

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Last Chance Ranch Stock Water Project

**Project No.:** 2008-063-00

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

**Location:** Custer County, 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:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Custer Soil and Water Conservation District to install four heated water troughs for livestock on a private ranch in the Pahsimeroi River valley, to relocate livestock feeding and watering areas away from the Pahsimeroi River.

The proposed project would install four stock watering troughs to which underground water and power lines would be extended (from nearby power lines). Troughs would be constructed on top of elevated concrete pads measuring approximately 70 square feet. Approximately 4,800 feet of trenching would be required for electric and water lines. Trenches would be 18 inches wide at bottom, and at least 24 inches" deep. Construction access to the site would be along an existing private road and temporary access roads. Equipment and supply staging areas and temporary access routes would be required for installation of the stock water system.

This action would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System while also supporting 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:

/s/ Katey C. Grange

Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

September 15, 2021

Date

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:** Last Chance Ranch Stock Water Project

## **Project Site Description**

The Last Chance Ranch Stock Water project area is located in and around a circular agricultural field in the Pahsimeroi River valley. It would impact previously plowed irrigated agricultural lands and heavily-grazed sagebrush steppe habitats surrounding it. The project would cross two irrigation ditches along where scattered willow shrubs and riparian grasses, rushes, sedges, and forbs are growing.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Two historic ditches eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and one site with an historic log barn and combine (determined by Idaho State Historic Preservation Office as potentially eligible but unevaluated as of yet) were identified within the project area. Both ditches would be crossed by the proposed electrical and water lines, but the impacts would not compromise the integrity of the ditches nor affect their eligibility for the National Register. The log barn and combine would be avoided by all elements of the project. Consultation letters were sent to the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office and to four Native American tribes. The Idaho State Historic Preservation Office responded, concurring that the project would have no adverse effect on cultural resources. No response was received from any of the tribes.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Trenching for the electrical and water lines would displace soils and mix soil horizons but would affect less than ½ acre overall, and the soils would be replaced into the trenches once the lines are placed, keeping the impact low. The watering troughs, with their concrete platforms, would attract cattle and there would be trampling and soil erosion from intensive cattle use at these four spots, creating a trampled circle estimated at about 50 feet in diameter. This equates to about .05 acre each, or slightly less than ¼ acre in total. This amount of soil disturbance would be minimal.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or special-status plant species are present in the Pahsimeroi Valley. As discussed above under "Geology and Soils," approximately ¾ of an acre of soil, and thereby, vegetation, would be disturbed by digging trench lines and installing troughs. The trench lines would be hydroseeded for recovery of herbaceous vegetation, but the trough

locations would likely become denuded over time, and remain so for as long as cattle use the troughs. These areas, however, are within heavily grazed pastures, and would be providing for vegetative recovery in the riparian zones along the Pahsimeroi River where vegetative values are higher and those former watering sites would be restored.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Small wildlife such as reptiles, mice, and pocket gophers may be harmed during construction activities. Larger wildlife (such as deer, or coyote) would be disturbed and temporarily displaced by noise and human presence during construction activities, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats would be unlikely. No shrubs, trees or riparian habitats would be impacted so bird life would be minimally affected.

Less than ¼ acre of heavily grazed pasture around the troughs would lose most habitat values for most species. The new water locations, however, with heated water during winter (to prevent freezing) may prove of limited benefit to ungulates such as deer and elk that might over-winter in the area. This value would be limited because of the high density of cattle use likely near the troughs in winter.

No Federal or state special-status wildlife species or habitats are within the project site.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No action proposed here would physically alter any aquatic habitat site; there would be no adverse physical changes to water bodies, floodplains, or fish from these actions.

ESA-listed fish species (Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout) and their designated critical habitats are present in the Pahsimeroi River, but there would be no effect to these species or their critical habitat since there are no project actions in aquatic habitats. However, vegetative recovery at former watering locations along the Pahsimeroi River would benefit over-wintering ESA-listed fish there.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are located within the project area. There would be no effect.

#### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project requires no groundwater withdrawals so there would be no effect on groundwater or aquifers.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The trough construction would not change land use or the designation of any land.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is not within view of any major highway, and only partially visible from the Pahsimeroi River Road.

Visual quality of the immediate area may be impacted during construction activities due to material staging and motor vehicle presence, but this would be a short-term impact only. The new troughs, new permanent features, would be consistent with the land use practices in the area as such troughs are a common sight in the Pahsimeroi Valley.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Air quality may be impacted by the workers' motor vehicle travel to the project site, but this impact would be local and temporary. There would be no long-term impact to air quality.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Work activities would raise noise levels above ambient levels for short periods of time, but the noise level would be low, consistent with other noise-generating agricultural practices in the area, and would only be generated during regular working hours for a couple of weeks.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicle operation, working with hand tools, and working in rural settings have their attendant risks to workers, but there would be no condition created from these actions that would introduce new human health/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: NA

### **Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination**

Description: Work would occur on private lands where the land owner is a partner to these project activities and would be closely involved in its construction.

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 15, 2021

Date