Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Ashe Substation Communication Fiber Replacement

Project No.: P02266

Project Manager: Debbie Staats

Location: Benton County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.7 Fiber Optic Cable.

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to install a new fiber optic cable trench and cable at its Ashe Substation in Benton County, Washington that is inside the Department of Energy's (DOE) Hanford Site. The installation would add new cable in the existing fiber optic trench and create a new trench to provide for a redundant communication path in Ashe-associated relay transfer trip protocols (RTTP). An RTTP is an electronic programming scheme intended to trip circuit breakers as needed to protect the electrical grid and transfer electricity flow to the open circuit indicated in the protocol.

The new trench would be installed in a path approximately 1,800-feet-long between the 230-kV and 500-kV relay houses inside the substation. Because the site is in the Hanford Site, newly excavated subsurface materials not used for backfill would be submitted for radiation and other contaminant testing and routed for controlled disposal through Hanford Site protocols. The spoils for the project are estimated to total over 24 cubic yards, yet all ground disturbance is limited to the previously disturbed substation grounds. About ten small posts would be installed after backfill of the trench to indicate the position of the buried fiber line.

There would need to be four 4-inch holes cut into a wall of each of the relay houses to route the new fiber into the buildings' elevated cable bridges. No other structural modifications would be required.

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) 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), BPA has determined that the proposed action:

1) fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D (see attached Environmental Checklist);
2) does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal; and
3) has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

/s/ Michael J. O'Connell
Michael J. O'Connell
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel *June 9, 2021*
Sarah T. Biegel Date
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Checklist

This checklist 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.

Proposed Action: Ashe Substation Communication Fiber Replacement

Project Site Description

The Ashe Substation is located on the Hanford Site at about three miles west of the Columbia River. There are no notable surface water features in close proximity to the substation. It is on flat terrain, and is surrounded mainly by dry sagebrush steppe land cover type. The Hanford Site covers approximately 320 square miles and is surrounded by Hanford National Monument which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project activities are located within the existing substation footprint. Construction of the substation included clearing native soils and leveling the footprint. It also included adding imported engineered construction fill materials within the footprint. As the proposed activities for this fiber project are located within this previously disturbed context, these activities would result in No Potential to Cause Effects to Historic Properties and no additional cultural resource efforts are needed.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All excavation would occur inside the substation from the graveled surface. Excavated material would consist of engineered fill. The depth of excavation would not exceed the depth of engineered fill.

3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work surfaces are gravel-covered and treated to stop all plant growth.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The work of the project is confined to the substation grounds which provides no habitat to the ESA-listed species: yellow-billed cuckoo, Threatened. No impacts would occur to riparian corridors utilized by the yellow-billed cuckoo. Likewise, due to lack of nearby habitat, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or Bald and Golden Eagle Act-protected species (willow flycatcher and golden eagle) do not have typical habitat nor documented occurrences nearby and would not be affected. The locally-occurring Washington-

threatened (ferruginous hawk) or candidate (sagebrush lizard, burrowing owl, loggerhead shrike, and Townsend's ground squirrel) species could be disturbed by noise and/or vibrations generated by excavation and wall penetration cutting. Bird effects would be mitigated by timing since work would occur after the end of the main bird nesting season of mid-July. The non-avian special-status species could be disturbed over a short duration (work is anticipated to produce noise or vibrations during daytime working hours for about two weeks, with the loudest most continuous noise, excavation, lasting intermittently throughout one week or five work days). However, work would be done during non-breeding periods for the Townsend's ground squirrel, and the sagebrush lizard depends on the Columbia Basin sand dunes landform which is not present within about one-half mile of the substation. For these reasons, there would be no effect to ESA and state special-status species.

Notes:

- Perform work after mid-July and before January to avoid effects to breeding birds and Townsend's ground squirrel.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Work would include adherence to all Hanford Site-recommended best management practices (BMPs) to limit exposure of bare substrate and excavated materials, and direct any runoff from the work areas to stormwater management facilities onsite. The work of the project is confined to the substation grounds which provides no habitat to the ESA-listed Threatened species, bull trout. No impacts would occur to the water bodies upon which bull trout depend.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands in the vicinity of the substation.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The depth of excavation would not penetrate through the engineered substation fill and the arid landscape would not have shallow water tables.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be located inside the substation grounds.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Only minor above-ground evidence of work would be left and include small marking posts and discrete changes to exterior building walls. These would have no impact on the viewshed for a casual observer.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: Minor, local increases in fossil fuel combustion exhaust via machinery operation would result during the two weeks of work. The isolated location with few other sources of air pollution would aid in the rapid mixing of exhaust into the air. Dust may become an issue during excavation, however, and proper BMPs would need to be employed to reduce transport of potentially radioactively-contaminated substrate.

Notes:

- Adhere to all Hanford Site-approved BMPs to limit dust export to a safe level.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Work would produce loud noise, but it would be limited to daytime working hours when other loud anthropogenic noises are typical.

Notes:

- Work during typical daytime hours.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Disturbance of the ground at Ashe Substation could issue radioactively-contaminated materials. Buildings may contain asbestos or other hazardous materials that could be disturbed by wall-cutting. While not inherently dangerous work, the location of Hanford Site dictates that extra precautions be taken and that the potential indirect health impacts are understood and prevented by utilizing applicable BMPs.

Notes:

- All workers shall adhere to all Hanford Site-approved safety controls and apply all BMPs, including wearing all required personal protective equipment. All disturbance, staging, and testing of excavated materials must be performed according to Hanford Site protocols. Workers on the project shall hold a safety tailgate each morning.

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: All applicable BMPs would be followed where recommended by Hanford Site to contain, test, and properly dispose of excavated substrate and waste building materials.

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: The Hanford Site environmental staff were consulted regarding radioactive concerns, wildlife and other natural resources, and cultural resources that the project could affect. All testing of materials the project produces would be organized by the BPA Environmental Liaison to Hanford Site.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed: */s/ Michael J. O'Connell* *June 9, 2021*
Michael J. O'Connell Date
Environmental Protection Specialist