

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Tucannon River Project Area 27/28.1 Floodplain Restoration Project

**Project No.:** 2008-00-202

**Project Manager:** Andre L'Heureux EWU-4

**Location:** Columbia County, WA

**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 provide funds to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) for restoration activities to increase channel complexity and floodplain connectivity along a one-mile-long segment of the Tucannon River. These treatments would provide structural diversity/roughness and sediment heterogeneity that is currently lacking throughout the river and floodplain and restore natural processes.

Specific Actions for Floodplain Restoration include:

**Instream Wood Placements.** Up to 75 wood placements would be constructed along and/or within the Ordinary High Water (OHW) of the main channel of the Tucannon River.

Excavator(s) would be used to excavate channel alluvium and floodplain sediments, to place large wood, and backfill the structures with the excavated substrates. Rock would be used to ballast the wood.

**Floodplain Wood Placements:** Up to 40 single logs with root wads would be placed on gravel bars within and on throughout the floodplain. Excavator(s) would excavate sufficient alluvium to allow the log to lay flat on the gravel bar or floodplain surface.

**Berm Removal:** Pushup berms located along the right bank river channel would be scalped down to the surrounding floodplain elevation (approximately three-foot reduction in elevation). The material excavated during each of these actions consists of native floodplain alluvium and would be re-used onsite as fill material within OHW.

**Culvert Replacement** – The existing culvert for a small ephemeral drainage along King Grade Road would be replaced to a stream simulation design to allow for fish passage and restore a water source to adjacent wetlands.

**Riparian Plantings** – Native species would be used to revegetate any disturbed areas following completion of constructed project elements. Grass seeding of access routes, staging areas and other disturbed areas would be completed immediately following construction.

Maintenance to these structures (addition of wood or ballast in previously disturbed areas) would occur on subsequent years in response to unforeseen high flow events. Construction of project elements below OHW would be carried out during the summer in-water work window for the Tucannon River, July 15th through August 30th. Project elements above OHW may be

completed August through September. Existing gravel access roads and compacted floodplain terrace surfaces would be used for access and staging areas would be located within the overall project footprint away from wetlands and waterbodies.

This project was broadly informed by the Snake River Salmon Recovery Plan for Southeast Washington and the project location and project design were informed by several basin-wide assessments including The Tucannon Sub-basin Plan and The Tucannon Geomorphic Assessment and Habitat Restoration Study. These activities fulfill 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). These activities would also benefit bull trout.

**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/ Dan Gambetta

Dan Gambetta  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: July 23, 2020

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:** Tucannon River Project Area 27/28.1 Floodplain Restoration Project

## Project Site Description

The Tucannon River throughout the project area is primarily a dynamic, multiple-thread channel with forced pools, riffles, and rapid sections. The current land use is a combination of rural residential and agricultural development. A portion of the historical riparian floodplain has been converted to hay fields. The existing riparian condition is cottonwood and alder dominated tree canopy with patches of aspen and locust. The understory is dominated by invasive vegetation consisting predominantly of Himalayan blackberry and reed canarygrass. The proposed project area contains approximately 8.1 acres of wetland.

## Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. <b>Historic and Cultural Resources</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> On January 15<sup>th</sup> 2020, BPA initiated Section 106 consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP).</p> <p>The CTUIR conducted cultural resources surveys through its Tribal Historic Preservation Office and prepared a report. BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no historic properties affected (WA 2020 042) and sent out a final determination on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The SHPO concurred with BPA's determination on the same day (Log No.: 2019-12-09313-BPA). No tribal responses were received within 30 days.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><u>Note:</u> In the event that archaeological 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.</li></ul>		
2. <b>Geology and Soils</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> The removal of the berm 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 and project elements were sited to minimize channel crossing locations. All ground disturbance would be stabilized and rehabilitated using native plantings.</p>		
3. <b>Plants</b> (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Although ground disturbance is proposed, there are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species known to exist on the site. Areas disturbed as a result of the excavation of the proposed side channels would be planted with native willows. Areas outside of the side channels that would be disturbed would be seeded with a locally derived and adapted native seed mixture. Any temporary impacts to on-site vegetation that may result from the implementation of this project would be completely restored to diverse, native vegetative communities.</p>		

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

Explanation: The property has been used almost exclusively for growing crops or grazing cattle. No wildlife species, including sensitive wildlife species, have been documented in or adjacent to the project area and no designated critical habitat is present.

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

Explanation: The project is covered under the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion (BiOp) under Section 7 of the ESA. Listed fish species include Middle Columbia River steelhead and Columbia River bull trout and their critical habitat. Plans were reviewed by BPA engineering technical services, and a series of design changes and conservation measures were proposed to ensure that the project would benefit ESA-listed fish species. The project was designed to work with and restore natural riverine sedimentation, flooding, and vegetation processes over the long run, by re-introducing instream natural roughness and increasing floodplain connectivity. Once HIP review was completed, the project was assigned HIP No# 2020073.

Prior to any in-channel construction, cofferdams and plugs would be used to isolate each work area and divert flows away from each active work area during construction. Thus allowing for volitional fish passage and minimizing exposure of fish to construction related sediment impacts. Fish salvage would occur as each respective section is dewatered and would be conducted according to BPA's HIP requirements using the CTUIR fish salvage implementation plan.

Site restoration measures would include seeding and planting of native willows and conifers at excavation locations. By removing the berm throughout the project reach, the project would increase floodplain hydrologic connectivity, benefit floodplain wetlands and increase habitat complexity.

6. **Wetlands**

Explanation: There would be no permanent adverse impacts to wetlands as a part of this project. No non-woody fill would be added to wetlands. Wetlands would be improved by adding wood only. The project would be following the BPA HIP guidelines and BMPs to protect and avoid impacts to existing wetlands. A Nationwide Permit 27 (NWS-2020-477) was obtained and all permit conditions would be followed.

Because this project is a habitat restoration and enhancement project, no net loss to wetlands or wetland buffers would result from this project. With removal of artificially confining features such as push-up berms and increased in-channel roughness from large wood additions, this project would increase the frequency and duration of hydrologic connectivity with the floodplain and is anticipated to result in an increase in aquatic resource functions. The project also has the potential to increase overall floodplain wetland area in this reach of the Tucannon River.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Explanation: Although there would be ground disturbance as a result of the excavation of the berm and floodplain, the work would have no effect on groundwater and aquifers because excavation would not intersect groundwater and containment measures would be implemented to prevent contamination of groundwater from equipment leaks or spills.

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

Explanation: No change in land use would occur for the proposed project.

9. **Visual Quality**

Explanation: The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality. The new large wood structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and the topography of the proposed side channels and would not be located in a visually sensitive area. Any change to the viewshed due to construction vehicles or equipment would be short term and temporary.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the field site would be very minor and short term during construction, but would resume to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. 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**



Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions, no CERCLA sites and no changes to electric or magnetic fields as a result of the proposed project.

**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**

Description: The underlying landowner have been involved in all design stages and has signed off on the JARPA permit. Adjacent landowners are supportive of the project.

---

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

Signed: /s/ Dan Gambetta      Date: July 23, 2020

Dan Gambetta ECF-4  
Environmental Protection Specialist