Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Operations and Maintenance at Albeni Falls Wildlife Areas Commencing in Summer 2021

Project No.: 1992-061-02

Project Manager: Lee Watts, EWM-4

Location: Pend Oreille County, WA; Bonner County, ID

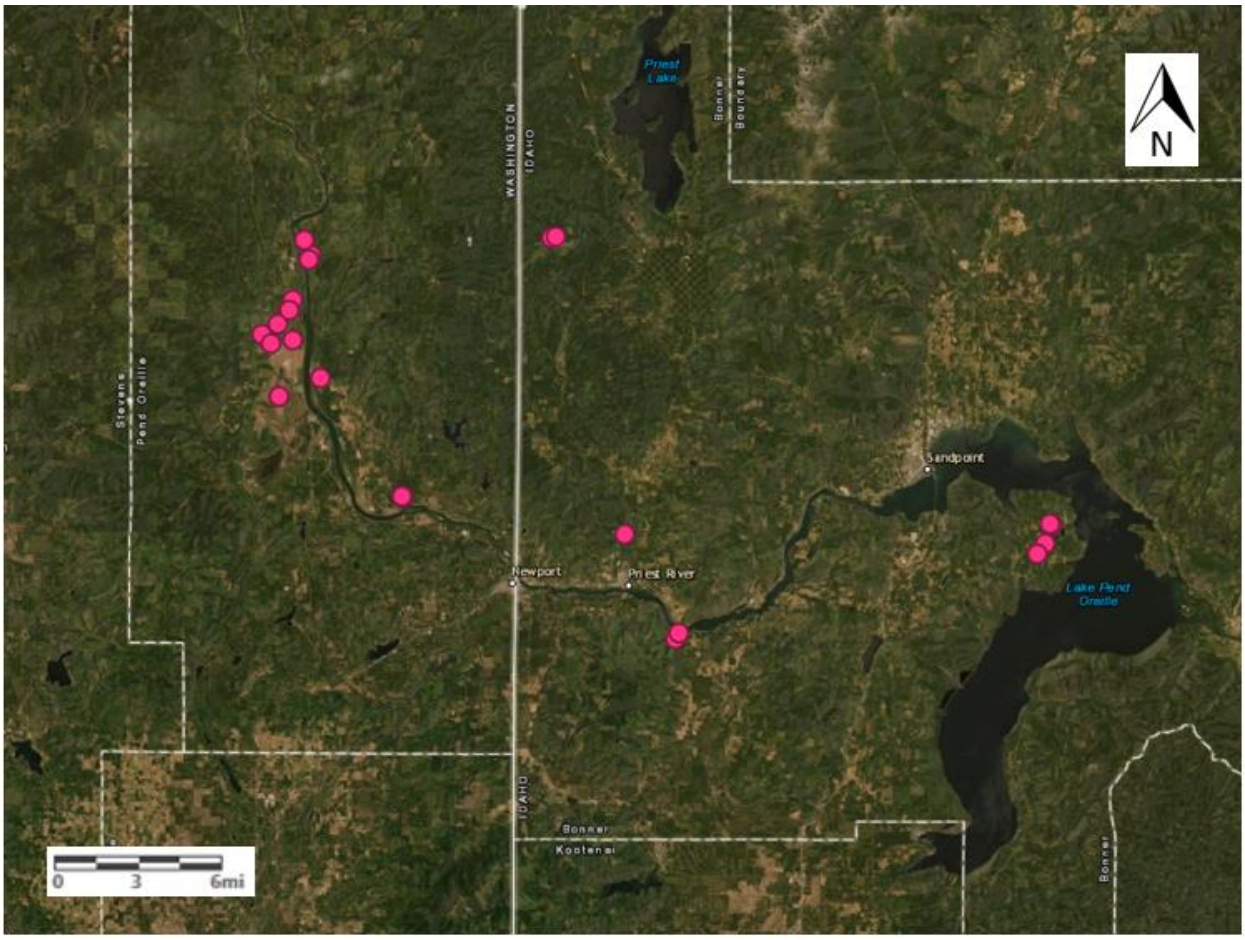
Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance; B1.20 Protection of Fish and Wildlife

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund operations and maintenance (O&M) on lands owned and managed by the Kalispel Tribe in Washington and Idaho (Figure 1) to address the negative impacts to wildlife species and habitats affected by the construction and operation of Albeni Falls Dam. The Kalispel Tribe manages wildlife on 3,510 acres in Washington and 1,724 acres in Idaho for a total of 5,234 acres. BPA funding would be provided under the Albeni Falls Wildlife Mitigation Program to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) on fish and wildlife in the mainstem Columbia River and its tributaries pursuant to Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act) (16 U.S.C. (USC) 839 et seq.).

