



U.S. Department of Energy

Categorical Exclusion Determination Form

<u>Categorical Exclusion Number:</u>	CX-270848
<u>Loan Application Number:</u>	EIR0044
<u>Proposed Action Title:</u>	Gaston – Goat Rock #1 230kV Transmission Line Project
<u>Program of Field Office:</u>	Loan Programs Office
<u>Location(s) (City/County/State):</u>	Chambers and Lee counties, Alabama

Proposed Action Description:

Description of Categorically Excluded Action

The United States Department of Energy (DOE), Loan Programs Office (LPO), may provide loan guarantees for energy infrastructure projects under Section 1706 of Title XVII of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, as amended by the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (42 U.S.C. 16517) and the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (Pub. L. No. 119-21, 139 Stat. 72 (July 4, 2025)) (the Energy Dominance Financing or EDF Program). The purpose of the EDF Program is to finance projects and facilities in the U.S. that retool, repower, repurpose, or replace energy infrastructure that has ceased operations or enable operating energy infrastructure to increase capacity or output (42 U.S.C. 16517(a)(2) and Pub. L. No. 119-21, 139 Stat. 72 (July 4, 2025)).

LPO is considering whether to issue a loan guarantee of a funding facility to Alabama Power Company (APC) pursuant to its authority under the EDF Program. In its application, APC has identified the Gaston-Goat Rock #1 230kV Transmission Line Project (Project) for inclusion in the funding facility that is the subject of DOE's loan guarantee. APC may request inclusion of multiple individual projects with independent utility in the funding facility that is the subject of the DOE loan guarantee; accordingly, DOE will complete an environmental review pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for these projects prior to their inclusion in the funding facility that is the subject of DOE's loan guarantee.

The Project includes upgrading 17.8 miles of an existing overhead electric powerline that will address constraints that limit the electrical grid's ability to integrate the electrical output of various generation sources. The Project will increase the current carrying capacity of the existing infrastructure, improve safety and efficiency, reduce power loss potential, and enhance reliability. Accordingly, the Proposed Action considered in this record of categorical exclusion is LPO's issuance of Federal financial support for the Project.

Project Description

The Project includes upgrading approximately 17.8 miles of the existing Gaston – Goat Rock #1 (North) 230kV Line within an approximately 150-foot-wide maintained right-of way (ROW), encompassing approximately 325 acres of land (Project Area). The Project Area is located within an existing, maintained transmission line corridor with existing access roads and pads (e.g. construction staging and laydown areas) that will be utilized during construction. The proposed Project originates at the existing Goat Rock Transmission Substation (eastern terminus) located in Lee County, Alabama, runs northwest for 17.8 miles, and terminates within an existing utility corridor (western terminus) adjacent to the existing North Opelika Transmission Substation in Chambers County, Alabama.

The Project will include upgrading of approximately 17.8 miles of 230-kV overhead electric powerline. This work will require the installation of nine (9) new structures; of the nine new structures, three (3) are new intermediate structures and six (6) are replacements of retired structures. These structure changes will allow the lines to operate at a higher temperature. The structure changes are the extent of the work associated with this Project (i.e., no other reconductoring or rebuild activities are associated with this project). Since the ROW already supports an existing electric powerline, existing access roads will be used to construct, operate and maintain the Project. Laydown areas necessary for Project construction will be located within the existing ROW, outside of environmentally sensitive areas to the greatest extent possible in order to limit temporary impacts. No new ROW clearing is proposed (e.g., no tree or vegetation clearing). Following construction, the area will be restored and stabilized in accordance with the Project's Construction Best Management Practices Plan (CBMPP) and the Alabama



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Handbook for Erosion Control and Sediment Control and Stormwater Management on Construction Sites in Urban Areas (Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Commission [ALSWCC], 2018).

The Project is scheduled to begin construction January 2026 with a projected in-service date of June 2026.

The Project involves the construction of two (2) new structures within wetland features; however, this permanent impact meets the requirements of USACE Nationwide Permit (NWP) 57 and will not require a Pre-Construction Notification (PCN). Specifically, the Project's wetland impacts comply with the conditions of a non-notifying USACE NWP 57. NWP 57 authorizes activities associated with the construction, maintenance, repair, or removal of electric utility lines, telecommunication lines, and related facilities within waters of the U.S., provided each single and complete project does not result in the loss of more than 0.5 acre of waters of the U.S. for each single and complete crossing.

Further, best management practices (including timber matting, installation of stringent erosion and sediment control measures, re-establishment of pre-construction ground contours, etc.) will be incorporated into construction plans.

In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, LPO's review of the Project found that there would be *no effect* to designated critical habitat. Additionally, for eight Federally threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species with potential to occur in the Project area (tricolored bat, whooping crane, alligator snapping turtle, purple bankclimber, monarch butterfly, fringed campion, Georgia rockcress, and relict trillium), LPO has reached a *no effect* determination based on 1) no in-water or in-stream work proposed, 2) no tree or vegetation clearing proposed, and 3) the results of desktop and field-based assessments indicating no ground disturbance within suitable habitat areas for these species.

In accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), LPO consulted with the Alabama State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). On October 8, 2025, the Alabama SHPO concurred with LPO's finding of no historic properties affected for this project. DOE identified and contacted six federally recognized Native American Indian Tribes (Tribes) that may have an interest in the Project area (Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas; Alabama-Quassarte Tribal Town; Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana; Miccosukee Tribe of Indians; Muscogee (Creek) Nation; and Seminole Tribe of Florida.). No comments were received from these Tribes. If archaeological materials are encountered during construction, the procedures at 35 CFR 800.13(b) will apply. DOE or the applicant will notify the SHPO and the tribes immediately. If human remains are encountered during construction, the provisions of the Alabama Burial Act (*Code of Alabama* 1975 §13A-7-23.1, as amended; Alabama Historical Commission Administrative Code Chapter 460-X-10 Burials) would be followed. This stipulation would be included in construction plans.

