

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: City of Salem Minto Brown Park Vegetation Management

Project No.: 2009-012-00

Project Manager: Eric Andersen, EWL-4

Location: Marion County, Oregon

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 funding for the City of Salem to implement terrestrial vegetation management activities on 48 acres to increase native plant cover at Minto-Brown Island Park, which is a 1,205-acre natural area located in the middle reach of the Willamette River, adjacent to downtown Salem between river miles 87-85. The project site is located along the northwest portion of the park.

Funding the proposed activities supports 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.). The goals of the proposed actions are to "protect, manage, and restore" habitat values for fish and wildlife. The Willamette River is in need of high quality floodplain forest; the reduced amount of historic floodplain forest is identified as a limiting factor and threat for Upper Willamette River Chinook Salmon and Steelhead. This project would focus on treating invasive weeds and planting native plants to preserve, restore, and enhance 48 acres of floodplain forest.

The proposed action would include reforestation of the historic floodplain forest with live plant staking in the form of large cottonwood poles. The total cottonwood pole planting area is approximately 6.3 acres and would be planted at a density of 100 poles/acre. These large cottonwood live-stakes would be planted using a gas powered 2-person auger to install 630 large (10-14 feet tall) cottonwood poles. The portable auger would utilize 3-foot-long, 6-inch-diameter bits. Planting depth for the cottonwood poles would be 3 feet. The auger would be carried by hand and walked in and out by crew members. Native plants would be purchased and planted for restoration planting in an area of 27.5 acres.

Reed canary grass and blackberry would be mechanically and chemically treated with weed eater, mowing and backpack herbicide application across 48 acres. Other weeds would be addressed such as Clematis, ivy, thistle and holly.

Existing access roads and paths would be used and trees would be staged in previously-disturbed areas near existing paths and roads.

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/ Shawn Skinner

Shawn Skinner

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange

Katey C. Grange

NEPA Compliance Officer

October 6, 2020

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: City of Salem Minto Brown Park Vegetation Management

Project Site Description

Minto-Brown Island Park is a 1,205-acre natural area located in the middle reach of the Willamette River, adjacent to downtown Salem between river miles 87-85. The vegetation management and restoration areas would be located on former farm and industrial lands that is currently owned by the City of Salem and designated as the Minto Island Conservation Area within Minto-Brown Island Park. The entire project is in the Willamette River floodway including approximately 3.4 acres of wetlands. Management activities would occur approximately 1,000 ft. from the water's edge to as close as a few feet behind the top of bank, which can be as close as 10 feet from the wetted channel.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties on July 27, 2020 (OR 2020 060). Concurrence was received from the City of Salem (August 6, 2020), the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (August 7, 2020), and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde (August 24, 2020). The Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (OR SHPO) asked for a clarification of methods on August 17, 2020 and BPA sent a response with clarifications on August 28, 2020; no response was received from the OR SHPO. BPA did not receive concurrence from any other consulting parties within 30 days.

Notes:

- In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, work would be stopped immediately and a BPA Archaeologist and Historian would be notified, as well as consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would have limited effect on soil and geologic values. The only digging involved would be for the planting of large cottonwood live-stakes using rock bars or breaker bars, carried into the site. The minor disturbance would be balanced through the proposed action goal of a restored floodplain forest as the end result.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no known Federal/state special-status plant species in the project area. Disturbance of plants in the project area would largely occur to non-native plants. There would be a long-term benefit by restoring the project area to a more natural condition through the treatment of invasive plants and replanting with native plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor Disturbance would occur to wildlife species in the area from noise associated with mechanical weed treatment. There are a number of bald eagles present along the Willamette River in the vicinity of the project area, but there are no known nests within the project area. Activities would be minimized and excluded from the immediate vicinity of an active bald eagle nest if one is observed. Mowing would be performed with weed-eaters and disturbance of the site during the nesting season would be minimized or avoided if possible. If any mowing is conducted in the bird nesting season (March 1 - August 31) the area to be mowed would be walked prior to mowing. Any nests observed would be avoided during mowing. Western pond turtles are present at Minto-Brown Island Park, but any known nest sites are outside of the project area. The City has a close relationship with ODFW Biologists studying Western pond turtles in Minto-Brown Island Park and coordinates with USFWS biologists on bald eagle nest protection measures.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not involve any in-water work or impact to water bodies or fish. The restoration activities do take place in the floodway, but any temporary impacts would be minimized by the restoration of the floodplain forest. The goal of the work is to improve riparian and floodplain habitat for the benefit of terrestrial and aquatic species, including Upper Willamette River Chinook Salmon and Steelhead. Impacts to ESA-listed species (Upper Willamette River Chinook Salmon and Steelhead) would be covered under BPA's programmatic Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinion with the USFWS and NMFS. A project notification form (2020068) was submitted on 6/18/20.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not be changing the hydrology within the project area, only removing non-native vegetation and planting native vegetation. The wetlands in the project area would be enhanced and restored by this project. Disturbance of the wetlands is for the purpose of removal of invasive plant species. Disturbed areas would be planted with native plant species appropriate for wetland habitats as needed to supplement the existing native plants released from invasive competition. Any potential wetland impacts would be limited and temporary. In the long-term, there would be a benefit to wetlands by the restoration project and native plantings.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not affect groundwater and aquifers. The only digging involved would be planting large cottonwood live-stakes using rock bars or breaker bars.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is consistent with the objectives of the Minto Island Conservation Area Management and Conservation Plan.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Visual quality would be minimally impacted only during some project activities. Majority of the project area is not visible from publicly accessible trails or paths. Activities would be accomplished by contractors on foot with some material and equipment staging near a path. Temporary placement of storage containers may be used to protect equipment and materials from vandalism.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The air quality impacts would be a minimal amount of dust or equipment exhaust during the project from the following equipment: 1) vehicle traffic from pick-up trucks to drop off equipment and materials to the edge of the site; 2) weed control with weed-eaters or similar small engine portable tools and 3) large cottonwood stakes would be removed with chainsaws and replanted with rock bars or breaker bars. These effects of vehicle and equipment generating dust or exhaust would be short-term and are not inconsistent with the present management of these lands. The project site is not near any residences or developed properties.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The noise quality impacts would be intermittent during the life of the project from the following equipment: 1) vehicle traffic from pick-up trucks to drop off equipment and materials to the edge of the site; 2) weed control with weed-eaters or similar small engine portable tools and 3) large cottonwood stakes would be removed with chainsaws and replanted with rock bars or breaker bars. These effects of vehicle and equipment generating elevated noise would be short-term and are not inconsistent with the present management of these lands. The project site is not near any residences or developed properties.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All workers implementing the project would follow OSHA guidelines. Herbicide would be applied by licensed applicators and use would follow ODA guidelines and label instructions. Visitors to areas bordering the project site would be warned of project activities by signs in the parking area or along trails. No public access is currently allowed within the project site regardless of activities taking place and the public would continue to be excluded from the site.

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 City of Salem has a webpage dedicated to the restoration projects underway along the Willamette River that the City is working on. Updates on the project can be posted on kiosks located within the park. Park volunteers patrol the park and are briefed on projects so they can answer questions from visitors. The City informed stakeholder groups in the area and received letters of support from: Claggett Creek Watershed Council, Marion Soil and Water Conservation District, Glenn-Gibson Watershed Council, North Santiam Watershed Council, ODFW, and the Salem Audubon Society.

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

Signed: /s/ Shawn Skinner

Shawn Skinner, ECF-4
Environmental Protection Specialist

October 6, 2020

Date