

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Couse Creek PALS Project

Project No.: 1994-018-05

Project Manager: Tabatha Rood, EWM-4

Location: Asotin County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B 1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Asotin County Watershed District in the installation of Post-Assisted Log Structures (PALS) and riparian planting within Couse Creek.

PALS would be installed along Couse Creek between river miles 1.4 to 3.5. The flow in this section of river goes subsurface or puddles and riparian function is limited. The primary limiting factors are low or no flow, oversupply of sediment, high stream temperatures, and limited geomorphic and hydraulic diversity due to a lack of structural elements. Reconnecting flood channels and promoting overbank flow would increase off-channel habitat and adding structural elements would increase geomorphic and hydraulic complexity, improve sediment sorting, and reduce sediment and woody debris transport time. These activities would also increase high flow and predator refuge for fish and create more suitable rearing habitat.

PALS installation would consist of untreated wooden posts that would be inserted into the stream bed using a hand-held pneumatic post-pounder. Installing 117 structures, each structure would consist of approximately 4 to 25 posts depending on the width of the stream at the installation locations, plus the addition of several pieces of woody debris that would be woven in between the posts by hand. Posts would penetrate roughly 2 to 3 feet into the stream bed at each structure. Chainsaws, handsaws, sledgehammers, shovels, and drills may also be used in the installation of the PALS. A 4-wheeler would be used to access the site via pre-existing roads and two-tracks, and to stage materials at least 150 feet from the creek or along existing roadways near creek.

Site restoration measures would include seeding and planting of native riparian vegetation at disturbed areas. Planting would consist of hydro-seeding, drill seeding, harrowing, or by hand.

These activities would benefit bull trout and fulfil commitments begun under the 2008 NOAA Fisheries Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (as supplemented in 2010 and 2014) (2008 BiOp) and ongoing commitments under the 2019 NOAA Fisheries Columbia River System BiOp (2019 CRS BiOp).

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

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: Couse Creek PALS Project

Project Site Description

The Couse Creek project area would be located along Couse Creek between RM 1.4 to 3.5. The project area is dominated by very coarse substrate and an undefined channel. Sections 01, 02, 11 of Township 08N Range 46E. Vegetation in the project site is widely spaced trees and shrubs. Primarily netleaf hackberry, chokecherry, and black cottonwood, but also including some coyote willow, red alder, woods rose, and Ponderosa Pine. Herbaceous vegetation varies. Some locations are mostly invasive species including cheatgrass, ventenata, and yellow star thistle while others include native bunchgrasses (bluebunch wheatgrass and/or Idaho fescue) or introduced grasses (intermediate wheatgrass). Project site is all privately-owned land.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed project would result in no historic properties affected (WA 2020 055). The SHPO concurred with BPA's determination on June 17th, 2020. The Nez Perce Tribe concurred with BPA's determination on July 7th 2020. No additional responses from consulting parties were received within 30 days.

Notes:

- In the event that archeological or historic materials are discovered during project activities, work in the immediate vicinity must stop, the area secured, and the concerned tribe's cultural staff and cultural committee and DAHP notified.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: The installation of the PALS would temporarily disturb soils on the project site. Best Management Practices (BMP) have been developed to avoid or minimize temporary fine sediment impacts during construction. All ground disturbance would be stabilized and native seeding and planting would occur post-construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: No ESA-listed or special-status plant species are known to exist on the site. Areas that are disturbed would be revegetated with native plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: No special-status or ESA-listed wildlife species or habitat would be negatively impacted by the installation of the PALS. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed and displaced by construction noise during implementation.

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

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: The project is covered under the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion (BiOp) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (HIP #2020090). Listed fish species include Snake River Basin steelhead and bull trout and their critical habitat. The project plans were reviewed by BPA engineering technical services and a series of conservation measures in accordance with the HIP consultation would be implemented to ensure that the project would benefit ESA-listed fish species.

Project work would occur in low to no flow conditions along the creek bed, therefore no impact to non-ESA-listed fish species or to the waterbody would occur. In the long term, this project was designed to increase fish habitat complexity.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: There are no designated wetland located in the project areas.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: Ground disturbing activities are not likely to intersect with groundwater and would have no impact on aquifers. Construction BMPs would be implemented to prevent contamination of groundwater from equipment leaks or spills.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: The project is located on private property. No changes to land use would occur.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: Minor changes to visual quality. The new post-assisted log structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and topography of the proposed structures would not be located in a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: Temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the site during construction activities.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: Temporary increase in ambient noise during construction. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No Potential for Significance

Explanation: The proposed activities are not considered hazardous nor would result in any health and safety risks to the general public.

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: The landowner has been in coordination with Asotin County Watershed District staff.

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

Signed: /s/ Catherine Clark 07/17/2020
Catherine Clark, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Motus Recruiting and Staffing, Inc.