

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: New Sun Oak Springs Interconnection and Easement Acquisition

Project No.: G0524

Project Manager: Rasha Kroonen—TEP-TPP-1

Location: Wasco County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to interconnect a 20-megawatt (MW) solar development project to BPA's electrical transmission system. The solar developer is New Sun Energy Transmission Company, LLC. The point of interconnection would be at the Tygh Valley NWC tap to Maupin-Tygh Valley-1 transmission line in Wasco County, Oregon.

BPA's proposed action to support the interconnection request consists mainly of installing a tap facility to connect the customer's transmission line to BPA's grid, and construction of a new radio tower to support communication requirements.

For the tap installation, an existing 68-foot-tall H-frame structure and a 33-foot-tall disconnect switch structure owned by BPA would be removed. A 55-foot-tall H-frame structure owned by Northern Wasco People's Utility District would also be removed. Three new H-frame structures (45-, 65- and 75-foot-tall, respectively), along with two new disconnect switch structures (33-foot-tall) would be installed within 150 feet north of the removed H-frame and disconnect switch structure. Blasting may be used to break up bedrock below the surface of the new pole locations. Excavation for the new poles would be to a depth of 10 feet and approximately 5 feet for the switches. The excavated soil would be used to backfill around the newly set poles. Two guy wires would be attached to each of the two tallest H-frame structures.

The existing access road at the tap location would be extended 200 feet to the north and would be 14 feet wide. Three new 30-foot by 30-foot landings would be installed at the base of the tap structures.

BPA proposes to acquire an additional 0.8 acres of right-of-way easement rights for the new tap structures and additional access road.

Replacement poles and switches, and equipment vehicles would be staged southeast of the tap location.

At BPA's Maupin Substation, located approximately three miles southeast of the tap location, a new 80-foot-tall radio tower with a microwave dish would be installed on a 30-foot by 30-foot foundation. Associated radio equipment would be installed inside the control house at Maupin Substation. BPA would also install a communications equipment rack within New Sun's control house at their collector station.

A construction trailer and smaller materials would be staged on the southern side of Maupin Substation.

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/ Beth Belanger

Beth Belanger
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC

Reviewed by:

/s/ Doug Corkran

Doug Corkran
Acting Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: April 4, 2019

Attachments: Environmental Checklist
No Effect Memo

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 areas are in Wasco County, Oregon, near the town of Maupin and the unincorporated community of Tygh Valley.

The proposed tap location is in Section 17, Township 4 South, Range 14 East. The site is in an agricultural field, located just over a half mile west of the Deschutes River National Scenic Area. The following native vegetation occurs at the site in uncultivated areas: sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), rabbit brush (*Ericameria nauseosa*), juniper (*Juniperus* sp.), mullen (*Verbascum thapsus*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), fiddleneck (*Amsinckia* sp.) and wild onion (*Allium* sp.). Additionally, Tygh Valley milkvetch (*Astragalus tyghensis*), an Oregon state-listed threatened plant and endemic species, also occurs at this location. Non-native plants at the site include crane's bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), medusa head grass (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*) and Russian thistle (*Salsola kali*).

The proposed radio tower location is in Section 27, Township 4 South, Range 14 East. The site is at BPA's Maupin Substation, located 2.3 miles east of the Deschutes River. The radio tower would be installed in an area that is devoid of vegetation.

The nearest waterbody to the tap location is Oak Springs Creek, located approximately 800-feet to the southeast. No wetlands or waterbodies are in, or near, the project area. At Maupin Substation, an unnamed stream is located 0.25 miles west of the site. There are no wetlands at either location.

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: On June 26, 2018, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs (CTWS) and the Oregon State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) were initially notified of the proposed project and provided with a map of the project area. After completing an archeological survey of the project area, BPA submitted a no effect determination letter on October 2, 2018, to the consulting parties. On December 4, 2018, SHPO concurred with BPA's determination. The CTWS did not respond to the determination letter.

2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Explanation: Soils would be excavated and graded to relocate the existing poles and to add the three switch structures; and also to install the new radio tower at the Maupin Substation. The maximum depth of soil disturbance for the new poles and radio tower foundation would be ten feet.

During construction, all appropriate Best Management Practices would be used to implement site-specific erosion and sediment control. All disturbed areas would be stabilized and seeded.

3. **Plants** (including federal/state special-status species)

Explanation: Tygh Valley milkvetch (*Astragalus tyghensis*), an Oregon state-listed endemic species, occurs at the tap location. The population is concentrated along the southerly portion of the existing access road, and also west of the project location, closer to the edge of the rimrock. Several individuals are growing near the work area. It is possible that two of these plants could be crushed during construction; however, the construction work would begin after the plants have senesced, so it is likely that the root system would not be impacted as no ground excavation is occurring in this location.

The following avoidance measures would be implemented to reduce impacts to Tygh Valley milkvetch:

- Prior to construction, BPA would mark the identified plants, educate workers about avoidance, and avoid impacts to the plants as much as possible.

There are no other special-status plants at either project location.

Invasive weeds, such as Russian thistle and knapweed (*Centaurea* spp.), would be appropriately controlled prior to construction. Additionally, construction vehicles and equipment would be required to be cleaned before entering the project location.

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

Explanation: Two golden eagle nests have been documented within 0.5 to 1 mile from the project location.

The following restrictions would be implemented to reduce impacts to golden eagles:

- No construction work would occur between January 1 and July 15, to avoid the golden eagle's critical nesting period.
- The EC lead would verify that the eaglets have fledged the nest before construction begins.
- Between July 16 and August 31, rock blasting would only occur in the middle part of the day (2 hours after sunrise and 2 hours before sunset) and blasting mats would be used to decrease noise levels.

There are no other special-status species at the project locations; therefore, there would be no impacts to other wildlife.

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

Explanation: There are no water bodies, floodplains, or fish in or near the project areas; therefore, no impacts would occur.

6. **Wetlands**

Explanation: The project locations and adjacent areas do not have wetlands; therefore, no impacts would occur.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Explanation: The project is unlikely to impact groundwater and aquifers. The maximum depth of disturbance for the project is 10 feet. The nearest Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 10 Sole Source Aquifer is approximately 70 miles northwest of the project location.

Spill prevention measures would be utilized during construction activities. The project would not provide a pathway for groundwater contamination.

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

Explanation: The project would not change the land use at either location. The new tap structure is located outside of the Deschutes River National Scenic Area. Therefore, there would be no impacts to either land use or specially designated areas.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The new infrastructure at both locations would be consistent with the current use as a transmission corridor and electrical substation. There would be no substantial changes to the visual quality at either location.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: A small amount of dust and vehicle emissions would occur during construction; however, there would be no significant changes to air quality during or after construction.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: The nearest residences are 0.5 to 0.75 miles away from the project location. Construction noise would be temporary and would occur during daylight hours. If rock blasting is necessary, it would be of short duration and would occur mid-day. Additionally, blasting mats would be utilized to muffle noise impacts. Overall, operational noise would not change.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: During project activities, all standard safety protocols would be followed. Project activities would not impact 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:

- 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:

- 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:

- 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:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: BPA would work closely with the landowners to provide adequate notification of construction timing and potential controls for invasive plants. In addition, BPA would obtain the necessary easement for the proposed switch and tap structures, prior to construction commencing.

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

Signed: /s/ Beth Belanger

Beth Belanger, ECT-4
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC

Date: April 4, 2019