

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
Bonneville Power Administration

Bonneville-Alcoa Access Road Project

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

Summary: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to establish a half mile of access road to tower 9/1 along the Bonneville-Alcoa No. 1 115-kilovolt (kV) transmission line. The road is needed to replace maintenance and emergency access to tower 9/1 because the road previously used to access the tower is blocked by a landslide that occurred in 1996. Approximately 1/8 mile of the proposed road exists, although it is overgrown and needs brush clearing. The remaining 3/8 mile of road would be constructed.

BPA has prepared an Environmental Assessment (DOE/EA-1467) to determine if the Proposed Action would cause significant effects that would warrant preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). 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 EIS is not required and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

This FONSI is based on the Final EA. Comments received on the Preliminary EA and responses to the comments are in Chapter 8 of the Final EA. A Mitigation Action Plan (MAP) also has been prepared; this MAP identifies mitigation measures that BPA has committed to for this project. The MAP is in Appendix B of the Final EA.

Copies: For copies of the Final EA, which includes this FONSI, please call BPA's toll-free document request line: 1-800-622-4250—leave a message with the name of this project and your name and mailing address. This FONSI and a summary of the Final EA are also available at the BPA's Environment, Fish & Wildlife Home Page: www.efw.bpa.gov/cgi-bin/PSA/NEPA/SUMMARIES/BonnevilleAlcoa.

For Further Information, Contact: Tish Levesque – KEC-4, Bonneville Power Administration, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3621, phone number 503-230-3469, fax number 503-230-5699, e-mail tklevesque@bpa.gov.

Supplementary Information: BPA's existing Bonneville-Alcoa No. 1 115-kV transmission line is located in Clark and Skamania Counties in Washington. Vehicle access to tower 9/1 on the transmission line was largely destroyed by a landslide in 1996, which now blocks the existing access road from State Route 14 to the tower. The tower is within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, approximately 4.5 miles west of Beacon Rock and 10 miles east of Washougal.

The transmission line serves BPA's utility customers, which in turn serve communities in southwestern Washington. BPA needs to take action to ensure transmission system reliability in

the Vancouver/Camas/North Bonneville area of southwestern Washington. Both routine and emergency maintenance on all BPA transmission lines are integral to providing such reliability.

Damage to or normal deterioration of tower 9/1's components or the tower itself would require the use of large and heavy equipment to repair or replace components or the entire tower. Access by such vehicles currently is impossible.

Minor and/or short-term impacts from construction of the Proposed Action would occur to the following resources: land use, soils and geology, vegetation, fish and wildlife, air quality, and noise. A minor change in land use would occur as approximately 1 acre of forest would be converted to an unpaved road. Construction may create short-term increases in soil erosion although mitigation measures would be used to limit erosion. Potential impacts would diminish after disturbed areas are restored and erosion and runoff control measures take effect. Soils on the road would be compacted, reducing soil productivity although construction would be contained within the proposed right-of-way to minimize impacts to adjacent forest and shrub areas. Approximately 12 conifers plus deciduous trees and shrubs would be removed during construction of the road, which would change the character of approximately 1 acre of vegetation. Construction noise could temporarily disturb wildlife close to the construction area, but wildlife would be expected to return after the disturbance is removed. About 1 acre of potential bird and animal habitat would be converted to an unpaved road, but any birds and animals that use this habitat would be expected to use similar habitat that exists nearby. Although bald eagles may winter in the project vicinity, surveys have revealed no eagle nests within or in proximity to the project area and mitigation would avoid effects if any nest is found during construction. There would be short-term increases in noise and dust at one residence during the 3-4 week construction period.

A biological assessment (BA) was prepared to evaluate the potential effect of the project on the bald eagle, northern spotted owl, bull trout, Lower Columbia River Chinook salmon, Lower Columbia River steelhead, and Columbia River chum salmon. Based on a review of the latest Federal threatened and endangered species lists, review of habitat requirements, and use of project mitigation measures proposed in the BA and the EA, it is BPA's opinion that the proposed project "may affect but is not likely to adversely affect" bald eagle and northern spotted owl. It is BPA's opinion that the proposed project would have "no effect" on bull trout, Lower Columbia River Chinook salmon, Lower Columbia River steelhead, and Columbia River chum salmon. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with these findings. Consultation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) was not required because the project would have no effect on ESA-listed anadromous fish species.

Background research indicated that no archaeological or cultural resources were located in the vicinity of the project. A field study found no evidence of archaeological resources on the ground surface along the proposed road. Seven areas along the proposed route were investigated using shovel test probes. No artifacts were recovered. It is BPA's opinion that the proposed project would have no effect on cultural resources. The Washington State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with these findings.

No impacts are expected to water quality, wetlands, floodplains, scenic resources, cultural resources, and socioeconomics.

The Proposed Action would not violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for protection of the environment. All applicable permits would be obtained.

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, on February 6, 2004.

/s/ Therese B. Lamb _____
Therese B. Lamb
Vice President
Environment, Fish and Wildlife Group