

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Lemhi Reference Reach Project, Phase 1

**Project No.:** 2010-072-00

**Project Manager:** Tim Ludington, EWM-4

**Location:** Lemhi, Idaho

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.20 Protection of Cultural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Habitat

**Description of the Proposed Action:** BPA proposes to fund the Lemhi Soil and Water Conservation District to rehabilitate/improve the morphological and habitat function in the lower Lemhi Reference Reach. The Lemhi Reference Reach Project, Phase 1, is the first phase in a multiple-phased approach that would focus on the downstream portion of the project, prescribing habitat treatment primarily on 850 feet of the left riverbank. The project would provide channel complexity while establishing a floodplain limit, and redirecting a major amount of flow through high quality riparian habitat upstream on river right in a former channel of the Lemhi River. Phase II, upstream of the project, would expand on Phase 1 efforts in future years to further establish a functional floodplain throughout the Reference Reach.

The Lemhi Reference Reach Project, Phase 1, would install ten large wood structures using approximately 44 logs with rootwads, 21 logs without rootwads, and 3 whole trees (logs with rootwads and branches). To accomplish this work “in the dry”, a temporary coffer dam would be constructed upstream to divert the Lemhi river into a former channel that would ultimately be reactivated as an end result of this project. The work would require some excavation and fill at each structure location, totaling about ½ acre. Approximately 900 feet of fence would be constructed.

The work would be conducted late in the fall of 2021, during the in-water work window of September 6 through March 11. Topsoil would be salvaged from areas to be excavated and used for restoration of excavated sites. The finished site would be planted with willow cuttings and seeded with native riparian herbaceous plant seed and grasses.

Temporary access would originate at Miller Lane, off Highway 28 and utilize the landowner’s pasture to get to the project site. A second access site on the east side of the river would be established from the Old Lemhi Road. The proposed temporary staging and stockpile areas at these locations would occur a minimum of 150 feet from the nearest waterway.

This proposed action would fulfill commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion and would support conservation of Endangered Species Act-listed species considered in the 2020 Endangered Species Act consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System.

The proposed action would also support ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the FCRPS on fish and wildlife in the mainstem Columbia River and its tributaries pursuant to the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act) (16 U.S.C. (USC) 839 et seq.).

**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/ Robert W. Shull

Robert W. Shull  
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist  
CorSource Technology Group

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel  
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Katey C. Grange</u>	<u>September 7, 2021</u>
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:** Lemhi Reference Reach Project

## **Project Site Description**

The project site is within and along the Lemhi River in a section characterized as having minimal riparian vegetation on the left bank (being mostly pasture grasses). Set back from the right bank runs a former river channel, now a linear riparian wetland bounded by sand and gravel bars where young cottonwoods and willows are beginning to establish since hydraulic disturbance in this area is decreasing. Beyond that former channel, to the north, lies a mature riparian forest of willow, cottonwood, and alder bounding yet another former river channel. Nearly all of the work would take place along the left bank in a livestock pasture, with only small patches of riparian forest at both up and downstream ends.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation would be required for this project so there would be potential to affect cultural resources. A survey was conducted and consultation was completed with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Nez Perce Tribe. Only one cultural resource was identified, an irrigation ditch, but it was found ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places. SHPO concurred with BPA on July 1, 2021 that the undertaking would result in no effect to historic properties. There was no response from the Nez Perce Tribe.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation would be required for this project so there would be potential to affect geology and soils. The extent of excavation, however, would be limited to about 1/2 acre. Topsoil would be salvaged for restoration, and the completed project site would be covered in that topsoil and replanted to willows and native herbaceous plants. Erosion protection and spill protection measures for equipment fluids would be in place. The impacts to soils and geology would be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no special-status plant species or habitats in the project area. Ground disturbance and thereby, plant disturbance, would be less than 1/2 acre, and replanted to

willows and native herbaceous plants when finished. Most of the project (about 80%) would be in a pasture, with only small spots of riparian or wetland habitats impacted at both upstream and downstream ends of the project area (about 0.15 acre total). Other disturbed sites would be on gravel bars, where willows and cottonwoods might be impacted (about 1,400 square feet). The amount of native riparian habitats impacted would be very low (about 0.17 acre), but the entire project area (approximately ½ acre) would be planted with willows and herbaceous riparian plants upon completion. The degree of short-term impact would be low, but the completed project would improve riparian vegetative conditions for the long term. Effects on plants would be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no special-status wildlife species or habitats in the project area. The footprint of the project provides minimal habitat value for wildlife, since it is primarily a pasture with only shrubs and trees at both upstream and downstream ends of the project. Some small wildlife individuals may be harmed or killed in the heavy equipment operations, but larger, more mobile species would simply be displaced during the construction period. In the long term, habitat values on the left bank would be changed from open meadow type to riparian shrub or forest, with capability to support more wildlife than at present. Effects on wildlife would be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Snake River spring Chinook, Snake River steelhead, and bull trout are present in the Lemhi River and thus in the project area. Fish habitat, however, is poor in the construction area, being a denuded, vertical, bank, with no instream habitat structures and relatively high flow velocity. Following construction, the area would be far more capable of supporting fish, as the erosive force of the river at this point would be diminished, woody habitat features would be present in abundance, and additional habitat in the reactivated channel would be made available. ESA consultation was completed on 9/2/21 using BPA's Habitat Improvement Program programmatic consultation.

Construction would occur "in the dry" so there would be no direct impacts to fish from heavy equipment use. Fish would be impacted by the river being bypassed into a former channel, and then "herded" downstream out of the construction area or salvaged from the section of river being dewatered. Fish salvage can involve electrofishing shock and handling, so individual fish may be harmed or killed, but nearly all would escape this impact by being effectively herded downstream. Effects to fish, fish habitat, waterbodies, and floodplains would be moderate.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Approximately 7,200 square feet (0.16 acre) of existing riparian wetlands would be directly impacted by construction activities in the process of creating, restoring, or enhancing the impacted acres plus an additional estimated 10,000 more square feet in and along the reactivated river channel. The actions have been reviewed and authorized by the Army Corps of Engineers in their issuance of a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit. The impacts to wetlands would be low.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project proposes no surface or ground water withdrawals. There would be no effect.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no effect on land uses since no change to land uses are proposed and the completed project would require no change in land use practices.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would add wood structures and increased willows and other native riparian plants to the existing riparian and pasture visual features, but the character of the scenery as pasture and riparian would not be changed. The effects on visual quality would be low.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Driving of motor vehicles and operation of construction equipment would produce emissions, but the amount would be minimal and short-term, and consistent with that produced by local grazing and agricultural activities. The effects on air quality would be low.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Noise sources would be from trucks and operation of construction equipment. Noise would be consistent with that produced by local grazing and agricultural activities and would be short-term. These impacts would occur during daylight hours during the summer months. The environmental effects of noise would be low.

## **12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicle operation and working with hand and power tools have their attendant risk to users, but there would be no condition created from these actions that would introduce new human health or safety hazards or risk into the environment. No condition created by these actions would increase the burden on the local health, safety, and emergency-response infrastructure. Neither project actions nor operation of project-associated vehicles on public roads would hinder traffic or access by emergency vehicles.

### **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**

The project is located on private lands and has been designed in cooperation with the private land owner. The land owner would be informed prior to project activity and would be closely involved during implementation.

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

Signed: /s/ Robert W. Shull

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September 7, 2021

Date