

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** John Day Powerhouse to Tower 1/2 Conductor Replacement

**PP&A No.:** 2556

**Project Manager:** Tina Edwards

**Location:** Sherman County, Oregon

**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 replace the existing 2.5-inch expanded line conductor on the John Day Powerhouse-John Day No. 1 through 4 transmission lines from structure 0/1 (powerhouse) to 1/2 on each of the lines. BPA needs to replace the conductor because the current conductor is obsolete and no longer manufactured. A failure of the existing conductor would also require modification or replacement of the existing support towers, resulting in an extended outage. To accommodate the new conductor, four towers on the upper deck of the dam would be also replaced.

To remove the existing line conductor, crews would replace the hardware that attaches the line to the structure with a pulley or sheave (known as a traveler). A pulling/tensioning rig would be located on each end of a line segment. A line segment can be several tower spans and is usually terminated where there is a change in the angle of the transmission line. A piece of heavy equipment, such as a bull dozer, would be used to anchor the pulling/tensioning rigs.

A lighter weight line, called the sock line, would be spooled onto one of the pulling/tensioning rigs and attached to one end of the old line conductor. The other end of the old line would be attached to the other pulling/tensioning rig. The old line would be pulled off the towers and the sock line would take its place. The line conductor would be cut into sections as it is pulled off the towers since it is too rigid to be re-spoiled.

Once the sock line is in place, a spool of new line conductor would be attached to the sock line and pulled through the span. The correct line sag and tension would be adjusted, and then linecrew would permanently attach the new line to each tower.

Although not required, it is possible a helicopter and human external cargo methods may be used to perform portions of the work. A river barge located upstream of the dam would be used to stage pulling/tensioning equipment in order to pull line from the powerhouse tower to tower 1/1. A portion of the project would cross over I-84 and the BNSF railroad. Guard structures would be used to help protect areas beneath the conductor within the park, over I-84, and the railroad.

Two privately-owned, graveled staging areas located on the Washington side, adjacent to the dam, would be used to temporarily store project related equipment. One staging area could also be used as a helicopter pad if needed to perform the work.

Work would occur over a period of four months. Over intermittent periods during that work time (primarily when pulling conductor from the powerhouse tower to tower 1/1), access would need to be restricted to the area below the conductors, including access to several tribal fishing platforms located below this span to ensure safe pulling and stringing of the conductor. Traffic on I-84 would also be intermittently disrupted during overhead work. For the railroad, work would be timed around rail traffic to avoid disruption to service due to federal DOT requirements.

Equipment to perform all phases of the project would include cranes, line trucks, excavators, pulling/tensioning machines, bull dozers, graders, and dump trucks.

**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/ Aaron Shurtliff*  
Aaron Shurtliff  
Environmental Engineer

Concur:

*/s/ Katey Grange*  
Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: *January 5, 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:** John Day Powerhouse to Structure 1/2 Conductor Replacement

## **Project Site Description**

The project area is centered around the John Day dam located on the Columbia River near the city of Rufus, Oregon. The surrounding area is relatively dry due to its location east of the Cascades and receives 11 inches of rain per year. Structure 1/1 is located on the downstream riverbank from the dam on the Oregon side within Giles French Park, owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and provides free primitive camping to the public in an area adjacent to the project site. The vegetation within the site is primarily lawn grass, disbursed trees and walkways. Several wooden fishing platforms are located along the riverbank within the project site that are used by tribal fishers periodically throughout the year. A portion of the project spans over a single track of the BNSF railroad and I-84 before connecting to a tower located on private land atop an 800 foot cliff. The vegetation on the cliff top consists of mixed grassland used for agriculture and grazing. Two equipment staging areas located on the Washington side of the river are privately owned graveled equipment yards.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, Washington DAHP, Oregon SHPO, Nez Perce Tribe, United State Army Corps of Engineers, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and Oregon DOT on 9/16/20. After background research and a field survey, BPA determined that the project would have No Adverse Effect to historic and cultural resources. Concurrence was received from DAHP on 9/17/20, Nez Perce on 9/24/20, Warm Springs on 10/16/20, and no responses were received from the remaining parties.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have minimal ground disturbance, limited to the use of existing graveled staging areas. Erosion control BMPs and site stabilization methods would be used during and after project completion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vegetation consists of maintained lawns and dispersed trees within a public park, and mixed wild grasses and shrubs. No ground disturbance would occur in these vegetated areas. No Federal or state listed species, or their habitat occur within the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would take place within publically occupied places including a park and graveled storage yards. A portion of the project would be located on a clifftop being used for agriculture and grazing. Wildlife disturbance would largely be limited to temporary, intermittent disturbance due to elevated levels of noise and human presence. No Federal or state species, or their habitat occur within the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The conductor being replaced from the upper deck of the dam to tower 1/1 is above the Columbia River. An existing river barge owned by USACE located upstream of the dam would be used to stage stringing equipment. No work would occur within waters of the Columbia River.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are within the project area.

#### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have minimal ground disturbance and would not affect ground water or aquifers.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project would result in the temporary disruption of land uses underneath the conductors, particularly when the conductors are being strung, including tribal fishing along the riverbank and public access to portions of Giles French Park. Traffic on I-84 would also be intermittently disrupted with periods of rolling slowdowns that allow for safely stopping traffic. Traffic would be slowed/stopped up to 8 hours per day for up to 4 days per month over the project duration of about 4 months. Due to federal DOT rail requirements, work would be timed around rail traffic to avoid disruption.

To safely complete the project, access to several fishing platforms managed by four tribes would need to be temporarily restricted during active replacement of the overhead conductor. BPA has worked with each of these tribes to identify various measures to minimize the effects to tribal fishing associated with the work.

Notes:

- Continue to coordinate with affected Tribes to sequence work to reduce and minimize disruption to fishing platform use as practicable, including minimization of disruption to fishing during peak run times.

- Install gate in construction exclusion fencing to allow for public access to the work area when it is safe to allow access. Work with tribal fisheries to facilitate access to the fishing platforms, as needed and practicable, when the areas are safe to access.
- In coordination with Tribal Governments, provide compensation to identified tribal platform users to account for lost fishing opportunities.
- Communicate in advance with tribal fishers, based on communication procedures developed in coordination with tribal fishery managers, on scheduled access restrictions through a variety of means which may include social media, email, signage, and onsite personnel.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The existing conductor would be replaced with new conductor that would have a similar profile and appearance. The new towers on the dam would also be of similar size and appearance to those existing. There would be temporary visual effects from the placement of guard structures, fencing, equipment staging, and helicopter traffic, if used. The area would be restored to pre-existing conditions at project completion.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project may generate minimal amounts of dust during construction which would be mitigated with appropriate dust control methods.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some noise would be generated from the staging of construction vehicles, and potentially from helicopter use. However, once equipment is in place, the pulling of conductor would not generate substantial noise. Helicopter traffic, if used, would generate elevated noise, however public exposure would be somewhat limited by restricting access during those times.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The construction contractor would develop a Site Specific Safety Plan to address risks to worker health and safety and mitigate those risks. This would include safe methods for using human external cargo, working on barges, and pulling conductor over public spaces.

Notes:

- Erect temporary fencing to limit public access, including tribal fishers, to the work area during construction periods when it would be unsafe to be under the conductors.
- In coordination with tribal fishery managers and CRITFC, develop a fisher safety and communication plan to notify users prior to and during construction restriction periods.

### **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: BPA has coordinated with the USACE, Oregon DOT, BNSF, and private landowners on the project. BPA has also coordinated with the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) and each of the four tribal governments regarding temporary access restrictions to several fishing platforms located within the project area. BPA would continue to work with tribal fishers and the USACE to notify them of construction scheduling and to conduct work activities at times that would minimize user disturbance as practicable.

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

Signed: /s/ Aaron Shurtliff  
Aaron Shurtliff, EP-AMPN-2  
Environmental Engineer

Date: January 5, 2021