

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Pratt Creek Ranch Conservation Easement Property Acquisition Funding

Fish and Wildlife Project No. and Contract No. : 2010-088-00; 008792

Project Manager: Hannah Dondy-Kaplan

Location: Lemhi County, ID

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.25 Real property transfers for cultural resources protection, habitat preservation, and wildlife management

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA is proposing to fund The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to purchase the Pratt Creek Ranch Conservation Easement, which is a 2,316-acre parcel of land located approximately 10 miles southeast of Salmon, Idaho in Lemhi County. The property includes an approximately 2.1-mile segment of Pratt Creek and an approximately 0.7-mile segment of Wimpey Creek, which are two Lemhi River tributaries. The majority of Pratt Creek Ranch has been converted to agricultural land, either irrigated hayfields or pasture meadows. Hayfields are dominated by a mix of introduced pasture grass species and alfalfa. Pasture meadows also tend to be dominated by introduced pasture grass species. Pratt and Wimpey creeks and irrigation ditch courses support strips of woody riparian vegetation. Further, the property consists of habitat for all life stages of Snake River spring/summer-run Chinook salmon and Snake River Basin steelhead trout. Sagebrush-steppe vegetation occupies upland slopes associated with the property. The easement would provide long-lasting fish and wildlife benefits by preventing the conversion of fish and wildlife habitat to other land uses and maintain flows in Pratt and Wimpey creeks. When the purchase of the easement is complete, the landowner would retain ownership of the property. The Nature Conservancy would hold the easement and BPA would have third party rights to enforce the terms of the easement.

Funding the purchase of the easement would serve as partial mitigation for the construction and operation of the Federal Columbia River Basin dams from which BPA markets power. TNC would provide long-term stewardship of the land and develop a management plan to guide the protection and enhancement of habitat and other resources on the property. The management plan would be reviewed by BPA for consistency with the agreement and purpose of the easement. If BPA proposes to fund any management activities on the property, additional environmental review would be conducted.

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, July 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 A 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/ Gregory M. Smith
Gregory M. Smith
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel
Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: August 10, 2016

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.

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Project Site Description

The conservation easement is 2,316 acres in size and is located approximately 10 miles from the town of Salmon in Lemhi County, Idaho. The property includes an approximately 2.1-mile segment of Pratt Creek and an approximately 0.7-mile segment of Wimpey Creek, which are two Lemhi River tributaries. The majority of Pratt Creek Ranch has been converted to agricultural land, either irrigated hayfields or pasture meadows. Hayfields are dominated by a mix of introduced pasture grass species and alfalfa. Pasture meadows also tend to be dominated by introduced pasture grass species. Pratt and Wimpey creeks and irrigation ditch courses support strips of woody riparian vegetation. Sagebrush-steppe vegetation occupies upland slopes associated with the property. The four major habitat types in the easement area are riparian/wetland complex, riverine, upland sagebrush steppe, and agricultural pasture. The conservation easement would protect conversion of existing habitat to other uses, improve some existing habitat areas, and maintain flows in Wimpey and Pratt creeks.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> There would be no effect due to the land acquisition and creation of a conservation easement. To the extent that stewardship activities may have an effect, it is expected that The Nature Conservancy would comply with all applicable laws and regulations.		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> See explanation for #1 above.		
3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> See explanation for #1 above.		
4. Wildlife (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> See explanation for #1 above.		
5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including federal/state special-status species and ESUs)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> See explanation for #1 above.		

6. **Wetlands**

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

9. **Visual Quality**

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

10. **Air Quality**

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

11. **Noise**

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

12. **Human Health and Safety**

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Adjacent landowners would be notified by mail of this conservation easement purchase.

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

Signed: /s/ Gregory M. Smith
Gregory M. Smith, ECF-4

Date: August 10, 2016