Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Conkelley Substation Decomissioning and Associated Work

Project No.: P02326

Project Manager: Sarah Sprague – TEPS-TPP-1

Location: Flathead County, MT

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.10 Removal of electric transmission facilities, B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities, B4.13 Upgrading and rebuilding existing powerlines.

Description of the Proposed Action: The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to decommission its Conkelley Substation and associated structures and facilities in Flathead County, Montana. Conkelley Substation was constructed to provide power to the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company, which ceased aluminum production in 2009. In order to decommission Conkelley Substation, several modifications would need to be made to BPA's system in order to maintain system reliability.

Work would take place at BPA's Conkelley and Columbia Falls Substation sites and along the Columbia Falls-Conkelley transmission line corridor. Work would also take place at BPA's Flathead substation.

In order to decommission Conkelley Substation, several modifications would need to be made to BPA's system in order to maintain system reliability.

- Work at Conkelley Substation would include removal and retirement of equipment including transformers, reactors, oil circuit breakers and current transformers (CTs), as well as demolition of the control house and a maintenance building. The existing transmission line and fiber line would be re-routed by installing two new towers on existing BPA right-of-way (ROW). Equipment, materials and soils containing hazardous materials would be properly disposed of to ensure no releases of hazardous materials occurs. Soils on the site would be tested for hazardous materials and if any are found they would be removed and properly disposed of. Once all hazardous materials are removed and the site is found to be clean, the about 13-acre area would be graded flat and revegetated with a grass seed mix appropriate to the area.
- Work on the Columbia Falls-Conkelley transmission line would include the removal of one mile of conductor from Conkelley Substation to the tap point at 2/1 and retiring in place the 6 existing structures. Three disconnect switches and associated structures would be added at the tap point (structure 9/1) for the Hungry Horse-Flathead No. 2 transmission line.

- Communication equipment would be updated at Columbia Falls Substation and Hungry Horse Powerhouse. No building modifications would be made to the substation or powerhouse for the updated communication equipment.
- Work at Flathead Substation would include the addition of a substation battery, addition of three bays and all equipment associated, replacement of an existing oil tank, addition of communication equipment, addition of electronic equipment including arrestors and risers, installation of two new towers, and removal of an existing tower. The work would require the acquisition and development of approximately two acres of adjacent land for substation expansion.

All proposed work would occur within or immediately adjacent to existing high voltage, electrical transmission facilities or transmission line ROWs.

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/ Douglas Corkran
Douglas Corkran
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange *June 9, 2021*
Katey C. Grange Date
NEPA Compliance Officer

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: Conkelley Substation Decomissioning and Associated Work

Project Site Description

The Conkelley substation sites and Columbia Falls-Conkelley line are on level ground on old floodplain terraces near the Flathead River just west of where it exits the Swan Mountains at an elevation of approximately 3000 feet asl. Land use in this area is a mix of industrial and agrigultural/forest lands. The Flathead substation is located just North of Kalispell on flat agricultural ground between the Stillwater and Whitefish Rivers.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA archeologists consulted with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho on the proposed project. BPA determined that the project would have an adverse effect on historic properties: BPA's Conkelley Substation and the Hungry Horse-Conkelley No. 1 and Columbia Falls-Conkelley No. 1 transmission lines. BPA and the MT SHPO entered into a Memorandum of Agreement on March 27, 2021 which stipulates, among other procedural tasks, that the historic globe lights at the entrance of the control house would be salvaged prior to demolition and installed elsewhere at a similar existing substation.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbance associated with the proposed project would be limited to existing disturbed substation sites and disconnect switch site in the existing right-of-way. The potential for soils to migrate off site is low, and all disturbed areas would be graded and reseeded following construction. Impacts to soils and geology would be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The only ESA-listed plant species near the project area are the Spalding's catchfly and the whitebark pine. The Spalding's catchfly is not documented near the project area, nor does the project area contain suitable bunchgrass habitat for the species. The whitebark pine is generally only found in subalpine habitats at higher elevations than the project area, and only two trees, both Douglas firs, would be removed as part of the proposed project. Overall very little vegetation would be removed as part of the proposed project and the formerly unvegetated areas at Conkelley Substation would be revegetated. Impacts to plants would be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No With Conditions

Explanation: BPA consulted with USFWS for Canada lynx, grizzly bear, and yellow-billed cuckoo, and USFWS concurred with BPA's determination of not likely to adversely affect on May 10, 2021. Historic bald eagle nest sites are located along the Flathead River near the Conkelley Substation. If eagles were to nest in those areas, minimization measures, such as construction timing, would reduce the impacts to any nesting eagles. Common wildlife species may be temporarily disturbed by construction activities; however, the potential for long-term impacts is low.

Note:

- The contractor and BPA would follow the consultation measures identified during the ESA consultation. Measures would includefood storage requirements and camping restrictions within portions of the project area.
- Federal bald eagle management guidelines would be followed near any active nest sites identifed during preconstruction surveys..

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Most of the proposed project is located in upland areas away from streams, rivers, and lakes There is one area where the project intersects the Flathead River. Work in this area would take place in upland areas approximately 800 feet away from the river. No impacts to water bodies, floodplains, and fish are expected.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is located in upland areas away from wetlands. Ground-disturbing work would take place within existing fenced substation areas and in a small gravelly upland area along the ROW.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground-disturbing work would take place at existing substations and in a small upland area along the ROW, and would not affect groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The removal of the Conkelley Substation and associated equipment would change the current use of the property from industrial electrical installation to vacant land but would not change the category of land use. Substation additions at Flathead substation would not change the overall land use in those areas. The removal of the conductor from the section of the Columbia Falls-Conkelley transmission line would not change the land use, since there is another transmission line within the existing ROW corridor.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Removal of the Conkelley Substation would change the views of the property from industrial electrical utility to vacant land. Additional substation equipment at Flathead Substation would be similar in visual quality to the existing substation equipment and would not substantially change views. Removal of the conductor on the Columbia Falls-Conkelley would only minimally change the views, as some of the existing towers would remain in place and there are other transmission line structures within the same ROW corridor.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some minor fugitive dust emissions are expected during demolition of the Conkelley substation and construction of the Flathead substation expansion. These emissions would be minor and temporary.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During demolition of the Conkelley Substation and construction of the Flathead Substation expansion some noise from construction equipment and tool use would occur. Construction would be limited to normal daytime hours. No long-term increases in noise are anticipated from the project.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The area surrounding the Conkelley Substation site has been designated as a Federal Superfund Site under CERCLA. Removal of the substation equipment and site restoration would meet all requirements for safe removal and disposal of any hazardous materials that may be encountered. During project activity, all standard safety protocols would be followed. A site-specific health and safety plan would be prepared and implemented to address any hazards during the proposed work. 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: 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: The removal of equipment containing PCB's or other hazardous materials would be performed under the supervision of professionals specializing in the management of hazardous waste and would be transported and disposed of using methods approved by the EPA and other appropriate regulatory agencies under CERCLA. Soils and materials in and around oil-filled equipment and other hazardous material use areas would be sampled and if found to be contaminated would be removed and disposed of properly in facilities that are authorized by EPA to accept such materials.

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: Adjacent and underlying landowners near the substations and transmission line ROW have been notified about project activities by the BPA Realty team.

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

Signed: */s/ Douglas Corkran* *June 9, 2021*
Douglas Corkran – ECT-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist