

Landowner's guide to BPA transmission projects

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The Bonneville Power Administration is committed to providing the Northwest with an adequate and reliable supply of electric power.

BPA owns and maintains 260 substations and over 15,000 miles of high-voltage electric transmission lines. As those facilities age and the region's population grows, the agency must replace or upgrade those facilities, as well as build new ones to meet our responsibility to the region's electric power users.

As we enter a period of increased construction, it is important for people who might be affected by BPA's construction activities to know as much as possible about how we make local residents and other stakeholders part of the process when we are siting new substations and transmission lines or upgrading and replacing older equipment.

BPA's public planning

BPA is a public agency that is serious about doing our work transparently. All planning for major rebuilds or replacements of existing facilities and any new construction is conducted through extensive public processes.

All projects are announced publicly, options for the project are publicized, local citizens are invited to comment and the proposed work is subject to extensive evaluation.



The principles for this review and public process are outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

While the process can feel cumbersome, it is rigorous in order to ensure that we follow all our policies and all federal guidelines. In some instances, we outline alternative routes for a transmission line prior to public comment and then announce additional routes after we review the comments. The goal is to gather as much information as possible before making a decision.

Gathering information for a project

Our information gathering process may include requests for permission to enter a landowner's property. If we are considering constructing a new transmission line on a particular site, we want to physically view the property. Early in the process we will just do reconnaissance to understand the lay of the land. Later, as the process continues, an archaeologist or historian may inspect the proposed project area as part of a cultural resource analysis. A wetland specialist may need access to assess for wetlands. A geologist may need to look for unstable land features. These workers may need to dig holes with shovels or drill auger holes up to about six inches in diameter. All test holes and excavations will be refilled promptly after examination.

If BPA determines that the property needs to be surveyed, surveyors may place wooden stakes and what are termed "survey monuments." In agricultural areas, the monument will be buried so it will not interfere with farming. In wooded areas, some trees and brush may be trimmed or cut to facilitate line-of-sight or straight-line survey. Trimming and cutting is minimized as much as possible.

If BPA causes any damage during its study, the agency will either restore the land to its original condition or pay for the damage. For example, if crop land or crops are damaged, BPA will pay the value of the damaged crops.

It may turn out that our studies will establish that a piece of property is not a viable option for the transmission



line or substation, because the soil is unstable or because of cultural artifacts, wetlands or endangered species believed to be present. The goal is to gather as much information as possible, make it public, hear public comments and make the best decision possible.

Acquiring rights and land

If your property is being considered for a transmission line right-of-way, access road or a substation site, a land liaison representative and siting engineer will contact you to describe where potential facilities might be located and what they would look like. If any proposed uses would interfere with your use of the land, the land liaison will discuss your needs and options.

BPA's standard practice is to purchase easements from landowners for a right-of-way needed for the new transmission line. These easements allow BPA to build, operate and maintain necessary facilities, including access roads, and to cut and maintain vegetation under the lines. The landowner retains ownership of the land and retains the use of the land for compatible activities such as the cultivation of low-growing crops.

When a new substation is required, BPA frequently purchases the acreage outright, buying enough land to include all substation equipment and to provide a security and safety buffer.

Whenever BPA buys easements or land, the purchase is made according to the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Land Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, which can be found at www.fhwa.dot.gov/realestate/ua/uraguide3805.pdf.

The act provides, among other things, the rights listed below:

- Property or property rights must be appraised before negotiations begin.
- A reasonable effort must be made to acquire property rights by negotiation.
- You do not have to allow BPA to take possession of the needed rights before you have been paid for them.

Before purchasing an easement or land, BPA has a federal or independent appraiser evaluate the land rights to be acquired according to the Uniform Appraisal

Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions. A landowner may accompany the appraiser when he or she completes the appraisal inspection.

The appraisal results in a fair market value of the rights BPA needs to acquire. The process is similar to the kind of appraisal one might have done on a typical home sale.

Invoking eminent domain: the option of last resort

BPA makes every effort to avoid exercising its right of eminent domain. If, however, negotiations over land or an easement fail to produce an agreement, BPA would ask the local federal attorney for assistance in acquiring the easement or land. This could result in the federal government acquiring the easement through condemnation. In this process, a judge or jury will decide the amount of compensation due to the landowner.

If BPA has to buy a residence and the landowner must move, he or she may qualify for relocation benefits. If this is the case, a BPA or contracted relocation specialist would work with the landowner to determine the landowner's benefits and assist in claiming them. Relocation benefits are described in detail at www.fhwa.dot.gov/realestate/rights.

Correcting damage during construction or maintenance

BPA pays for damage to property, including crops, both during construction and maintenance of a transmission line, consistent with the easement language. Current easement agreements also include rights for removing trees outside an easement if they have the potential to fall into the line.

Using a transmission line easement

BPA rights-of-way are usually available for a range of compatible uses.

You can read more in BPA's Landowner's Guide to Compatible Use of BPA's Rights-of-Way. It is available on BPA's website or by calling 800-622-4519.

Call 800-836-6619 before you dig, plant or build on a right-of-way, or if you have any questions about BPA's process for acquiring easements or land.