

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Swale Creek Low Tech Process-Based Restoration Project

Project Manager: Jesse Wilson, EWL-4

Location: Klickitat 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 fund Yakama Nation Fisheries to complete a low tech process-based habitat restoration project along a 1.5-mile segment of Swale Creek, a tributary to the Klickitat River. The work would benefit Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Mid-Columbia steelhead.

The project would include in-stream placement of small hand-built beaver dam analogs (BDAs) and post assisted log structures (PALS) to improve stream processes in a degraded reach of Swale Creek. BDAs and PALS are in-stream habitat structures constructed of small posts woven with locally available woody material. Installation would include placement of wood posts into the stream bed by hand or with the use of a hydraulic post pounder. About 3 to 5 PALS in combination with BDAs would be constructed every 300 feet along a mile of stream. The objective is to improve natural hydrologic, geomorphic, and biological stream processes over time.

The equipment for installation of these structures would include a hydraulic post pounder, chainsaws, loppers, shovels, picks, and 5-gallon buckets. All in-channel work would occur during the approved in-water work window (typically July - October 15). Following construction, all work areas would be returned to pre-construction condition. Riparian plantings or native seed mix would be used to reestablish areas disturbed during construction and to improve the riparian area and floodplain. Project implementation and adaptive management work would occur in multiple phases over 5 years as restoration targets are met and self-sustaining natural processes are established. Adaptive management could include lateral or vertical extension of structures by adding more wood, plugging gaps by adding more wood, repairing minor breaches or adding or removing a structure.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also support Bonneville's commitments to the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as amended, 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/ Carolyn A. Sharp

Carolyn A. Sharp
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: Swale Creek Low Tech Process-Based Restoration Project

Project Site Description

The project is located on private property in south central Washington about 12 miles west of Goldendale, WA. Swale Creek is a tributary to the Klickitat River. The project area begins about 0.75 mile upstream from the confluence with the Klickitat River and extends for approximately 1 mile upstream. The upper watershed is located on a plateau characterized by relatively flat topography which transitions quickly into a canyon in the lower third of the watershed. Vegetation in the lower watershed consists of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and Oregon white oak on upland slopes and a mix of alder and willow in riparian areas within valley bottoms. In the upper watershed, vegetation is dominated by cropland and open grasslands. A majority of the watershed is in private ownership (including off-Reservation Tribally-owned land) surrounding isolated parcels of state-managed land.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation (WA 2022 045) on October 21, 2022 with the Nez Perce Tribe, The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Yakama Nation), and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). On June 13, 2023, BPA made a determination of no effect to historic properties. Concurrence was received from DAHP (June 13) and Yakama Nation (June 14). The Yakama Nation requested minor edits to the inventory report. On July 18, 2023, BPA resubmitted the edited report to all consulting parties. No additional comments were received.

Notes:

- A cultural resource specialist would monitor ground-disturbing work.
- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by a professional archaeologist.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The construction of PALS and BDAs involves driving 2- to 4-inch wood posts into the streambed and weaving in small woody materials, which creates little to no turbidity. While small amounts of fine sediment may be introduced to the water column as substrate is disturbed during installation, the resulting increase in turbidity occurs at a small spatial scale (about 30 to 60 feet), for a short time duration (1 to 2 hours).

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or ESA-listed plant species are known to be present. Some riparian vegetation may be trampled as workers access the stream corridor on foot with hand tools to install the PALS and BDAs. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects to vegetation diversity and extent from riparian plantings and improved hydrologic conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or ESA-listed wildlife species are documented in or adjacent to the project area and no critical habitat is present. Local wildlife may be temporarily disturbed or displaced by construction noise. It is likely that species would avoid the area during construction and return once project work is complete.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Swale Creek is used by ESA-listed Mid-Columbia steelhead and coho salmon, and Chinook salmon. The project is covered under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion under Section 7 of ESA with Project Notification Form number 2023033. Construction activities would take place during low flows when fish are not present. The project would result in long-term improvement to fish habitat in the Swale Creek basin.

Notes:

- Project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval.
- Instream work would be conducted during the established work window determined by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not take place within or around wetlands and, therefore, no potential to affect wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to ground water or aquifers are anticipated due to the minimal amount of ground disturbance that would not be deep enough to penetrate groundwater. Restoration activities would result in a local increase in groundwater storage through improved floodplain function.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to project actions. There would be no land use changes, and no impact to specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no adverse effects to the visual quality of the environment as a result of this project. The new structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and would not be located in a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There may be minor and temporary amounts of exhaust produced by gas powered hand tools or vehicles used to access the site. There would be no long-term effects to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in noise during daytime construction activities due to vehicles and equipment use. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following project completion. No long-term impact to noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed project actions would not adversely impact human health and safety. Operational activities would follow applicable health and safety standards.

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 project is located on private property. Yakama Nation Fisheries has obtained permission from the landowners to access the site and conduct habitat restoration actions upon it.

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

Signed: /s/ Carolyn A. Sharp August 28, 2023
Carolyn A. Sharp, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist