

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Sycan Compensation III Station Engine Generator Replacement and Grounding Upgrade

Project Manager: Jennifer R. Bachman, TEPF-CSB-2

Location: Lake County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities; B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace an engine generator (EG) and associated EG building and fuel tank and to upgrade electrical grounding at BPA's Sycan III Compensation Station in Lake County, Oregon (Section 30, Township 31 South, Range 15 East). The propane EG and existing building, 500-gallon propane fuel tank, and foundations would be removed, and a diesel EG and new prefabricated building, 1,100-gallon diesel fuel tank, and foundations would be installed. This project is required to bring the facility into compliance with BPA's substation standards.

The switchyard would be expanded approximately 4,600 square feet to the south to allow sufficient spacing between new and existing switchyard structures and the fence line. Expanding the switchyard would require excavating up to three feet deep, installing grounding, foundations, and fencing, and then backfilling and compacting to bring the surface to the appropriate grade. Electrical grounding would similarly be repaired and enhanced throughout the existing switchyard. Excavated soils would be stored temporarily on-site and then either used for backfill, deposited elsewhere on-site, or appropriately disposed of off-site according to all local, State, and Federal regulations. Outside of the switchyard, BPA would resurface the existing driveway and add a new approximately 300-square-foot graveled vehicle pullout. The switchyard expansion and new vehicle pullout would require removing approximately 20 ponderosa pine trees (*Pinus ponderosa*).

Completion of the project would require the use of heavy equipment, including an excavator, dump truck, grader, and compactor. Materials and equipment staging would be located within the existing, previously disturbed switchyard.

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

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: Sycan III Compensation Station Engine Generator Replacement and Grounding Upgrade

Project Site Description

The project site is located entirely within BPA's existing easement area at BPA's Sycan III Compensation Station on the Fremont-Winema National Forest in Lake County, Oregon (Section 30, Township 31 South, Range 15 East). The project site includes portions of the energized switchyard, as well as an area south of the switchyard where the yard expansion, vehicle pullout construction, and existing access road resurfacing would occur. The energized switchyard and existing gravel access road are covered in crushed rock with little to no vegetation, while the remainder of the project site consists of native and nonnative grass species interspersed with shrub species and ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*). Land surrounding the project site is largely undeveloped pine/fir woodland and savanna, with two maintained 500-kV transmission line rights-of-way and additional high voltage electrical transmission lines and substation infrastructure located west of the project site. The closest waterbody is Squaw Creek, which is located over 800 feet north of the project site. A freshwater emergent wetland associated with Squaw Creek is mapped approximately 700 feet east of the project site.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On January 10, 2020, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- Burns Paiute Tribe
- Oregon Heritage: State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
- The Klamath Tribes
- United States Forest Service (USFS) Fremont-Winema National Forest

BPA completed background research and an intensive pedestrian survey of the area of potential effect (APE). Within one mile of the APE, seven cultural resource surveys have been previously conducted, and six sites have been recorded. Three of the seven previous survey areas overlap with the current APE. The intensive pedestrian survey identified three isolates (ISO-01, ISO-02, and ISO-03) within the APE.

Project activities would occur in areas previously disturbed by the construction and ongoing maintenance of BPA's Sycan III Compensation Station. The compensation station is not eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP). Similarly, none of the three isolates identified in the pedestrian survey are eligible for inclusion in the NRHP, and construction activities would avoid these isolated finds. Therefore, BPA has determined that the proposed actions would result in no effect to historic properties (BPA

CR Project No.: OR 2019 149; SHPO Case No.: 20-0050). The Klamath Tribes concurred with BPA's determination on October 8, 2020. No other comments were received.

In the unlikely event that cultural material is discovered during the implementation of this project, BPA would follow project-specific Inadvertent Discovery of Cultural Resources Protocols put in place prior to the implementation of the undertaking.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Geology and soils within and around the project site were previously disturbed during construction of the existing switchyard, access roads, and 500-kV transmission lines. The expanded switchyard (approximately 4,600 square feet) and the new vehicle pullout (approximately 300 square feet) would be covered by imported crushed rock, which would result in a permanent loss of soil productivity. Minor soil compaction could also occur due to vehicle and equipment use.

