

memorandum

DATE: April 4, 2012

REPLY TO
ATTN OF: KEP-Alvey

SUBJECT: Supplement Analysis for the Transmission System Vegetation Management Program FEIS (DOE/EIS-0285/SA-465-Lower Monumental-Hanford, Lower-Monumental-Ashe, Scootney Tap Transmission Line Corridors)
Project No. PP&A # 2282

TO: Bill Erickson
Project Manager – TFBV/Walla Walla

Proposed Action: Vegetation management along portions of the Lower Monumental-Ashe #1 (500-kV), Lower Monumental-Hanford #1 (500-kV), and Scootney Tap (115-kV) transmission line shared corridor rights-of-way (ROW) and associated access roads.

Location: The project is located in Franklin County, Washington, in the Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) Pasco District.

Proposed by: BPA

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to remove tall-growing and noxious vegetation from the transmission line corridors and access roads on the following segments:

500-kV Lower Monumental-Hanford #1 (Lower Monumental to 43/3)
500-kV Lower Monumental-Ashe #1 (Lower Monumental to 36/4 + 275 feet)
115-kV Scootney Tap (11/2 to Scootney)

The corridors range from 100 to 250 feet in width, and traverse approximately 78 miles of terrain.

In order to comply with Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC) standards, BPA proposes to manage 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 work supports system reliability. The overall goal of BPA is to establish low-growing plant communities along the ROW to control the development of potentially threatening vegetation. The proposed project would begin in March 2012. Follow-up treatment may intermittently be applied to control resprouting species.

A combination of selective and nonselective vegetation control methods would be used to perform the work. Management methods proposed for this project, including selective cutting and herbicide treatments, are consistent with the methods approved in the Vegetation Management Program EIS. Debris would be disposed of using onsite chip, lop and scatter, or mulching techniques. All onsite debris would be scattered along the ROW.

Analysis: A Vegetation Management Prescription and Checklist was developed for this project that incorporates the requirements identified in BPA's Transmission System Vegetation Management Program FEIS (DOE/EIS-0285, May 2000) and Record of Decision (ROD). Previously completed SAs were also considered and include: *DOE/EIS-0285/SA-157-May 23, 2003, and DOE/EIS-0285/SA-197-March 29, 2004.*

Land along the corridor consists of arid agricultural and grazing lands, as well as the Bureau of Reclamation and the Washington Department of Natural Resources. No tribal lands are involved.

The following summarizes natural resources occurring in the project area along with applicable mitigation measures:

Water Resources: Water bodies (streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands) occurring in the project area include the Snake River, the Columbia River, various seasonal wetlands, and several dry irrigation ditches. Trees and brush in riparian zones will be selectively cut to include only those that are within 50 feet of the transmission conductor at maximum sag. Trees will be topped where shrubs are not present to provide shade and a silt buffer. Cut stump and basal herbicide applications are prescribed for the initial treatment of the project. Spot and localized foliar treatments will occur on resprouting tall-growing and invasive species as needed following the initial treatments. As a conservation measure, no mechanical mowing methods will be performed; hand-cutting only. In addition, only spot and localized application methods will be used, and only herbicide formulations containing low-toxicity herbicides may be applied within a 100-foot buffer from all waterways containing any threatened or endangered species. Irrigation and drinking water wells, or other domestic water supplies, if discovered on the ROW, will have a 50-foot radius buffer excluding all herbicide use.

No ground-disturbing management methods will be implemented, thus minimizing the risk for soil erosion and sedimentation near water bodies.

Threatened and Endangered Species/Essential Fish Habitat: Pursuant to its obligations under the Endangered Species Act, BPA has made a determination of whether its proposed project will have any effects on any listed species. A species list was reviewed from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) identifying federally listed, proposed, and candidate species and Critical Habitat Units potentially occurring in the project area. Based on the ESA review conducted, BPA made a determination that the project would have "No Effect" for all ESA listed species under USFWS jurisdiction. BPA also conducted a review of species under the jurisdiction of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries. A determination of "No Effect" was made for all ESA listed species under NOAA jurisdiction, with the implementation of the conservation measures in the Water Resources section above.

Essential Fish Habitat: A review of the NOAA Fisheries database identified Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) waterways occurring in the project area. Measures identified for Water Resources would be followed for EFH. A determination of "No Effect" was made for EFH waters that occur in the project area.

Cultural Resources: No cultural resources are known to exist within the project area.

Vegetation management activities will have limited ground disturbance and are not anticipated to affect cultural resources that may be present. If archaeological material is discovered during the course of vegetation management activities, work would be stopped in the vicinity and the appropriate tribe(s), BPA Environmental Representative and a BPA archeologist will be notified.

Monitoring: The entire project will be inspected during active work periods to ensure all target vegetation has been managed. Follow-up monitoring for vegetation control will combine line maintenance patrols and next season's site reviews to determine any follow-up actions that would be required. Additionally, the line will be patrolled annually by ground after the initial treatment to monitor the long-term effectiveness of the treatments. A diary of inspection results would be used to document formal inspections and will be filed with the contracting officer.

Re-Vegetation: For sites disturbed by vegetation management activities and on access roads, a native seed mix will be considered and used, when feasible, consistent with climatic conditions and soils present. Revegetation will occur during mid-spring or early fall to maximize seedbed potential. Mulching with weed free straw or hydroseeding may be required to prevent wind erosion in the spring.

Findings: This Supplement Analysis finds that (1) the proposed actions are substantially consistent with the Transmission System Vegetation Management Program FEIS and ROD, and (2) there are no new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed actions or their impacts. This Supplement Analysis also finds the proposed actions will not affect threatened or endangered species. Therefore, no further NEPA documentation is required.

/s/ Stuart Hugill, for:

Benjamin Tilley
Natural Resource Specialist – KEP-Alvey

Concur: /s/ Katherine S. Pierce
Katherine S. Pierce
NEPA Compliance Officer

DATE: April 4, 2012

Attachment(s)
Vegetation Management Checklist
Effects Determination for T&E Species