

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: North Fork Walla Walla Springs Reconnection and Riparian Protection

Project No.: 2008-2003-00

Project Manager: Corrie Veenstra, EWL-4

Location: Umatilla County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat; B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish and wildlife

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council (WWBWC) to reconnect a series of cold-water springs to the North Fork Walla Walla River (NFWWR) by constructing hydrologic passages, plant vegetation, and positioning cattle exclusion barriers to conserve the springs and riparian vegetation. This project would contribute to the recovery of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead, spring Chinook salmon, and bull trout by improving water quality and restoring riparian conditions. These actions 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.).

Hydrologic Passages: Nine areas containing a permeable substrate, called a rock mattress, and three 30-inch-diameter culverts would be embedded beneath a 5.2-mile stretch of the NFWWR road; a dirt levee road preventing the springs from reaching the NFWWR. These additions would be added to facilitate passage of water from the springs to the NFWWR. The passages, which would be no larger than 14 feet long, 4 feet deep, and 12 feet wide, would be excavated with small scale construction equipment. Culverts or beds of permeable substrate would be placed in the passage, backfilled, and resurfaced with a road grader. Materials and equipment would be hauled via dump truck, excess soil and debris would be removed from the site, and no staging area would be necessary. Work zone isolation techniques would be used as needed, sediment run-off would not be anticipated, and no in-water work would occur. Areas with ground disturbances and sparse riparian vegetation would be replanted with non-rooted willow cuttings approximately 1 centimeter in diameter. Cuttings would be inserted by hand approximately 5 to 10 inches deep with very little ground disturbance.

Cattle Exclusion Barriers: Whole trees, approximately 30 feet long and 15 inches in diameter, would be placed horizontally on the ground to enclose approximately 3 acres of reconnected seepage springs. The untreated trees would be sourced from the site and would be positioned using a track hoe. No ground disturbances would be required.

Activities would occur in early fall during the dry season. The project would take place on private land. Sites would be accessed by vehicle and on foot via public and private roads and established foot paths. Landowners would be contacted to gain permission prior to accessing private property.

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/ Lindsey Arotin

Lindsey Arotin
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
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: North Fork Walla Walla Springs Reconnection and Riparian Protection

Project Site Description

The proposed project site is located in northeast Oregon, approximately 9 miles east of Milton-Freewater, Oregon in Umatilla County. The project areas are located between river mile (RM) 4 and RM 5 of the NFWWR along the NFWWR road, a country road that runs through private rural and agriculture land. The land surrounding the project areas is degraded from development and flooding, and vegetation coverage is sparse.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA determined that the hydraulic passage construction (OR 2022 021) and vegetation planting activities (OR 2022 027) would have no historical properties affected on August 17, 2022. BPA consulted with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (CTUIR), the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, and the Oregon State Historical Preservation Office (OR SHPO). The Nez Perce Tribe responded August 24, 2022 deferring to CTUIR for comments. OR SHPO responded September 14, 2022 requesting additional information. OR SHPO also requested that the report and determination letter be revised to have an identified historic resource as “unevaluated” on the NRHP and a finding of no adverse effect to historic properties for the project given the identified resource’s location adjacent to, but outside of, the APE. An amended consultation letter addressing OR SHPO’s request was issued September 24, 2024. The Nez Perce Tribe again responded to the amended consultation letter Sept 28, 2022 deferring to CTUIR. OR SHPO responded October 7, 2022 concurring that there would be no adverse effect to historic properties. No further comments were received from consulting parties. .

BPA determined that the cattle exclusion barriers would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties on January 18, 2022; BPA CR Project No.: OR 2022 051

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Restoration activities would disturb the soil at the project sites. All areas where activities would occur have been previously disturbed. The hydrologic passages would be placed beneath a reconstructed levee road, no native soil would be disturbed. Vegetation planting would be completed by hand and would have minimal impact. The cattle exclusion barrier would have no anticipated ground disturbance. The proposed work would likely improve habitat conditions and water quality.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary ground and vegetation disturbances would occur during hydrologic passage placement, vegetation planting, and cattle exclusion barrier placement. These activities would contribute to riparian restoration and would ultimately benefit surrounding vegetation. No ESA-listed, state-listed, or sensitive plant species are known to exist on the site. No designated critical habitat is present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, state-listed, or sensitive wildlife species were documented in, or adjacent to, the project areas and no designated critical habitat is present. Wildlife present on the site during restoration may be temporarily disturbed by human presence and noise. The proposed actions would restore water conditions and riparian vegetation, which would likely improve conditions for surrounding wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: None of the proposed activities would occur in Federal/state special-status species' habitats. Hydrologic passage placement, vegetation planting, and cattle exclusion barrier placement would occur near the NFWWR and seepage springs but activities would not involve any handling of fish, in-water disturbances, or sediment run-off. The proposed activities would improve water conditions for ESA-listed species in the NFWWR.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: According to the National Wetland Inventory no wetlands are present in the project area and no wetlands would be disturbed during hydrologic passage placement, vegetation planting, or cattle exclusion barrier placement.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No actions during hydrologic passage placement, vegetation planting, or cattle exclusion barrier placement would impact ground water or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur as a result of hydrologic passage placement or vegetation planting. The cattle exclusion barrier would exclude cattle from riparian

vegetation and the cold-water springs. All project details have been coordinated with and approved by affected land owners.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed projects would temporarily impact visual quality during construction. Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, to include work zone conditions, vehicles, and equipment. Once completed the area would have a minimal alteration of the visual quality, with those changes being a more natural state that would include hydrologic passages beneath a levee road, increased native vegetation, and a low profile cattle exclusion barrier constructed from whole untreated trees.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Air quality may be temporarily impacted during restoration activities due to increased vehicle traffic and dust. Conditions would return to baseline conditions upon completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Restoration activities would temporarily increase ambient noise due to human presence, vehicle traffic, and construction.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work activities

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: WWBWC worked closely with the landowners during planning and project development phases to ensure approval. WWBWC would coordinate with landowners prior to accessing private land.

Signed: /s/ Lindsey Arotin October 11, 2022
Lindsey Arotin, ECF - 4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist