

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: New Sun Fort Rock Solar Interconnection (Update to previous categorical exclusion issued on April 23, 2019)

Project No.: G0521 and G0526

Project Manager: Rasha Kroonen—TEP-TPP-1

Location: Deschutes and Lake Counties, 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 two 10-megawatt (MW) solar development projects to BPA's electrical transmission system. The solar developer is New Sun Energy Transmission Company, LLC. The two solar projects would share one point of interconnection along BPA's Lapine-Fort Rock-No. 1 transmission line. BPA's proposed action to support the interconnection request consists of installing a tap facility to connect the customer's transmission line to BPA's grid and substation and communication upgrades.

The work described in the previous categorical exclusion included removal of three existing transmission poles; of which two would be relocated within approximately 15 feet of their existing locations. However, it has been determined that one of the replacement poles would need to be relocated approximately 185 feet from its current location, rather than 15 feet.

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, Jul. 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: June 12, 2019

Attachment: 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.

Proposed Action: New Sun Fort Rock Solar Interconnection (Update to previous categorical exclusion issued on April 23, 2019)

Project Site Description

The proposed project area is in Lake County, Oregon, between the towns of Fort Rock and Christmas Valley. It is in Section 19, Township 26 South, Range 15 East and Section 24, Township 26 South, Range 14 East. The project area is adjacent to a large agricultural field. The surrounding area is a mix of private, state, and federally owned land. The surrounding area is a mix of private, state, and federally-owned land. The surrounding topography is relatively flat, with the exception of Connley Hills to the southwest of the project area. There are no rivers or streams nearby; however, there are a series of dry lake beds approximately 0.5-1 mile northwest and northeast of the project location.

The vegetation at the project site consists mostly of sagebrush (*Artemesia* sp.), yellow rabbit brush (*Ericameria* sp.), greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) and some spiny hopsage (*Grayia spinosa*). The project site also has invasive Russian thistle (*Salsola* sp.) plants.

Staging of materials would occur on a graveled area at the LaPine Substation and fiber would be installed at the Redmond Substation, both in Deschutes County, Oregon. The fiber at Redmond Substation would be routed across the front lawn that is vegetated with sod grass.

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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Explanation: On April 2, 2018, the Burns Paiute Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Fort McDermitt Paiute-Shoshone Tribe, The Klamath Tribes, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) were initially notified of the proposed project and provided with a map of the project area. On April 27, 2018, SHPO replied and requested additional information. On May 8, 2018, BPA responded to SHPO's request for more information. The remaining consulting parties received a cover letter describing SHPO's request and BPA's response, along with copies of both letters.

The project area was surveyed during the early summer of 2018. Several cultural sites were recorded within the area of potential effect (APE) including three pre-contact archaeological sites and two pre-contact isolate sites. BPA would avoid impacts to these resources by reconfiguring the switch structure locations, roping off the area during construction, and by having an archaeological monitor on site during all construction activities. An Inadvertent Discovery Plan would also be provided to the construction contractor.

On September 17, 2018, BPA submitted a no adverse effect determination letter to all of the consulting parties listed above. On March 14, 2019, SHPO provided concurrence with the no adverse effect determination, with the condition that an archaeological monitor would be onsite during all construction activities and also that a tribal representative be invited to participate in monitoring.

2. **Geology and Soils**



Explanation: During construction, all appropriate Best Management Practices would be used to implement site-specific erosion and sediment control. Excavated spoils would be placed in a BPA-approved location. All disturbed areas would be stabilized and seeded.

3. **Plants** (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)



Explanation: There are no Federal/state-listed plants at the project locations; therefore, there would be no impacts to special-status plants.

Invasive weeds, such as Russian thistle, would be appropriately controlled prior to construction.

Additionally, construction vehicles and equipment would be required to be clean before entering the project location.

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



Explanation: During the summer of 2018, the project area was surveyed for burrowing owls and pygmy rabbits, using established protocols. The results of the surveys were negative. There are no Federal/state special status species or habitats occurrence records in the project area, nor were any observed during a site visit. There would be no impacts to special-status or federally-listed wildlife.

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



Explanation: The project area and adjacent areas do not have any water bodies, floodplains, or fish; therefore no impacts would occur.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: The project area does not have wetlands; therefore, no impacts would occur.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: A geotechnical exploration conducted at the site in January of 2019 encountered water at 27-feet below ground surface (bgs); however, it was concluded that this was likely perched water because well logs in the surrounding area indicate that groundwater ranges between 43 to 45 feet bgs. Because groundwater levels vary seasonally, and construction would occur in the summer when levels are lower, it is unlikely that groundwater would be encountered during installation of the drilled shaft foundations for the new transmission structures; however, a dewatering plan would be developed prior to construction.

The nearest Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 10 Sole Source Aquifer is approximately 175 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 land use would not change at the project site. Nor is the project within, or near, any specially designated areas, such as National Scenic Rivers.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The visual quality would be consistent with the existing use of the transmission right-of-way corridor. There would be no significant change to the visual quality.

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 residence is over a half-mile away from the project location. Construction noise would be temporary and would occur during daylight hours. 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 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: June 12, 2019