Project implementation would occur at the following management areas:

Washington	Idaho
Tacoma Creek	Carey Creek
Trimble Creek (includes Doramus and Scheibel)	Big Meadows
Cusick Meadows	Gamlin Lake
Flying Goose (includes Dillings)	Beaver Lake
Indian Creek	Eaton Lake
	Betzler Property

Figure 1. Distribution of Project Sites across Washington and Idaho



Gravel Sorting

Eight thousand cubic yards of rock, gravel, and dirt at the Indian Creek property would be sorted for use in future stream stabilization projects, road resurfacing, and soil for Indian Creek Field Nursery. Rock and stone would be used in shoreline stabilization projects. Stony materials would be placed on top of filter fabric on existing access roads before topping with gravel to support equipment to reach sites and maintain usable roadways. Sandy loam would be used at Indian Creek Nursery as potting soil. Sorted piles would be used on project sites until depleted, after which the area would be re-seeded and/or planted with native vegetation.

Fence Maintenance

All perimeter fences at management areas would be monitored and maintained. Work would include tightening wires, replacing old wires with new ones, removing fallen trees, and adding property ownership signs where needed. Perimeter fencing in Washington is approximately 60 miles in length; perimeter fencing in Idaho is approximately 33 miles in length.

Vegetation Maintenance

Vegetation would be monitored, planted, maintained, or removed using physical, mechanical, biological, or chemical means. See below for details.

Plant Vegetation

- Tacoma Creek
- Trimble Creek
- Cusick Meadows
- Flying Goose
- Indian Creek

Native floodplain tree and shrub species would be planted on approximately 10 acres per year in an effort to restore natural vegetation conditions in newly restored areas and former agricultural fields. In former restoration areas, a mix of native plants, trees, and shrubs would be planted to sustain those communities. Cottonwoods (*Populus sect. Aigeiros*) would be planted along the banks of the Pend Oreille River to create future nesting areas for bald eagles, osprey, and other species. Planting would be carried out using planting shovels and a CAT loader with an auger bit. The depth of ground disturbance would be approximately 0.5 to 2 feet, depending on the size of the plant. Plant species would be obtained from Indian Creek Field Nursery.

Noxious Weed Control

- Big Meadows
- Beaver Lake
- Eaton Lake
- Gamlin Lake
- Carey Creek
- Indian Creek
- Flying Goose
- Tacoma Creek
- Trimble Creek
- Cusick Meadows
- Scheibel

Mechanical control (mowing) would be performed in riparian and upland areas. Herbicide application via hand spraying, tank-mounted boomless truck, or vehicle sprayer would be performed in riparian and upland areas. The acreage treated could vary depending on weather and site conditions, but chemical applications would occur on at least 700 acres of wildlife mitigation lands.

Mechanical hawthorn (*Crataegus*) removal via chainsaw cutting close to ground level would be implemented at Flying Goose, Tacoma Creek, and Trimble Creek at a rate of approximately three to five acres per year to promote reestablishment of native vegetation and reduce non-native vegetation encroachment.

Burning Grasslands and Slash Piles

- Big Meadows
- Carey Creek
- Flying Goose
- Tacoma Creek
- Trimble Creek
- Cusick Meadows

Controlled burns would be performed to reduce weed density and stimulate native vegetative cover growth in areas that were used for agriculture and grazing. The Kalispel Tribe has over 2,000 acres of acquired grasslands. Mowed lines, wet lines, water bodies, and/or hard roads would be used as burn barriers. Up to 700 acres per year would be treated. Burning would occur on up to 20 percent of the

Big Meadows and/or Carey Creek properties over the next 5 years. Spring or fall slash pile burns would be performed on about 10 piles per year on the Tacoma and Flying Goose properties.

Maintain Planted Vegetation

- Tacoma Creek
- Doramus
- Trimble Creek
- Flying Goose
- Dillings
- Cusick Meadows
- Carey Creek
- Big Meadows

Planted vegetation would be monitored for survival and replanted by hand as necessary to provide structure, cover, and diversity. Planting would occur between 2 and 6 inches below the ground surface, depending on species and soil, and would occur in previously planted areas. Trees, shrubs, and native vegetation would be hand planted along shorelines and wetland sites to increase habitat diversity.

Road Maintenance

Routine maintenance would be performed on the existing road system and would consist of gravel resurfacing within the existing road footprint. Resurfacing would involve placing filter fabric on the road and covering it with a gravel layer approximately 4 to 6 inches thick.

Inspection and Maintenance of Water Control Structures

Routine inspection and maintenance would be performed on 10 existing water control structures located in the Tacoma Creek, Trimble Creek, Scheibel, Cusick Meadows, and Flying Goose management areas. This would include cleaning, adding or removing stop logs, cleaning culvert flanges, and lubricating water control valves in order to maintain water level management within established wetland mitigation properties.

Building Maintenance

Ongoing maintenance would be performed on facility buildings used for storage and fabrication for project tools and equipment at Tacoma Creek, Indian Creek, and Big Meadows. This would include debris removal and in-kind fence repair.

Kiosk and Parking Lot Maintenance

Existing parking areas and kiosks would be maintained at Tacoma Creek, Carey Creek, Doramus, Flying Goose, Big Meadows, and Beaver Lake. Parking lots are 2,500 square feet in area and consist of filter fabric ground cover topped with 4 to 6 inches of packed gravel. Kiosks are made up of 4x4 foot plywood boards attached to two posts covered with a protective roof, and are located near access gates.

Field Nursery Maintenance

The Indian Creek Field Nursery produces plant materials used on restoration sites. Ongoing maintenance would involve potting plants with native soil mix and growing these plants in developed beds for several years to reach the size and structure necessary to survive on restored sites, as well as maintaining the water delivery system and its components. The nursery consists of 20 acres with a

developed water system that operates during the field season. Plants are bedded over winter and remain dormant until spring. All work would occur in areas that have been previously disturbed.

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/ Mandy Hope
Mandy Hope
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel
Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange *June 8, 2021*
Katey 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.

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Project Site Description

The project area is primarily at floodplain elevation, approximately 2,040 feet. The area is largely within the Upper Pend Oreille watershed and consists of agricultural lands, broad floodplains, and a small component of overly dense tree stands near Sandpoint, Idaho. The Pend Oreille River runs through the majority of the project area. Descriptions of the individual wildlife mitigation sites are as follows:

Tacoma Creek/Trimble Creek/Cusick Meadows/Flying Goose (WA)

The Calispell-Cusick Valley, located approximately 20 miles north-northeast from Chewelah, WA and 10.5 miles west of the WA/ID border, includes Tacoma Creek, Trimble Creek, Cusick Meadows, and Flying Goose management areas. The Pend Oreille River flows north to south through the area. The valley's hydrology and habitats have been altered substantially in the last century. Multiple dams, a system of levees, dikes, drainage ditches, and railroad levees have resulted in altered or degraded wetlands and substantial loss of riparian and native meadow vegetation.

Indian Creek (WA)

The Indian Creek property is located approximately 7.5 miles south-southeast of Usk in Pend Oreille County, WA, at an elevation of 2,000 to 3,400 feet. Native vegetation primarily consists of conifers, shrubs, forbs, and grasses. The property is mostly mixed, lightly harvested coniferous forest. The only open areas are in irrigated hay fields with the exception of the western 30-acre opening, which is being actively reforested and consists of forest and upland meadow. Indian Creek and the associated riparian zone bisect the property flowing north to south, where it empties into the Pend Oreille River. The property includes two large islands accessible by boat only. The shoreline and creek provide for waterfowl and furbearing animals such as muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*), beaver (*Castor*), skunk (*Mephitidae*), weasel (*Mustela*), mink (*Neovison vison*), and otter (*Lutrinae*). Moose (*Alces alces*), elk (*Cervus canadensis*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), white-tailed deer (*O. virginianus*), and black bear (*Ursus americanus*) are all native to the area and utilize forested areas. Upland areas of hardwoods contain ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) as well as numerous species of resident and neo-tropical migrant birds. Raptors that nest within the project area include bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), marsh hawks (*Circus cyaneus*), and owls (*Strigiformes*). Amphibians and reptiles are also present in the area.

Carey Creek (ID)

Located approximately four miles southeast of Priest River, ID on the southern bank of the Pend Oreille River, the 117-acre Carey Creek property contains approximately 16 acres of forest, both conifer and hardwood. The remaining area consists of cleared former agricultural lands and freshwater emergent wetland associated with the riparian area along the banks of the river. The terrain is flat with a very slight north aspect. Elevation ranges from just under 2,100 to around 2,200 feet. The western third of the coniferous area is steep with incised draws. Vegetation varies; the dominant habitat types are western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*)/bead lily (*Clintonia borealis*), western hemlock/ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), grand fir (*Abies grandis*)/twinflower (*Linnaea borealis*), and grand fir/bead lily. Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*), western hemlock, ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), lodgepole pine (*P. contorta*), Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and grand fir are the dominant tree species.

Big Meadows (ID)

Located approximately 7 miles south-southwest of Coolin, ID and less than 2 miles east of the WA/ID border, the 788-acre Big Meadows property primarily consists of wet meadow (approximately 590 acres), as well as deciduous forest, conifer forest, scrub-shrub wetland, grassland, and open water. The onset of development for pasture and agricultural land drained seasonal wetlands and removed shrub and tree vegetation. Dikes and drainage ditches now control the hydrology of this portion of the floodplain. The remaining habitat available to wildlife is open pasturelands, which is the dominant landscape feature; pockets of deciduous and coniferous forest; and scattered shrubs. An agricultural lease at the property allows livestock grazing on up to 80 acres of grassed bottomlands per year through 2026.

