Boyer–Tillamook Access Road Improvement Project

Finding of No Significant Impact

Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA-1941
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SUMMARY

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings on the Boyer–Tillamook Access Road Improvement Project. The project would improve about 13.5 miles of access roads at specific sites along an 18-mile portion of the existing 115-kilovolt (kV) Boyer-Tillamook transmission line in Tillamook and Yamhill counties, Oregon.

BPA has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) evaluating the Proposed Action and the No Action 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 (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required and BPA is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (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 included in the Final EA. The Final EA also identifies changes made to the Preliminary EA.

Attached is a Mitigation Action Plan that lists all the mitigation measures that BPA and its contractors are committed to implementing. The FONSI also includes a statement of findings on how the Proposed Action impacts wetlands and floodplains. Impacts to wetlands and floodplains would be avoided where possible and minimized by the mitigation measures included in the EA and Mitigation Action Plan where there is no practical alternative.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

This FONSI will be mailed directly to individuals who previously requested it, a notification of availability will be mailed to other potentially affected parties, and the Final EA and FONSI will be posted on BPA's project Website www.bpa.gov/goto/BoyerTillamookAccessRoads. .

PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, BPA would improve about 13.5 miles of road that help access BPA's Boyer-Tillamook transmission line. Access road improvements would consist of placing gravel, regrading, installing water bars, widening, placing riprap, constructing retaining walls, cleaning and replacing culverts and bridges, removing trees, and installing gates. The improvements are needed because the existing access roads are in poor condition or washed out, making regular maintenance and emergency

repairs to the transmission line difficult, time consuming, and dangerous. In addition, improvements to access road stream crossings would facilitate fish passage.

Construction is expected to last from 2 to 4 months, although work may need to be spread out over two to three seasons due to work timing restrictions protecting fish and wildlife. Details of the Proposed Action are presented in Chapter 2 of the EA.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, access road improvements for the Boyer-Tillamook transmission line would not be implemented and portions of the Boyer-Tillamook transmission line would continue to be inaccessible during inclement weather and much of the winter. Maintenance and right-of-way vegetation management activities would continue on an as-needed basis, stormwater improvements associated with the Proposed Action would not be made, and culverts that are currently fish barriers would remain impassable to aquatic species.

The No Action Alternative would likely hinder BPA's ability to conduct emergency line repairs during outages because maintenance and repairs needed to access the line, particularly during heavy precipitation, would not have been completed. This delay could lead to longer outages, affecting BPA's customers and reducing system reliability. Leaving the access road in its current condition could affect worker safety because the narrow and rutted roads would not be repaired, hazardous trees would not be removed, some slide areas would not be cleared and others might be more prone to develop due to ongoing water runoff and associated erosion along and in the roadbed. In the case of an emergency, obtaining access to the transmission line could result in impacts to natural resources if conditions make access roads impassable and alternate routes must be found quickly and without typical protective measures. Selected culverts would continue to be barriers to fish passage, including ESA species, and hinder the opportunity to increase fish populations.

SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

To determine whether the Proposed Action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, the potential impacts of this alternative on human and natural resources was evaluated and presented in Chapter 3 of the EA. The potential impacts associated with the Proposed Action are summarized below. To evaluate potential impacts, 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 regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.27). High impacts could be considered significant impacts, if not mitigated, 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, RECREATION, AND TRANSPORTATION

Impacts to land use, recreation, and transportation would be low.

- Road construction, road improvement, and tree clearing would be consistent with existing land management plans and complementary to ongoing land uses.
- Long-term changes in land use or land ownership would be minimal (affecting a total of about 3 acres) and dispersed along existing project roads.
- Recreation impacts would be limited to short-term construction noise disruptions to the Castle Rock campground and noise and construction equipment disruptions to private landowners' recreational uses.
- Traffic delays on State Route 22 and U.S. Highway 101 from construction vehicles would be short-term and localized to areas where constructing would occur. Further, the traffic associated with annual or emergency maintenance activities along project roads would be similar to existing conditions.

GEOLOGY AND SOILS

There would be no impacts to geology, and impacts to soils would be low-to-moderate.

- Mitigation measures (use of sediment barriers, reseeding disturbed areas, etc.) would minimize the risk of soil erosion during construction and would aid in soil recovery.
- Improved roads would be more stable and better capable of handling stormwater, reducing soil erosion and risks of mass wasting, particularly during storm events.

WATER RESOURCES

Impacts to surface water resources would be low in the long term and low-to-moderate in the short term. There would be no impacts to groundwater.

- Although the addition of rock fill and a retaining wall would alter 8 square feet of stream channel, these features would help improve habitat and stormwater function by lessening turbidity and reducing the risk of mass wasting.
- Mitigation measures (stormwater pollution prevention plans and use of best management practices) would reduce the potential for erosion and runoff during construction activities, help stabilize disturbed areas, and reduce potential water turbidity impacts.
- Work areas would be isolated and de-watered at locations where culverts would be replaced with the arch pipe or bridges.
- The majority of trees removed would be away from stream edges and would have little effect on stream shading. Tree replanting mitigation at four stream crossings would provide streambank protection and restore riparian buffers.
- New and improved access roads would be constructed with compacted gravel surfaces, drainage dips, culverts, or water bars, as necessary, to prevent future surface erosion and road failures.
- Replacing undersized culverts with adequately sized crossing structures would accommodate a wider range of flows and prevent excess sediment accumulation.

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS

Impacts to wetlands and floodplains would be low. There would be no impacts on the 100-year floodplains of any surface water resources in the project area.

- Of the 10 wetlands identified in the project area, only 2 palustrine scrub shrub wetlands would be directly impacted. These impacts would occur as a result of bridge and arch pipe installation at two streams and would result in a total of approximately 592 square feet of fill.
- Crossing improvements would provide overall benefit to the hydraulic function of the watershed, including wetlands, because they replace inferior stream crossings and would be more adequately sized to accommodate a wider range of flows and prevent excess sediment accumulation.
- The potential for sediment and erosion to affect wetlands in the project area would be mitigated through the use of appropriate erosion control measures during construction, as described in the project's stormwater pollution prevention plan.
- Implementation of the Proposed Action would benefit wetlands in the project area by reducing the potential for road, culvert, or bridge failure, or landslides—all of which could release large amounts of sediment into adjacent wetlands.
- No work would be conducted within the 100-year floodplain.

VEGETATION

Impacts to vegetation would be low, except near the location of the culvert replacement on the unnamed tributary to Sourgrass Creek, where they would be moderate.

- Although about 533 trees would be removed, most tree removal would be distributed throughout the project area, which has dense production forest tree coverage and the remaining canopy, understory trees, shrubs, and crown sprouts would be expected to regrow, and existing trees would continue to provide shade and stabilize soils.
- Near the unnamed tributary to Sourgrass Creek where about 176 of the trees would be removed, 350 trees would be replanted in the riparian area for streambank stabilization and riparian buffer.
- Approximately 3 acres of primarily forest vegetation would be removed. However, impacts would be distributed along the 13.5-mile project and would be reseeded using native seed mixes or plantings.
- Potential noxious weed infestations would be reduced or prevented with the use of mitigation measures and because the project is within existing corridors, no weeds would potentially be introduced into pristine habitats.

FISH AND WILDLIFE

Impacts to fish and wildlife would be low-to-moderate.

- Use of erosion control mitigation measures would minimize or eliminate the delivery of sediments from project activities into nearby streams.
- At stream crossing improvement locations, implementation of mitigation measures would minimize potential in-water work turbidity or soil erosion, and potential fish injury from workers, equipment, or accidental spills of hazardous materials.
- Stream crossing improvements would improve fish habitat in the long term through the re-establishment of naturally flowing streams, widening of channels and floodplains, and improvements in stream processes, drainage, and connectivity.
- The work area would be isolated and de-watered at the locations where culverts would be replaced with the arch pipe or bridges: the unnamed tributary to Sourgrass Creek, Hester Creek,

and the unnamed tributary to Louie Creek. A biologist would be on site during construction to capture, transport, and release any fish and invertebrates to the portion of the stream outside of work areas.

