Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: FY27 Wenatchee District Vegetation Management Project

PP&A No.: 7031

Project Manager: Len Rieman – TFBV-Bell

Location: Benton, Chelan, Douglas, and Grant Counties, WA

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

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to maintain low-growing vegetation communities in specific, localized areas in and adjacent to the Vantage-Columbia No. 1, Chief Joseph-Monroe No. 1, Schultz-Wautoma No. 1, and Midway-Rocky Ford No. 1 rights-of-way (ROW) in Benton, Chelan, Douglas, and Grant counties, WA. Vegetation management needs were assessed, and Vegetation Control Cut Sheets were created for the ROW corridors and associated access roads along these transmission facilities.

Transmission Line Name	Span (line mile/structure number)	
Vantage-Columbia-1	11/3	32/4
Chief Joseph-Monroe-1	35/2	65/1
Chief Joseph-Monroe-1	0/1	35/2
Schultz-Wautoma-1	55/1	55/4
Vantage-Columbia-1	0/1	11/3
Midway-Rocky Ford-1	26/3	34/1

Table 1. Tranmission line spans proposed in this CX.

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 would 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 ROW to control the development of potentially threatening vegetation. Work would be done that is consistent with BPA's long-established vegetation management program; 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 300 feet in width and total approximately 110 linear miles. Localized areas within an approximate 3,900 acres, 44 miles of access roads, and 521 structure sites of existing transmission line and access road ROWs would

be initially treated in the fall and winter of 2026. 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 fall of 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 386 danger trees (DT) and corridor trees (CT) in, or adjacent to, the ROW and to remove limbs or top from approximately 124 trees in, or adjacent to, the ROW. Tree clearing would not be concentrated and occur in multiple, discrete locations within the 110 miles of ROWs. 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 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/ *Justin Carr*
Justin Carr
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ *Sarah T. Biegel*
Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer Date: *November 5, 2026*

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

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 proposed work areas are existing transmission line ROWs that are located in the Chiwaukum Hills and Lowlands, Wenatchee/Chelan Highlands, and Chelan Tephra Hills in the North Cascades region and the Channeled Scablands, Loess Islands, and Okanogan Drift Hills in the Columbia Plateau region of Washington. The North Cascades are characterized by high, rugged mountains with eastern rain shadow effects in the proposed work areas of Douglas-fir forests and the Columbia Plateau is characterized by arid and semi-arid mixed grassland, shrub-steppe and dry Ponderosa pine forests. The work areas are existing transmission ROWs that are located on private lands, state lands, US Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and US Forest Service (USFS) Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest lands. The existing transmission ROWs are managed for low-growing vegetation species.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

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: Wenatchee District will result in No historic properties affected.

Notes:

- Avoidance and minimization conditions/locations noted in work cutsheets.

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 ROWs 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 including showy stickseed, Ute ladies'-tresses, and Wenatchee Mountains checkermallow. There are multiple state-sensitive plant species that may occur in the project area. However, localized treatment using approved herbicides or mowing and cutting activity would be applied to specific species of invasive plants or plants

growing at certain heights within the ROW. Spray drift of herbicide would be minimal. Non-target individual plant species within the ROW may be impacted, but there would be no effect to the greater plant population in the surrounding area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

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. There would be no effect to Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed wildlife species: Mt. Rainier white-tailed ptarmigan and yellow-billed cuckoo. The listed species Mt. Rainier white-tailed ptarmigan and yellow-billed cuckoo are not present in the proposed work areas. There are portions of the Chief Joseph-Monroe No. 1 transmission corridor that lie within northern spotted owl habitat; therefore, BPA determined the project activities are not likely to adversely affect northern spotted owl (NSO). BPA would follow timing restrictions for NSO breeding in these areas as outlined in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Biological Opinion: Chief Joseph-Monroe No. 1 Periodic Vegetation Management FWS/R1/2022-0012394, sent to BPA in September 2022.

The proposed threatened species monarch butterfly and proposed endangered species Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee are likely present in the action area; however, BPA has made a determination that project activities "may adversely affect, not likely to result in jeopardy of the proposed species." Project activities promote existing low-growing plant communities that are habitat for both of these species. There are no state-sensitive species occurring in the proposed project areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: 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 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).

There would be no effect to bull trout. Herbicide would not be used within 100 feet of identified stream and riparian vegetation shall be left less than 10 feet where possible (except noxious weeds); and to preserve shade conditions, selectively cut only trees that are currently violating or have the ability to violate clearance standards within the next three years. There are no state-sensitive fish in the proposed project area.

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 use of USFS, BLM, or state-managed lands would occur.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be performed within existing transmission line ROW. 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: BPA has coordinated with USFS, BLM, and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR). No special measures or requirements were identified for treatments on any of these Federal or state-managed lands. Letters, on-site meetings, emails and phone calls would be used to notify landowners 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/ *Justin Carr* Date: *November 5, 2026*
Justin Carr
Physical Scientist (Environmental)