

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Knight-Ostrander No. 1 Access Road Improvement Project (Line Miles 48 & 49)

PP&A No.: 3,949

Project Manager: Scott Williams – TDFD-The Dalles

Location: Skamania County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):

B1.3 Routine Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action:

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) owns and operates the Knight-Ostrander No. 1 500 kV high voltage transmission line that runs from Knight Substation in Klickitat Co., WA, to Ostrander Substation in Clackamas Co., OR. To provide safe and reliable access to transmission structures, BPA maintains a network of access roads along the transmission line. The access roads in line miles 48 and 49 of the Knight-Ostrander No. 1 line, near Carson, WA in Skamania County, are degraded and in need of repair. BPA is proposing to rock and grade the existing access roads. Approximately 1.75 miles of road work is planned. BPA would place and compact rock within the access road footprint. Some degraded areas would be bladed, then rocked and compacted. In other locations, low-growing vegetation currently in the road footprint would be cleared. All road work would be conducted in the existing access road footprint on existing easements. No new roads are planned, and except for utilizing ford crossings incidental to construction, no in-water work or culvert installation work is planned. The work would be conducted using heavy machinery such as dump trucks and a backhoe.

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, July 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/ Aaron Siemers
Aaron Siemers
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel
Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: July 20, 2018

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.

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Project Site Description

The project is located in the Wind River watershed, Skamania County, Washington. The township, section, and range information is detailed below:

Township		Range		Section	County	Ownership
3	N	8	E	16	Skamania, WA	State of Washington

The project area is located in the low elevation slopes of the Columbia River Gorge, in the Western Cascades Lowlands and Valleys ecoregion. Some of the project area overlaps with land within the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area, which is managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The ecoregion is dominated by western hemlock and Douglas-fir forests in a low elevation alpine environment. Western red cedar is also present in the project area. The underbrush contains vine maple, sword fern, lady fern, Oregon grape, thimbleberry, grasses, and small shrubs. Cutleaf blackberry, Himalayan blackberry, and Scotch broom are also present in the cleared transmission right-of-way. The forest in the project area provides habitat to large mammals like deer and elk, and raptors such as eagles and falcons as well as smaller birds such as Steller's jay. Northern spotted owl critical habitat is present within 500 ft. of the project site.

The area shows signs of historical logging, with remnant stumps, and most Douglas-fir and western hemlock are less than 24 inches dbh. Some mature western red cedar of approximately 36 inches to 48 inches dbh are present to the northeast of the project area.

Brush Creek, a small tributary to the Wind River, is present in the project area, as are other unidentified tributaries to Brush Creek.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Explanation:

Bonneville Power Administration engaged in consultation with the Cowlitz Tribe, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho, and the Washington Dept. of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). A cultural survey was conducted of the area of potential effect. On July 24th, 2017, BPA issued a report that documented a determination of No Historic Properties Affected. DAHP issued a concurrence letter August 28th, 2017. No other consulted parties responded to BPA's determination. Therefore, BPA has fulfilled the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and no further investigation or survey is necessary. In the event archaeological or historic materials are discovered during project activities, BPA would immediately cease work, secure the area, and notify the proper authorities.

2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Explanation:

The Knight-Ostrander No. 1 Access Road Improvement Project involves road work on existing access roads. While some lite blading, re-grading, and rocking would be necessary, no significant road cuts or earth movement would be required. Disturbed, un-rocked soils outside of the road prism would be seeded and stabilized to minimize risk of erosion and sedimentation. The project has no potential for significant impacts to geology or soils.

3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Explanation:

There are no special-status plant species present in the work area. Vegetation ranges from invasive blackberry and Scotch broom, to common ferns, Oregon grape, salal, and common coniferous tree species like Douglas fir, alder, vine maple, and western hemlock. Work is to be conducted in an existing access road footprint. The disturbed areas would be revegetated upon project completion with a climate-appropriate grass seed mix. The project has no potential for significant impacts to plants.

4. Wildlife (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Explanation:

Gray wolf, North American wolverine, northern spotted owl (NSO), and yellow-billed cuckoo are listed in the project area. Northern spotted owl critical habitat can be found near the project area, approximately 500 ft. to the north of the work area.