- Construction during ODFW in-water work windows would help avoid potential impacts to migrating juvenile and adult salmonids. Young salmonids that remain in streams during the in-water work window would be captured, transported, and released outside of the work area. BPA would follow any additional mitigation measures required by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for Oregon Coast coho salmon once consultation with these agencies for Endangered Species Act compliance (NMFS) and fish passage design approval (ODFW) has been completed.
- Any incidental mortality to wildlife from construction activities and temporary displacement of wildlife near work areas would be limited because of the short amount of time impacts would occur (generally from one day to a few weeks in any one area), and because impact areas are small and distributed along roads and at stream crossings. Removal and recovery of aquatic species would be carried out at in-water work areas, and more mobile wildlife species would be expected to avoid work areas during construction. Tree removal would be restricted to occur outside of the bird nesting season.
- The approximately 3 acres of primarily forest habitat that would be permanently removed for road improvements would be dispersed along the 13.5-mile project area in previously disturbed transmission line and road corridors.
- Noise and activity associated with construction would displace wildlife, but impacts would be temporary and localized. Tree removal activities would be completed quickly (i.e., generally within 1 to 2 days) in any one area, and high noise producing activities would be scheduled to protect potential marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl nesting. Also, tree clearing activities would take place outside of the nesting period for birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, so no active nests would be impacted.
- Although individual marbled murrelet or northern spotted owl birds could be present within the project area, their presences would be limited to dispersal habitat and possible roosting habitat and there are no known nests or suitable nesting habitat within 0.25 mile (marbled murrelet) or 1 mile (northern spotted owl) of proposed construction activities. Construction timing restrictions, as agreed upon with the US Fish and Wildlife Service would minimize possible disturbances.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

The Proposed Action would likely have no effect on any known cultural resources.

- No historic or archaeological resources were found during project surveys. Mitigation measures to stop work would lessen potential impacts if cultural materials are revealed during construction.
- Potential impacts to wild hazelnut ethnobotanical resources would be avoided and mitigated by minimizing construction footprints where resources are likely and including wild hazelnut in seed mixes at these locations.

SOCIOECONOMICS, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Impacts to socioeconomics would be low. There would be no impact on environmental justice populations or public services.

- There would be no-to-few temporary employment opportunities during construction and no additional employment following completion of the Proposed Action.
- Since existing local lodging is expected to be sufficient to accommodate non-local workers during construction, there would be a low impact on housing during construction.
- Some local procurement of equipment and spending by construction workers would have a low, positive impact on the regional economy during construction.
- Construction of the Proposed Action would have no adverse or disproportionate impacts on environmental justice (minority or low-income) populations.
- Any short-term traffic delays from approximately three to four construction vehicles would not disrupt the ability of emergency services personnel to respond to emergencies.

VISUAL QUALITY

Impacts to visual quality would be low.

- The improvements would occur in areas where the landscape is already altered. The access roads are an existing element of the viewshed and the improvements would occur in previously altered views, reducing any long-term impacts.
- The project area is remote; visual impacts during construction would be temporary and localized, primarily affecting adjacent landowners.

AIR QUALITY AND GREENHOUSE GASSES

Impacts to air quality and greenhouse gasses would be low.

- Air quality impacts would occur near the construction site, would be temporary in nature, and would not result in a change in air quality that would likely create any risk to human health.
- Greenhouse gas emissions would be far below the EPA mandatory reporting threshold and would not represent a substantial change from current conditions.

NOISE, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND SAFETY

Impacts to noise, public health, and safety would be low-to-moderate.

- Noise from construction vehicles would temporarily contribute to existing traffic noise on local roads, but would not likely result in a substantial increase in average traffic noise levels. Because of the temporary and intermittent noise from construction equipment and traffic, noise impacts would depend on the proximity to construction activities.
- Potential safety impacts during construction would be mitigated with the construction safety practices identified in the EA and Mitigation Action Plan.

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 USC 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/ F. Lorraine Bodi — *1/13/14*

F. Lorraine Bodi
Vice President
Environment, Fish and Wildlife

Date

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