BPA and its contractors would implement best management practices (BMPs) to address temporary erosion and sediment control.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would require permanently clearing low-growing vegetation and approximately 20 ponderosa pine trees to expand the switchyard (approximately 4,600 square feet) and construct the new vehicle pullout (approximately 300 square feet). Additional construction-related activities (e.g., vehicle and equipment use) could result in removal of vegetation in small areas. All other project activities would occur within the existing switchyard or the existing access road prism, both of which are largely maintained clear of vegetation.

There are no documented occurrences of any state special-status plant species or plant species protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) near the project site, and no such species are expected to occur at the site. Therefore, the proposed project would have no effect on protected plant species.

BPA and its contractors would implement BMPs to prevent the spread of noxious weeds. Where appropriate, BPA would revegetate disturbed areas with a native seed mix.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: At least two gray wolves (*Canis lupus*) were documented in the vicinity of the project site during surveys in 2019. The project site is located within the Silver Lake Area of Known Wolf Activity, an area designated by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife indicating where resident wolves have become established. Gray wolves are listed as Endangered under the Federal ESA in this region of Oregon. In addition, golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) nests were documented in the vicinity of the project site as recently as 2018. Golden eagles are protected under the Federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. There are no other documented occurrences of any state special-status wildlife species or wildlife species protected under the Federal ESA, and no such species or suitable habitat are expected to occur at the project site.

Current ambient noise and disturbances are high in the area due to routine maintenance and operation of the 500-kV transmission lines and switchyard and ongoing construction activities at the nearby Sycan I Compensation Station. The proposed project would involve temporary noise and activity levels similar in nature to those that already occur at or near the project site. As such, wildlife species that could be present in the area would likely already be habituated to human activity. The project would not result in the loss of any suitable protected species habitat. Therefore, the proposed project would have no effect on protected wildlife species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No waterbodies or floodplains are present within 500 feet of the project site, and there are no documented occurrences of any state special-status or ESA-listed fish or fish habitat near the project site. BPA and its contractors would implement erosion and sediment control BMPs to prevent the migration of sediment offsite. Therefore, the proposed project would result in no impact to these resources.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present within 500 feet of the project site. BPA and its contractors would implement erosion and sediment control BMPs to prevent the migration of sediment offsite. Therefore, the proposed project would result in no impact to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: It is unlikely that soil excavation would be deep enough to affect groundwater or aquifers, if present. BPA and its contractors would implement BMPs to reduce the potential for inadvertent spills of hazardous materials that could enter groundwater or aquifers. Therefore, the proposed project would have no impact on groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction would occur exclusively within BPA's existing easement, in an area that has been developed for high-voltage electrical transmission. The final site buildout, including the switchyard expansion, vehicle pullout, and access road resurfacing, would be consistent with current land use. No specially-designated areas are in the project vicinity.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be a perceptible change in the appearance of the switchyard (e.g., expanded switchyard footprint, new vehicle pullout, and tree removal). However, the final switchyard buildout would be consistent with the existing visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction-related activities would result in a temporary increase in dust and emissions in the local area. Following completion of the project, the new diesel EG would produce more emissions, including carbon dioxide and particulate matter, than the existing propane EG. However, the diesel EG would only be operated as needed in the event of a power outage and only until primary station service is restored. The diesel EG would also be operated periodically throughout the year for approximately an hour to ensure it remains in reliable working condition. Therefore, there would be a minor long-term change in air quality following completion of the project.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Current ambient noise is typical of what would be associated with routine maintenance and operation of the 500-kV transmission lines and switchyard and ongoing construction activities at the nearby Sycaon I Compensation Station. During construction, use of vehicles, machinery, and equipment and general construction activities would temporarily produce noise at levels similar in nature to those that already occur at or near the project site and only during daylight hours. The project site is in a relatively undeveloped area, and there are no noise-sensitive receptors or land uses in the vicinity. Following construction, operational noise would not increase above current ambient conditions.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not create conditions that would increase risk to human health and safety. Construction crews would follow appropriate safety precautions for working in an electrical switchyard. Security fencing and signage would be installed and maintained to prevent unauthorized personnel from accessing the site during construction and following completion of the project. No impacts to human health and safety are expected as a result of project activities.

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: 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: 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: 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: N/A

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: All proposed work would occur within BPA's existing easement on the Fremont-Winema National Forest, and BPA would coordinate with the U.S. Forest Service. No other landowner notification, involvement, or coordination would be required.

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

Signed: /s/ W. Walker Stinnette November 19, 2020
W. Walker Stinnette, EC-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient CRGT