The following permits or authorizations have been or will be obtained prior to construction:

- USACE Clean Water Act 404/10 Permit – NWP 57 for Electric Utility line and Telecommunications Activities.
- APC plans to acquire an ADEM Construction Stormwater permit to address erosion and sediment controls during the proposed rebuild. Construction activities that exceed land disturbance greater than 1 acre or greater are required to obtain coverage under ALR1000000 of Alabama Department of Environmental Management.

Categorical Exclusion(s) Applied:

B4.13 - Upgrading and rebuilding existing powerlines

Categorical Exclusion(s) Description:

The Project is consistent with and covered by DOE categorical exclusions in 10 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1021, Appendix B4, Categorical Exclusions Applicable to Electric Power and Transmission. Specifically, the Project is covered by DOE Categorical Exclusion B4.13 Upgrading and Rebuilding Existing Powerlines.



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B4.13 Upgrading and Rebuilding Existing Powerlines

Upgrading or rebuilding existing electric powerlines, which may involve relocations of small segments of the powerlines within an existing powerline right-of-way or within otherwise previously disturbed or developed lands (as discussed at 10 CFR 1021.410(g)(1)). Upgrading or rebuilding existing electric powerlines also may involve widening an existing powerline right-of-way to meet current electrical standards if the widening remains within previously disturbed or developed lands and only extends into a small area beyond such as lands as needed to comply with applicable electrical standards. Covered actions would be in accordance with applicable requirements, including the integral elements listed at the start of appendix B of this part; and would incorporate appropriate design and construction standards, control technologies, and best management practices. This exclusion does not apply to underwater powerlines. As used in this categorical exclusion, "small" has the meaning discussed at 10 CFR 1021.410(g)(2).

Per 10 CFR 1021.102, application of categorical exclusions (classes of actions that normally do not require EAs or EISs), the following clarifications are provided to assist in the appropriate application of categorical exclusions that employ the terms or phrases "previously disturbed or developed" and "small" or "small-scale":

- (1) "Previously disturbed or developed" refers to land that has been changed such that its functioning ecological processes have been and remain altered by human activity. The phrase encompasses areas that have been transformed from natural cover to nonnative species or a managed state, including, but not limited to, utility and electric power transmission corridors and rights-of-way, and other areas where active utilities and currently used roads are readily available.*
- (2) DOE considers terms such as "small" and "small-scale" in the context of the particular proposal, including its proposed location. In assessing whether a proposed action is small, in addition to the actual magnitude of the proposal, DOE considers factors such as industry norms, the relationship of the proposed action to similar types of development in the vicinity of the proposed action, and expected outputs of emissions or waste. When considering the physical size of a proposed facility, for example, DOE would review the surrounding land uses, the scale of the proposed facility relative to existing development, and the capacity of existing roads and other infrastructure to support the proposed action.*

Regulatory Requirements Defined in 10 CFR § 1021

The proposed loan guarantee for actions described above was subjected to an environmental due diligence review by DOE LPO staff to ensure consistency with the specific category of action (categorical exclusion) contained in Appendix B of 10 CFR Part 1021 and the conditions for applying categorical exclusions specified in Section 102 of Part 1021. To ensure that the requirements of Appendix B were met, LPO Environmental Compliance obtained numerous project-related documents between March and September 2025 and participated in several conference calls with APC staff to ensure a complete understanding of the activities associated with the Project.

The environmental due diligence review determined that there is no controversy regarding the potential environmental impacts of the Project, and that the actions associated with the loan guarantee would not adversely affect any physical, biological, or socio-cultural resources associated with the deployment of the project. The environmental due diligence review determined the Proposed Action has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Signature by APC's designated representative in the Corporate Validation section (below) is an indication of APC's concurrence with the findings and determinations presented herein.



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For the DOE procedures regarding categorical exclusions, including the full text of each categorical exclusion, see [10 CFR 1021.102](#) and Appendix B to 10 CFR Part 1021, and also Section 5.4 (Applying one or more categorical exclusions to a proposal) and Appendices B and C of [DOE's National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures](#) (June 30, 2025).

Requirements and guidance in 10 CFR 1021.102 and DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures: (See full text in regulation and in Implementing Procedures)

- ☒ The proposal fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix B to 10 CFR Part 1021 or Appendix B and C of DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures (June 30, 2025).

To fit within the classes of actions listed in Appendix B to 10 CFR Part 1021, or Appendix B of DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures, a proposal must satisfy the conditions that are integral elements of the classes of actions in Appendix B of both 10 CFR Part 1021 and DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures.

- ☒ There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal. DOE or an applicant may modify the proposal to avoid reasonably foreseeable adverse significant effects such that the categorical exclusion would apply.

- ☒ The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Based on my review of the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer, I have determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class(es) of action, the other requirements and guidance set forth above are met, and the proposed action is hereby categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

Corporate Validation:

Comments: _____

Applicant Signatory: Stacey Turner
Vice President, Environmental Affairs
Alabama Power Company

Signature:

Date:

10.20.25

DOE Signatory: Todd Stribley
Director, Environmental Compliance
DOE Loan Programs Office

Signature:

Date Determined:

10/21/2025