

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Kalispell TLM District FY19 Wood Pole Replacements

PP&A No.: 3933

Project Manager: Lisa Casey – TEPL-TPP-1

Location: Flathead, Lincoln, and Sanders counties, Montana

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to perform in-kind replacement of twenty-four wood pole structures and associated structural/electrical components (e.g. cross arms, insulators, guy anchors, etc.) along several transmission lines. Replacement poles would be placed in or adjacent to existing holes following removal of current pole structures, and may be re-augered to assure proper depth placement.

Wood pole replacement locations are listed below:

Transmission Line	Structure	TRS	County, State
Columbia Falls-Kalispell No. 1	10/4	T29N R20W SEC31	Flathead, MT
Columbia Falls-Trego No. 1	3/7	T30N R20W SEC17	Flathead, MT
	9/1	T30N R21W SEC16	Flathead, MT
	15/1	T31N R22W SEC33	Flathead, MT
	16/6, 17/1	T31N R22W SEC31	Flathead, MT
	19/6	T31N R23W SEC24	Flathead, MT
Hot Springs-Rattlesnake No. 1	9/8	T20N R23W SEC12	Sanders, MT
Libby-Bonnors Ferry No. 1	7/7	T31N R30W SEC21	Lincoln, MT
	8/1, 8/2, 8/3, 8/4	T31N R30W SEC21	Lincoln, MT
	8/5, 8/6	T31N R30W SEC20	Lincoln, MT
	8/7, 8/8, 8/9, 9/2	T31N R30W SEC29	Lincoln, MT
	9/5, 9/6, 9/7, 10/1, 10/2, 10/3	T31N R30W SEC30	Lincoln, MT
	44/5	T33N R34W SEC26	Lincoln, MT

Minor access road improvements are required in order to access structures the structures on the Libby-Bonnors Ferry No. 1 transmission line. Access road improvements would include blading, grading, adding rock, installing landings, and installing drainage features. One new landing and approximately 100 feet of access road improvement would be required to reach structure 10/4 of the Columbia Falls-Kalispell No. 1 transmission line.

The proposed action would maintain reliable power in the region. All work would be in accordance with the National Electrical Safety Code and BPA standards.

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/ Emma Reinemann

Emma Reinemann
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: *February 9, 2021*

Attachment(s): 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: Kalispell TLM District FY19 Wood Pole Replacements

Project Site Description

Proposed routine maintenance activities would be conducted along the Columbia Falls-Kalispell No. 1, Columbia Falls-Trego No. 1, Hot Springs-Rattlesnake No. 1, and Libby-Bonnors Ferry No. 1 transmission lines. Proposed maintenance activities would be performed in the existing transmission line right-of-ways and access road easements which are located in privately owned, federally managed, and tribally owned rural, agricultural, and forested areas. Federal land management agencies include the US Forest Service (USFS) Kootenai National Forest and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. Tribal land managers include the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

Miles nine through eleven of the Libby-Bonnors Ferry No. 1 transmission line are located less than half a mile from the Kootenai River. Structure 10/4 of the Columbia Falls-Kalispell No. 1 transmission line is located in a wetland.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated Area of Potential Effect (APE) consultation with the Kootenai National Forest, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the City of Columbia Falls, and the Montana State Historic Preservation Office on October 21, 2019. The project area was surveyed by an archaeologist. No cultural resources were identified during the survey and BPA determined that the project would have no adverse effect to historic properties. BPA sent out determination letters to the same interested parties on September 17, 2020 and received a response from the Montana State Historic Preservation office on October 13, 2020. The CSKT TPHO responded on January 25, 2021 and indicated that a tribal monitor should be present during the replacement of structure 9/8 of the Hot Springs-Rattlesnake No. 1 line, which is located on CSKT owned land.

Notes:

- A CSKT monitor must be present during the replacement of structure 9/8 of the Hot Springs-Rattlesnake No. 1 line.
- In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, stop work in the vicinity and immediately notify the BPA environmental lead, archaeologist, and project manager; interested tribes; Montana Historical Society; and the appropriate local, state and Federal agencies. Implement reasonable measures to protect the discovery site, including any appropriate stabilization or covering. Take reasonable steps to ensure the confidentiality of the discovery site, including restricting access.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Localized soil disturbance would occur during wood pole replacements, landing improvements and access road maintenance activities. Standard construction erosion control measures would be utilized as necessary.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No known Federal/state special-status plants are present in the project area. Vegetation would be crushed and left in place, rather than bladed, where possible. Any disturbed areas outside the road prism would be reseeded with an appropriate seed mix.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project area does not include habitat for any Federal or state special-status species, except grizzly bear. BPA consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the potential impacts to grizzly bear on April 17, 2020 and received a Letter of Concurrence on April 22, 2020. It was determined that the project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect grizzly bears.

There would be little to no effect to other wildlife in the area. Project activities would be limited to the already impacted right-of-way and would not substantially alter the footprint or operational noise of the line; therefore, wildlife and associated habitat would not be affected in the long term.

Notes:

- The following mitigation measures would be implemented in order to minimize impacts to grizzly bears:
 - Forest Service protocols for food storage orders would be enforced
 - Travel would be minimal, and limited to existing access road easements. In the Cabinet-Yaak Ecosystem recovery zone (in which Libby-Bonnors Ferry 44/5 is located), administrative trips would be limited to less than 60 trips per year, divided by the following seasonal limits:
 - Spring (April 1 – June 15): < 18 trips
 - Summer (June 16 – September 15): < 23 trips
 - Fall (September 16 – November 30): < 19 trips
 - Disturbed areas would be reseeded with non-attractant, native seed.
 - Crews would be informed of procedures for safely working in grizzly bear country.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No in-water work is proposed for this project. The Kootenai River, which is critical habitat for bull trout, is located less than half a mile south of miles 9 through 11 of the Libby-Bonnors Ferry No. 1 transmission line. Standard construction erosion control measures would be utilized to ensure sediment and other contaminants do not enter bodies of water; therefore, water bodies, floodplains, and fish would not be affected by the proposed project activities.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Columbia Falls-Kalispell 10/4 is located in a wetland. Access road work and landing installation would occur in the wetland; however, less than 1/10 of an acre of fill would be placed in the wetland. This activity would be covered under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permit 14 as an action not requiring pre-construction notification. All permit conditions would be adhered to and BMPs would be implemented to mitigate additional impacts to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No use of groundwater proposed and excavation would not extend to a depth that would intersect ground water.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No specially designated areas were identified within the project area. Land use would not change as a result of project activities.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be performed within existing transmission line right-of-ways. Replacement of wood poles and associated components would be in-kind and replaced in the same location.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have a small, temporary impact on air quality from a small amount of vehicle emissions and dust generated during construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some temporary construction noise would occur during daylight hours. The operational noise of the transmission line would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed action would allow safe and timely access to the transmission line which would help reduce outage times and maintain reliable power in the region. Miles 8 thru 10 of the Libby-Bonnors Ferry transmission line are located in operable unit 3 of the Libby Asbestos Superfund site. BPA has coordinated with the EPA, who conveyed that the likelihood of encountering asbestos in that area is low.

Notes:

- Crews have been trained in working in the Libby Asbestos area by the Lincoln County Asbestos Resource Program and will be implementing institutional controls to ensure work is completed safely.

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: Miles 8 through 10 of the Libby-Bonnors Ferry transmission line are located within the Libby Asbestos Superfund site. BPA has coordinated with the EPA to ensure the proposed project would have no uncontrolled or unpermitted releases.

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: BPA Realty personnel would perform landowner notifications 30-days prior to project initiation and any concerns regarding proposed transmission line maintenance activities would be addressed.

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

Signed: /s/ Emma Reinemann

Date: February 9, 2021

Emma Reinemann – EPR-4
Physical Scientist (Environmental)