations

Corridor	Transmission Line	Spans	
BEMA_KLNP-JDAY-1	Klondike Schoolhouse-John Day No 1	12/4	12/5
BEMA_BIGE-OSTD-1	Big Eddy-Ostrander No 1	1/1	39/4
BEMA_KNIT-OSTD-1_B	Knight-Ostrander No 1	0/1	39/4
BEMA_KNIT-OSTD-1_A	Knight-Ostrander No 1	36/3	58/5
BEMA_KNIT-OSTD-1_A	North Bonneville-Midway No 1	4/4	4/5
BEMA_NBON-MIDW-1	North Bonneville-Midway No 1	6/2	23/5
BEMA_KNIT-OSTD-1_B	North Bonneville-Midway No 1	34/4	70/2
BEMA_CELO-SYLM-1_A	Celilo-Sylmar No 1	5/4	33/1
PAHQ_MCNY-ROSS-1	McNary-Ross No 1	22/1	22/2
BEMA_MCNY-ROSS-1_C	McNary-Ross No 1	123/5	144/2
BEMA_BIGE-OSTD-1	Big Eddy-Chemawa No 1	28/4	29/1
BEMA_BOPH-HORV-1	Bonneville PH 1-Hood River No 1	4/1	19/7
BEMA_NBON-MIDW-1	Underwood Tap to Bonneville PH 1-Alcoa No 1&2	7/3	7/4
BEMA_NBON-MIDW-1	Underwood Tap to Bonneville PH 1-Alcoa No 1&2	12/6	13/1
BEMA_KNIT-OSTD-1_B	Wautoma-Knight No 1	70/6	72/5

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: FY27 The Dalles District Vegetation Management

Project Site Description

The Dalles Vegetation Management District spans several ecoregions in northwestern Oregon and southwestern Washington. The area encompasses portions of the Western Cascades lowlands, valleys, and mountains, the Eastern Cascades slopes and foothills, the Columbia Plateau, and the Columbia River Gorge.

The work areas are existing transmission line rights-of-ways that are primarily in urban, agricultural, and timberland properties as well as land managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and local governments.

Several transmission line corridors run through Mt. Hood National Forest and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA), managed by the USFS.

The existing transmission rights-of-way are managed for low-growing vegetation species.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA Cultural Resource Staff have determined that, pursuant to the *Nationwide Programmatic Agreement Among the Bonneville Power Administration, the Southwestern Power Administration, the Western Area Power Administration, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding Routine Transmission Operations and Maintenance Undertakings Associated with Existing Transmission Facilities and Access Roads Throughout the United States*, BPA's FY27 Vegetation Management Project: The Dalles District will result in No historic properties affected as **Appendix G Conditions A.1, A.6, A.7 and A.8** are met.

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.

Notes:

- Implement cultural monitoring, restrict off-road travel, and modify work methods in certain locations specified in the cut sheets.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed vegetation management actions do not result in ground disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Site-specific treatment would be applied to maintain existing low-growing plant communities. Project activities would be limited to the already impacted transmission line and access road rights-of-way and would not substantially alter existing plant communities. Existing naturalized grasses and woody shrubs are present on the entire ROW and are expected to naturally seed into the areas that would have lightly-disturbed soil predominantly located on the ROW roads. There would be No Effect to Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species. No impacts to state or other federally-sensitive species are anticipated because BPA would selectively target only tall-growing woody species and noxious weeds.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: In general, the project would have a small impact to wildlife and habitat related to temporary disturbance associated with elevated equipment noise (chain saws and mowers) and human presence. Typically, this temporary disturbance would last less than an hour in any particular treatment segment. With the use of cut, lop, and scatter tree debris disposal, some small animal habitat would be created. Wildlife is anticipated to use adjacent habitat and return to the treatment area soon after the completion of work.

Pursuant to its obligations under the ESA, BPA made a determination of whether its proposed project would have any effects on any ESA-listed species. A species list was obtained for federally-listed, proposed, and candidate species potentially occurring within the project boundaries from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Based on the ESA review conducted, BPA made a determination that the project would have “No Effect” for yellow-billed cuckoo. BPA made a determination of “May effect, not likely to adversely affect” for gray wolf, North American wolverine, and northern spotted owl and its designated critical habitat. BPA made a determination of “May adversely affect individuals and habitat, not likely to result in jeopardy of the species” for monarch butterfly, Suckley’s cuckoo bumble bee, and northwestern pond turtle.

The proposed vegetation management activities in Washington are within the scope of activities and action area evaluated in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) letter of concurrence (LOC) regarding: BPA Southern Washington Periodic Vegetation Management, consultation number 2023-0081437, sent to BPA in August of 2023, and conservation measures would be implemented and included on the cut sheet. The proposed vegetation management activities in Oregon are within the scope of activities and action area evaluated in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) Biological Opinion (BiOp) regarding: *Bonneville Power Administration Routine Inspections and Right-of-Way Maintenance in Western Oregon*, Ecosphere Project Code 2023-0041665-S7, dated January 14, 2025. All terms and conditions and conservation measures identified in this consultation would be implemented and included on the cut sheet.

No special-status state or federally-sensitive species were identified in the project area.

Notes:

- Implement all conservation measures listed in the attached Sensitive Species Conservation Measures document.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Streams in the project area with documented presence of ESA-listed fish, designated critical habitat for one or more species, and/or identified as EFH have been noted in the Vegetation Control Cut Sheet. Appropriate herbicides would be used within these locations according to label instructions and applicable ESA consultation minimization measures, including buffer distances. No ground disturbance would occur and root systems would be left intact to prevent sedimentation. Any effects to ESA-listed fish are covered by BPA's programmatic biological agreement with the National Marine Fisheries Service's Endangered Species Act Section 7 Programmatic Conference and Biological Opinion and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation for Standard Local Operating Procedures for Endangered Species to Administer Maintenance or Rebuild Projects for Transmission Line and Road Access Actions Authorized or Carried Out by the Bonneville Power Administration in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho (WCR-2014-1600, September 22, 2016).

Bull trout and bull trout designated critical habitat are on the USFWS's species list for Washington. Based on the ESA review conducted, bull trout and bull trout designated critical habitat are documented in nine streams in the action area. BPA made a determination of "May effect, not likely to adversely affect" for bull trout and bull trout critical habitat. The proposed vegetation management activities are within the scope of activities and action area evaluated in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) letter of concurrence (LOC) regarding: BPA Southern Washington Periodic Vegetation Management, consultation number 2023-0081437, sent to BPA in August of 2023. All conservation measures would be implemented and included on the cut sheet.

Notes:

- Implement all conservation measures listed in the attached Sensitive Species Conservation Measures document.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands may be present in the treatment areas. Herbicides would not be applied within wetlands and a buffer up to 100 feet would be established depending on treatment type, potential toxicity, or label advisory for ground or surface water. In those locations with wetlands, appropriate herbicides (mainly Garlon 3A) would be used up to the water's edge, but not over water. No ground disturbance, filling, or excavating of wetlands would occur.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No use of groundwater is proposed. Herbicide applications would be applied by licensed applicators and would follow label instructions to minimize the potential for groundwater contamination. Further, herbicides would not be applied within 50 feet of known groundwater wells and water sources.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur. No specially-designated areas are present in the work areas. No disruption to the lands managed by USFS, BLM, DNR, or the CRGNSA would occur.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be performed within existing transmission line rights-of-way. Vegetation management activities and techniques would be similar to what has occurred during prior prescribed management cycles; therefore, there would be a negligible change to the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have a limited, temporary impact on air quality from a small amount of vehicle and hand tool emissions and dust generated during vehicle movement.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary noise from vehicles and hand equipment that would occur intermittently and last a few hours in each area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would remove potential vegetation hazards to the transmission lines, thus reducing outages and wildfire risk. Herbicides would be applied by licensed applicators in accordance with the label instructions and BPA-approved herbicides to limit the potential for public or worker exposure. Trees would be cleared by contractors who are qualified to work around electrical facilities to minimize the risk of trees falling into the lines and causing injury or wildfire.

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 USFS was notified of the planned work within National Forest System lands and lands within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. BPA has coordinated with the USFS, BLM, as well as local governments and private landowners. No special measures or requirements were identified for treatments on USFS-managed lands. BLM was notified of the planned work on their lands and have no comments or concerns. Letters, on-site meetings, emails, and phone calls would be used to notify landowners approximately three weeks prior to commencing vegetation management activities. Door hangers would also be used at properties where special treatments are anticipated. Any additional measures proposed by landowners or land managers through ongoing communication would be incorporated into the vegetation management plan during project implementation.

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

Signed: /s/ Samantha Rinker

Samantha Rinker

Biological Scientist (Environmental)

Date: September 30, 2026