BPA has conducted an effects determination and found that the project would have "No effect" on North American wolverine, gray wolf, and yellow-billed cuckoo. The project area does not provide suitable habitat, nor are there any documented sitings of these species.

In addition, BPA has determined that the project would have "No effect" on NSO and the associated critical habitat. The work would not be conducted in NSO critical habitat, or habitat preferred by NSO (large, dense canopy old-growth trees). The forest in the project area is second or third growth, and trees are typically less

than 24 inches dbh. No mature tree removal is planned during the road improvement project, as the road work involves improving existing access road corridors. There are no known recent reports of NSO in the project area. In addition, the road work would be conducted in August, relatively late in the bird nesting season. The project has no potential for significant impacts to wildlife.

Please review BPA's Knight-Ostrander No. 1 Access Road Improvement Project No Effect Memo for more information regarding the project's effects to endangered species.

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



The project is located near Brush Creek, in the Wind River drainage system. Construction traffic would be utilizing an existing ford over Brush Creek during road construction, and another ford over a smaller tributary to Brush Creek. Brush Creek is listed in some environmental databases as an endangered steelhead stream. However, in recent email communications between BPA and WA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife, BPA was informed that Brush Creek is not managed as an ESA-listed steelhead stream due to impassable falls near the mouth of the stream as it flows into Wind River, which is approximately 0.7 miles downstream. Therefore, BPA has determined that the project will have "No effect" on endangered salmonids and bull trout.

Resident rainbow trout may be present in the stream, likely at lower elevations than the project area. To reduce sedimentation into the creek and limit damage to the existing ford crossings during construction, BPA will emplace several steel plates over both ford crossings, and plan the construction to limit the amount of necessary crossings over the fords. Work will also be conducted in the in-water work window for Wind River tributaries.

No floodplains are present in the project area. With mitigations in place, the project has no potential for significant impacts to water bodies, floodplains, and fish.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation:

There are no known wetlands present in the project area. Some wetland indicators (such as hydrology and vegetation) are present in various isolated locations within the footprint of the existing access roads in certain locations on slopes, as the existing road cuts intercept natural slope drainages and can form seasonal seeps and wet areas on the slope. While the wetland status of these seeps is undetermined, regardless, any potential access road improvements in existing serviceable road footprint would be exempt from Clean Water Act dredge and fill regulations by the maintenance exemption (Clean Water Act, Section 404 F 1 b). All road work improvements would be conducted in existing access road footprint. The project has no potential for significant impacts to wetlands.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation:

The work would not involve new groundwater wells or ground disturbance that would impact aquifers. The project has no potential for significant impacts to groundwater and aquifers.

8. **Land Use and Specially Designated Areas**



Explanation:

The project is located in the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area, which is managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The project area is located in a Special Management Area (SMA). BPA consulted with the Forest Service regarding the proposed actions. An email notification and project review application was provided to the USFS on June 25th,

2018. In an email on July 5th, 2018, the USFS concurred with BPA that the proposed action was consistent with the Savings Provision of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The project has no potential for significant impacts to existing land use or specially designated areas.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation:

The proposed work would be conducted in existing access road footprint in rural, forested areas. No significant tree removal or change in the viewshed is planned. The project has no potential for significant impacts to visual quality.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation:

The project would create temporary dust and vehicle emission due to construction; however, no significant impacts would occur.

11. **Noise**



Explanation:

The project would create temporary noise due to construction; however, no significant impacts would occur.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation:

During project construction activity, all standard safety protocols would be followed. Post-construction, road improvements in this remote area would reduce the risk to BPA employees and other users of the remote access road system, improving human health and safety. Other than that point, the project would not have significant impacts on human health or safety.

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, if necessary: 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, if necessary: 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, if necessary: N/A

- ☒ 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, if necessary: N/A

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

The proposed project is located on BPA access road easements, on land owned by the State of Washington, managed by the WA Dept. of Natural Resources, within the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area, which is managed by the U.S. Forest Service. BPA has notified the WA Dept. of Natural Resources and the USFS of the planned activity and proposed construction schedule. BPA would continue ongoing coordination with the landowners and land management agencies during project activities.

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

Signed: /s/ Aaron Siemers

Aaron Siemers

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: July 20, 2018