



Categorical Exclusion Determination

Western Area Power Administration

U.S. Department of Energy



<u>Proposed Action Title:</u>	Bristol to Summit Geotechnical Investigation
<u>WAPA Region:</u>	Upper Great Plains
<u>Location (County/State):</u>	Bristol, South Dakota to Summit, South Dakota
<u>CX Determination Number:</u>	2026-UGP-005
<u>CX Determination Expiration Date*:</u>	05 May 2031

**CX is valid until the date above (no longer than five years from when document was signed) or completion of work started prior to the expiration of the CX Determination, unless there are substantial changes to the scope of work, location, or applicable regulations. If such changes occur prior to the expiration of the CX, the Region Environmental Program will review the analysis to ensure the CX is still applicable.*

Proposed Action Description:

Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), Upper Great Plains Region (UGP), is proposing to conduct a geotechnical investigation to inform the design and alignment of transmission structures for the Bristol-Summit 115kV Rebuild Project. The Bristol-Summit Geotechnical Investigation will occur between May 1, 2026, and November 1, 2026.

The proposed project area is located north of Highway US-12 north, running east and west between Bristol to Summit, South Dakota. The area extends over both land and water with the multiple lakes in the area with an estimated water depth of 10 to 15 feet.

Equipment used may include work trucks, semi-tractor and trailer, amphibious and ATV-mounted drilling equipment and support vehicle truck-mounted augers and cranes, skid-steer loaders, backhoe, drill rigs, and equipment trailers. Drill rigs will be transported to the alignment using semi-tractor and trailer and all rigs will be accompanied by a pickup truck pulling a trailer.

24 borings will be completed for the geotechnical investigation. 11 borings will be roughly 60ft deep, and 13 borings will be roughly 80ft deep. Boring locations will be offset from existing powerlines by 50ft. Six samples will be obtained in the upper 15 feet of each boring, and samples will be obtained at depth intervals of about 5 feet thereafter. Soil sampling will be performed using thin-wall tube and/or split-barrel sampling procedures. A geologist will be on site to supervise the sampling.

Shallow borings on land may be advanced using continuous-flight hollow-stem augers. Alternately, continuous-flight hollow-stem augers will be used to advance the boreholes through the upper clays and until groundwater is encountered; the boring method will then switch to rotary wash methods. Borings on water will be advanced using casing to the mud line and then rotary wash methods.

The contractor will backfill the borings with bentonite grout after after-completion to prevent the settling of backfill material. Excess auger cuttings and drilling fluids of borings on land will be disposed of by thin spreading in grassy areas near the boreholes. In the course of drilling, some disturbance such as rutting of the ground surface may occur. The contractor will avoid any areas with crops.



UGP Lands is coordinating the contractor's temporary access with landowners adjacent to the proposed project area as needed.

The geotechnical boring will be sequenced in the following order: (1) submerged sites to begin May 11 and last approximately two weeks; (2) Dry land sites in the Dakota Skipper habitat to occur between June 1 and June 9; (4) All other dry land sites which will occur after June 10.

Environmental Requirements during Project Implementation:

- Reseed disturbed grassland areas and provide erosion and sedimentation control measures as needed.
- Tree trimming and/or removal must occur outside the Northern Long-Eared Bat pupping season (June 1 – Aug 15), and would avoid, as practicable, the bat active season (April 15 – October 31).
- If a piping plover (PIPL) or rufa red knot (RRKN) is observed ≤ 100 meters from the project, project activities would cease immediately and delay until:
 - A) the PIPL or RRKN moves off naturally; or
 - B) the USFWS had been consulted to determine when construction activities could resume.
- There are 3 eagle nests in proximity to the project (the closest is a bald eagle nest $\approx 2,000$ feet away from WAPA's ROW). Avoid activities ≤ 660 feet from active bald eagle nests and $\leq \frac{1}{2}$ mile from active golden eagle nests. Activities in these buffers would only occur:
 - A) during portions of the year when eggs, eaglets, and/or breeding adults were not present on the nest (traditionally September 1 – January 14); or
 - B) when a biological monitor is present to monitor the nest and ensure activities wouldn't cause undue disturbance to the nest/young/adults.
- The primary bird nesting season in South Dakota is May 1 – August 1. If a bird nest is observed, a suitable buffer distance would be established to avoid nest disturbance, and project activities would not commence within the buffer until:
 - A) the nest fate is reached naturally;
 - B) a biological monitor is present to monitor the nest and ensure activities are not causing undue disturbance to the nest/young/adults; or
 - C) outside the primary nesting season dates.
- There is a raptor nest (species unknown) ≈ 400 feet south of WAPA's ROW at 45.366739°N | 97.599793°W; and a raptor nest (red-tailed hawk) near WAPA's structure 16/2 exact coordinates are to be determined. If project activities occur March 1 – August 1 annual nest activities need to be determined and, if active, implement the conservation measures above for active nests.



- The action area includes 26.6 acres of potentially suitable habitat areas for the Dakota Skipper butterfly (DASK). Spans containing untilled native prairie in potentially suitable DASK habitat areas (32 total spans) include: 0/1-1/1 (x9), 3/3-3/4 (x1), 6/2-6/6 (x4), 10/3-12/2 (x14), 12/5-13/1 (x4). Assume presence of DASKs on these 26.6 acres and avoid work during the adult flight period, June 10 – July 25. If work must be completed on these acres during the adult flight period, a WAPA biologist would conduct a ground-based habitat assessment ≤ 2 weeks prior to the start of construction to determine if the grasslands contained the necessary plant composition to support DASKs, as outlined in the 2024 Survey Protocol (USFWS 2024). If areas contain suitable plant composition to support DASKs:
 - A) those areas would be avoided during the adult flight period; or
 - B) occupancy surveys would be conducted by a permitted biologist prior to project activities (typically must be contracted/hired, and availability is limited, so schedule this service well in advance).
- The western prairie fringed orchid (WPFO) has never been documented in WAPA's existing ROWs in the action area. If a WPFO is observed, alter activities to avoid the WPFO's location.
- When work must be completed in a water body (i.e., wetland, stream, lake), maintain water connectivity and seasonally appropriate flows as much as is practicable.
- WAPA coordinated with the US Army Corps of Engineers to ensure compliance with Waters of the US and the Clean Water Act (Section 404) permitting. The project must follow conservation measures outlined in the USACE Nationwide Permit 06: [Survey Activities](#).
- SD Game, Fish & Parks requested that reasonable sediment control measures be taken (but didn't specify what minimums needed to be met). The NWP #6 document from the USACE outlines general measures for erosion and sediment control: *12. Appropriate soil erosion and sediment controls must be used and maintained in effective operating condition during construction, and all exposed soil and other fills, as well as any work below the ordinary high water mark or high tide line, must be permanently stabilized at the earliest practicable date. Permittees are encouraged to perform work within waters of the United States during periods of low-flow or no-flow, or during low tides.*
- When work must be completed in a water body (i.e., wetland, stream, lake), maintain water connectivity and seasonally appropriate flows as much as is practicable.
- If unanticipated cultural resources or if human remains are inadvertently discovered during this Geotech investigation, immediately stop work at that location and contact WAPA's UGP Historic Preservation Official.

Categorical Exclusion(s) Applied (Number and Title):

B3.1 Site characterization and environmental monitoring



B1.13 Pathways, short access roads, and rail lines

Findings:

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](#) (Jun. 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 or 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. Additionally, for CXs adopted pursuant to NEPA Section 109 (see DNIP, Appendix C), the originating Federal agency's integral elements or extraordinary circumstances must be in accordance with the applicable requirements.

- 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.

[Note: For proposals that fit within the categorical exclusions listed in Appendix C of DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures, see DOE's notice of adoption for the subject Appendix C categorical exclusion for additional considerations. DOE notices of adoption for other agency categorical exclusions may be found on [DOE's Section 109 webpage](#).]



Determination:

Based on my review of the proposed action, 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.

WAPA Authorized Official Signature:

Gayle R. Nansel | Senior VP and Upper Great Plains Regional Manager