

Albany-Burnt Woods and Santiam-Toledo Pole Replacement Project
Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
and Floodplain Statement of Findings
DOE/EA-1636

Summary

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings on the Albany-Burnt Woods and Santiam-Toledo Pole Replacement Project. This project involves replacing wood pole structures on the existing Albany-Burnt Woods single-circuit, 115-kilovolt (kV) transmission line and along a portion of the existing Santiam-Toledo single circuit, 230-kV transmission line.

BPA has prepared an environmental assessment (DOE/EA-1636) evaluating the proposed project and its alternative. Based on the analysis in the EA, BPA has determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action is not the type of action that normally requires preparation of an EIS and is not without precedent.

The comments received on the Preliminary EA and responses to the comments are in the Revision Sheet for the EA. Only one minor change (the addition of a table with additional magnetic field information) was made to the Preliminary EA as a result of public comments.

Attached is a Mitigation Action Plan (MAP) that lists all of the mitigation measures that BPA is committed to implementing.

A Floodplain Statement of Findings is also included in this FONSI. Impacts to floodplains and wetlands will be avoided where possible and minimized where there is no practicable alternative.

Public Availability

This FONSI will be mailed directly to interested parties, a notification of availability will be mailed to other potentially affected parties, and the FONSI will be posted on BPA's Web site.

Proposed Action

BPA is proposing to replace aging and deteriorating wood pole structures and associated structural components on the existing Albany-Burnt Woods 115-kV No. 1 transmission line and along a portion of the existing Santiam-Toledo 230-kV No. 1 transmission line. Wood pole structures would be replaced along the entire length of the 26-mile Albany-Burnt Woods transmission line between BPA's Albany and Burnt Woods substations. On the Santiam-Toledo transmission line, wood pole structures would be replaced along a 21-mile portion of this line from a point about two miles southeast of the City of Adair Village, Oregon to BPA's Burnt Woods Substation.

All work would be completed on existing right-of-way. The proposed construction would start in the spring 2009 and continue through fall 2009. Details of the Proposed Action are presented in Chapter 2 of the EA.

Alternative

The No Action Alternative assumes that BPA would not replace wood pole structures on either the Albany-Burnt Woods or the Santiam-Toledo transmission lines and would continue to operate and maintain the existing transmission lines. Construction activities associated with the project would not occur, and the reliability concerns that prompted the proposal for action would continue to be of concern. Maintenance activities would continue within the corridors for the existing lines. The No Action Alternative could result in loss of reliable power in the Albany and Corvallis areas of Oregon.

Significance of Potential Impacts of the Proposed Action

To determine whether the Proposed Action or the alternative has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, the potential impact of each alternative on human and natural resources was evaluated. This impact analysis is in Chapter 3 of the EA and is summarized for the Proposed Action below. To evaluate potential impacts from construction, operation, and maintenance activities, four impact levels were used—high, moderate, low, and no impact. These impact levels are based on the considerations of context and intensity defined in Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1508.27). High impacts could be considered significant impacts, while moderate and low impacts are not. The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts.

The following discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

Land Use

Impacts to land use would be low.

- Removal of trees within the 2-acre plant and wildlife mitigation site will change the use from forest to plant and wildlife habitat; however this will be a positive impact to surrounding plant and wildlife populations.
- Potential short-term impacts to agriculture from construction could include temporary and localized disruption of maintenance and/or harvest of agricultural products in actively cultivated fields where towers are replaced. Individual landowners would be compensated for any loss of crops and for post-construction activities necessary to return disturbed areas of agricultural fields to production.
- Construction and maintenance activities would cause only brief, temporary interruption of residential and recreational use activities and traffic on local roads and highways.

Soils and Geology

Impacts to soils would be low to moderate.

- Ground disturbing activities (pole replacement, removal of encroaching vegetation along existing roads, grading, rocking, improving road drainage, and installing culverts) would potentially expose soils to rain, but erosion would be minor with the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for controlling erosion and timing of the disturbance.
- Disturbed areas will be revegetated after construction.

Vegetation

The impacts to vegetation would be low to moderate.

- Temporary impacts through vegetation disturbance during project construction will be mitigated by revegetating disturbed areas with seed suitable for the site conditions and land use. Native seed will be used where appropriate.
- About 1.1 acres of critical habitat for Kincaid's lupine, a federally and state listed threatened plant species, would be disturbed during pole replacement activities. However, resurveying existing lupine populations, placement of no-construction buffers around lupine populations, reseeding of portions of the transmission line rights-of-way, implementation of dormant season timing restrictions, monitoring of lupine populations during construction, and development of a permanently protected site will reduce potential impacts on Kincaid's lupine to low. At the permanently protected site, BPA will fund native prairie habitat enhancement and/or restoration to mitigate for any damage to lupine and its critical habitat.
- Possible impacts from noxious weed infestation in disturbed areas will be reduced with the use of mulching, approved herbicides, and prompt revegetation following construction.

Fish and Wildlife

Impacts to fish and wildlife would be low to moderate.

- Five pole structures to be replaced are within 50 feet of fish-bearing streams or primary tributaries to fish-bearing streams. Use of BMPs will minimize or eliminate the delivery of any sediments from pole replacement activities for these structures into nearby streams.
- Although new culverts would be installed as part of access road work in five project vicinity streams, these streams are not fish-bearing.
- Potential impacts to wildlife and migratory birds from a temporary increase in noise, loss of foraging and ground-nesting habitat around existing structures may occur but is unlikely to result in injury or death of wildlife. The amount of habitat disturbed would be a small percentage of the habitat available to wildlife within the project corridor. Noxious weed infestation of wildlife habitat could occur however vegetation management and mitigation measures specific to the spread of noxious weeds within the project corridor will minimize that potential.
- Project activities would not occur in marbled murrelet critical habitat; this species has not been documented in the project corridor and a field survey of the nearest critical habitat showed that it currently is not suitable nesting habitat.
- About 1.1 acres critical habitat for Fender's blue butterfly, a federally listed threatened wildlife species, would be impacted during pole replacement from use of vehicles and

equipment and movement of people. Since this critical habitat involves Kincaid's lupine, the mitigation as described above for Kincaid's lupine also will reduce impacts on Fender's blue butterfly to low to moderate.

- About 0.8 acres of habitat for Taylor's checkerspot butterfly, a federal candidate species, would be impacted during pole replacement activities. Implementation of mitigation such as resurveying existing Taylor's checkerspot habitat, use of no-construction buffers, reseeded of portions of the transmission line rights-of-way, dormant season timing restrictions, monitoring of construction in Taylor's checkerspot habitat during construction, and funding for future habitat enhancement and/or restoration in Taylor's checkerspot habitat will reduce impacts on the butterfly to low to moderate.

Water Quality

Impacts to water quality would be low to moderate.

- Vegetation removal and soil disturbance would increase wind and water erosion rates, which could increase sediment deposition in streams and other surface waters, but impacts would be temporary. A Stormwater Pollution Prevention plan will be prepared and implemented to reduce erosion and runoff and stabilize disturbed areas. Use of BMP's also will minimize impacts to water quality from turbidity and sedimentation.
- Albany-Burnt Wood structures 2/6 and 2/7 are located within the Southern Willamette Valley Groundwater Management Area. Because replacement of these structures would not increase concentrations of nitrate in the groundwater, there would be no impacts to this GWMA. Potential impacts to groundwater in other areas along the project corridor would be localized, short-term, and likely would not exceed state or Federal water quality criteria.

Wetlands

Impacts to wetlands would be low.

- All but three wood pole structures would be replaced outside of wetlands. Pole replacement will be done in the dry season to avoid impacts.
- Limited road improvement would occur in wetlands.
- Any construction within wetlands will be designed to minimize impacts and BPA will coordinate with the Army Corps of Engineers to obtain appropriate permits and comply with any mitigation required by the Corps.
- Erosion control measures to avoid sedimentation of wetlands and streams will be used.
- Disturbed areas will be revegetated.

Floodplains

Impacts to floodplains would be low.

- Disturbance to floodplains would be short-term and highly localized during construction and maintenance activities.

- Incidental amounts of sediment deposition in the floodplain from soil erosion from disturbed areas could occur.
- Disturbed areas will be revegetated.
- Erosion control measures will be used to avoid sedimentation of floodplains.
- Flood storage capacity would not change.

A Floodplain Statement of Findings is including in this FONSI, below.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Impacts to socioeconomics would be low.

- Implementation of the proposed project would be expected to result in the creation of up to 30 temporary construction jobs over the 6-month construction period. Since some of the workers for these jobs could come from the local workforce, this likely would result in a temporary positive impact on local employment.
- The proposed project would not be expected to have an effect on local demographics, housing, or public services or utilities.
- There would be no environmental justice impacts associated with the proposed project because the project would not have a disproportionately high or adverse impact on minority and/or low-income populations.
- Money coming into the area (through the purchase of goods, employing local workers, non-local workers paying for lodging and food) would increase jobs or spending in the counties during the construction period, which would be a positive impact to the local economy.
- Replacing wood pole structures could create a more reliable transmission line system, which would be a positive impact and could contribute to growth.

Visual Resources

Impacts to visual quality would be low to moderate.

- Construction activities (trucks, dust) would have short-term, low to moderate visual impacts on residents, recreationists and motorists.
- The new wood pole structures would have a low visual impact on residents and recreationists because they would look the same as existing structures.
- Motorists would have views of the project corridor and line along local roads, U.S. Route 20, and Oregon State Routes 99W and 223 where the lines cross these highways. These visual impacts would be low because the views would be of short-duration, across agricultural fields or blocked by vegetation, and similar to current views of the existing transmission line.
- Non-reflective insulators will be used.

Air Quality

Impacts to air quality would be low.

- Minor increases in emissions would be temporary and confined to the immediate vicinity, and air quality would not be perceptibly affected.

Cultural Resources

Impacts to cultural resources would be low to moderate.

- Pole replacement would have a moderate impact on 5 known cultural sites. Implementation of mitigation including pre-construction data recovery and construction monitoring will reduce impacts to low to moderate.
- Access road work will not occur in documented cultural resource sites.
- During construction there is the potential for inadvertent discoveries of cultural resources; however mitigation including stopping work immediately, notifying law enforcement officials and appropriate agency and tribal staff, and development of an Inadvertent Discovery Plan would minimize impacts.

Public Health and Safety

Impacts to public health and safety would be low.

- Construction activities could pose some risk to the public though increased traffic and other hazards, but implementation of identified mitigation such as proper signage, safety measures, and appropriate fencing would reduce this potential impact to low levels.
- The electric and magnetic fields of the transmission lines after pole replacement would be at the same levels as the electric and magnetic fields emitted along the existing transmission line rights-of-way.
- Before construction, the contractor will prepare a safety plan to minimize potential health and safety risks.

Transportation/Traffic

Impacts to transportation and traffic would be low.

- Temporary traffic delays and short-term increases in traffic on project area roads from worker vehicles and construction equipment would occur during construction. Notification of ODOT and use of traffic signs and flaggers will inform motorists and manage traffic during construction activities.

Noise

Impacts to noise levels would be low.

- Construction activities would create typical short-term construction equipment noise impacts. These impacts would be low, consistent with state noise regulations, and will be limited to daylight hours.

- Long-term corona noise from the lines would remain the same as the existing line.

Floodplain Statement of Findings

This Floodplain Statement of Findings was prepared in accordance with 10 C.F.R. Part 1022. Notice of floodplain and wetlands involvement was included in the letter sent to the project mailing list announcing the availability of the Preliminary EA March 20, 2009. An assessment of impacts to floodplains and wetlands is in Chapters 3 and 4 of the EA. No comments were received relating to impacts to floodplains.

BPA is proposing to replace wood pole structures on the Albany-Burnt Woods No.1 and Santiam-Toledo No. 1 transmission lines in the existing rights-of-way that cross 100-year floodplains of the Willamette River, Frazier Creek, Mountain View Creek, Marys River, and Tum Tum River. Pole replacement activities within floodplain areas would short-term and not alter floodplain functions. Impacts from structure replacement are expected to be low. No access road work would occur in floodplains. The primary direct impacts on floodplains are expected to result from soil compaction and removal of vegetation, leading to possible subsequent erosion. Indirect impacts to floodplains would be low and limited to incidental amounts of sediment deposited in the floodplain from soil erosion in disturbed areas near the floodplain. Operation and maintenance is expected to have a low impact on floodplains; activities would be infrequent, short-term, and localized, and would not substantially alter floodplain functions.

Determination: Based on the information in the EA, as summarized here, BPA determines that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq. Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

/s/ Gregory K. Delwiche
Gregory K. Delwiche
Vice President
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May 6, 2009
Date