Gamlin Lake (ID)

The 156-acre Gamlin Lake property is located approximately seven miles southeast of Sandpoint, ID, one mile west of Lake Pend Oreille, and immediately west of Gamlin Lake. The habitat is composed of about 91 acres of forest located on the southern two-thirds of the property and about 60 acres of grass pasture or lakeside wetlands. A creek runs easterly into Gamlin Lake. There is water present and flowing in this creek year-round. The property is surrounded by pastoral settings of small individual landowners. Three old skid roads are located in the forested area.

Beaver Lake/Eaton Lake/Betzler Property (ID)

The project area (combined parcels totaling 520 acres) is situated on the western flank of the Glacial Lake Missoula Floodplain and on the eastern edge of the greater part of the Selkirk Range. It is dominated by silt loam soils. Coniferous species include Douglas-fir, grand fir, lodgepole pine, ponderosa pine, western red cedar, western larch (*Larix occidentalis*), and western white pine (*P. monticola*). On the western third of the Betzler project area, beginning at the wetland margins and continuing upslope to the east, the predominant vegetation community is cattail (*Typha*) and other hydrophilic species. The wildlife resources in the area include a number of game animals: mule deer, white-tailed deer, mountain goat (*Oreamnos americanus*), bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*), woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*), elk, moose, black bear, grizzly bear (*U. arctos horribilis*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), lynx (*L. canadensis*), cougar (*Puma concolor*), and wolf (*Canis lupus*).

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Consultation was completed for maintenance of existing water control structures, maintenance of buildings and roads, and vegetation maintenance under Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) Log No. 071315-10-BPA, WA DAHP Log No. 2020-07-04565-BPA, Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Rev. No. 2014-1145, and ID SHPO Rev. No. 2020-765. Both offices concurred with BPA's determination of No Effect. The remaining activities would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground-disturbing activities would be limited to vegetation removal, seeding, planting, and road maintenance, resulting in minimal soil impacts.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species are present in the project area. The proposed action could result in potential short-term negative impacts to native plant species during proposed invasive species control. Long-term positive impacts to native plant species are expected following invasive species control and planting. Maintenance activities would not result in vegetation disturbance and would have no effect on plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed wildlife species in Bonner and Pend Oreille Counties include Canada lynx, grizzly bear, and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). No ESA-designated special-status species or habitat are present where project implementation would occur; therefore, there would be no effect on listed species or critical habitat. The common loon (*Gavia immer*), a sensitive species identified by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, is a transient visitor to the WA management areas. Bald eagles have nesting sites on management areas in both Washington and Idaho. Any impacts to non-listed wildlife species would be limited to the immediate area where there would be a temporary, small decrease in available habitat during activities and temporary elevated noise disturbance. Activities are anticipated to have a net improvement in wildlife habitat in the area in the long term.

Notes:

- The Kalispel Tribe would adhere to the guidelines of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act during O&M activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No anadromous fish species are present in any of the project areas. Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and its critical habitat are present in the Pend Oreille River and its tributaries. All O&M activities would occur on land and would not have the potential to affect fish species, with the exception of herbicide application. Impacts to aquatic species from herbicide use in riparian areas would be short-term and have been considered in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) consultation (please see Notes).

Notes:

- The Kalispel Tribe would adhere to all activity-specific conservation measures identified in BPA's HIP consultation and approval for herbicide application in river systems. This would include using only approved herbicides at application rates not to exceed the parameters specified in the HIP consultation and following herbicide mixing specifications and application methods.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Intermittent Freshwater Emergent and Freshwater Forested/Shrub wetlands are present along the Pend Oreille River and tributaries. Removal, fill, or disturbance of native vegetation within wetland areas is not anticipated through ongoing O&M activities.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater proposed. The Kalispel Tribe would follow best management practices for spill prevention.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change as a result of this project because the lands are currently managed for wildlife habitat purposes.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no adverse effects to the visual quality of the environment as a result of this project because actions would maintain current management facilities or return vegetation and habitat to more natural conditions.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of emissions associated with increased vehicular traffic, as well as carbon dioxide released during controlled burns, would occur during project activities. There would be no significant changes to air quality as a result of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The noise generated by project implementation would not substantially impact the surrounding environment.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety. All applicable safety regulations would be followed during controlled burns.

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: Areas where project implementation would occur are owned and managed by the Kalispel Tribe.

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

Signed: */s/ Mandy Hope* *June 8, 2021*
Mandy Hope, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing