

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Bluebird Solar Generation Interconnection Project

Project No.: G0586

Project Manager: Sarah Sprague - TEPS-TPP-1

Location: Wasco County, Oregon and Klickitat County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.11 Electric Power Substation and Interconnection

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to update the existing Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA), Sequential Events Monitor Master, and protection equipment in the control houses at BPA's Spring Creek and Big Eddy substations. These electronic additions to its existing communication systems would provide the required connectivity needed to interconnect Bluebird Solar Power, LLC's (Bluebird) generation facility.

BPA would also install electronic equipment inside of a yet-to-be constructed Bluebird control house. BPA would install communications and control equipment, including SCADA/generation meters, power quality meters, remote terminal units, data phase measure units, network management system, data combiners, communication batteries, switches, interfaces, alarms, and other electronic appurtenances. BPA would not fund or carry out any ground-disturbing activities or activities associated with the construction of Bluebird's control house.

BPA activities would support the interconnection of Bluebird's solar generation facility into BPA's high-voltage transmission system.

The Federal Columbia River Transmission System Act directs BPA to construct, acquire, operate, maintain, repair, relocate, and replace the transmission system, including facilities and structures appurtenant thereto. (16 United States Code [U.S.C] § 838i(b)). The Administrator is further charged with maintaining electrical stability and reliability, selling transmission and interconnection services, and providing service to BPA's customers. (16 U.S.C § 838b(b-d)). The Administrator is also authorized to conduct electrical research, development, experimentation, tests, and investigation related to construction, operation, and maintenance of transmission systems and facilities. (16 U.S.C § 838i(b)(3)).

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.¹

Laura Roberts
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

¹ BPA is aware of the November 12, 2024, decision in *Marin Audubon Society v. Federal Aviation Administration*, No. 23-1067 (D.C. Cir. Nov. 12, 2024). To the extent that a court may conclude that the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA are not judicially enforceable or binding on this agency action, BPA has nonetheless elected to follow those regulations at 40 Code Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) §§ 1500– 1508, in addition to the US Department of Energy’s NEPA implementing procedures at 10 C.F.R. Part § 1021, to meet the agency’s obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

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: Bluebird Solar Generation Interconnection Project

Project Site Description

The Bluebird Solar Generation Interconnection Project would occur at BPA's Spring Creek substation (Klickitat County, Washington) and Big Eddy substation (Wasco County, Oregon) control houses and the yet-to-be constructed Bluebird control house located in unincorporated Klickitat County about seven miles south of Bickleton, Washington.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BPA archaeologist and historian reviewed the proposed action and determined, per 36 CFR 800.3(a)(1), that the undertaking is a type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties, assuming such historic properties were present. BPA made a No Potential to Cause Effect determination on January 30, 2025.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ground disturbing activities in the proposed action. Therefore, geology and soils would not be impacted due to the implementation of the proposed action.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur inside of control houses. Therefore, plants would not be impacted due to the implementation of the proposed action.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur inside of control houses. Therefore, wildlife and habitats would not be impacted due to the implementation of the proposed action.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur inside of control houses. Therefore, water bodies, floodplains, and fish would not be impacted due to the implementation of the proposed action.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur inside of control houses. Therefore, wetlands would not be impacted due to the implementation of the proposed action.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur inside of control houses. Therefore, groundwater and aquifers would not be impacted due to implementation of the proposed action.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur inside of control houses. There would be no change to land use or specially-designated areas resulting from the proposed action.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur inside of control houses. Therefore, the visual quality of the area would not be impacted due to the implementation of the proposed action.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of vehicle emissions would occur during project implementation. However, there would be no substantial changes to air quality during or after the implementation of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project implementation may create low-level, temporary noise inside the control houses. However, the noise would be intermittent, would only occur during daylight hours, and would likely only last for one to two days per control house. Operating noise would not increase due to equipment installation. Therefore, the noise impacts to the surrounding areas would be negligible.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project implementation, all standard safety protocols would be followed. Therefore, implementation of the proposed action 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: 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 is coordinating with Bluebird to access their facility. All other actions would occur within BPA facilities and no other landowner coordination is necessary.

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

Signed:

Laura Roberts
Environmental Protection Specialist