

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Sorenson Meadows Road Improvements

Project No.: 2011-004-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss, EWM - 4

Location: Lane 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 fund the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to remove debris and improve an access road at the Sorenson Meadows wildlife management area (WMA) in Lane County, Oregon. Funding for this work partially fulfills commitments made by BPA in the 2010 “Willamette River Basin Memorandum of Agreement Regarding Wildlife Habitat Protection and Enhancement between the State of Oregon and the Bonneville Power Administration” and is part of ongoing efforts to mitigate for the impacts to fish and wildlife from the construction and operation of Federal flood control and hydroelectric facilities in the Willamette River Basin.

The Sorenson Meadows WMA is located along the bank of the Willamette River and hosts both restored upland prairie and remnant riparian forest across more than 50 acres of BPA-owned land. Access through the property is across a series of unimproved dirt tracks that run along the southern and eastern borders of the property. These paths are roughly 8 feet wide and are regularly mowed to act as firebreaks. During wet months in the winter and spring, the ground becomes saturated and muddy, which makes access along these paths more difficult. Trucks, ATVs, and other equipment used for maintenance and habitat work on the property create ruts in the soft soil and can sometimes become stuck in the mud.

In order to improve these conditions, ODFW would lay down crushed rock and gravel along the existing dirt access track. Geotextile fabric would also be placed along the route of the track in sections where ground compression and disturbance would be a concern. Gravel would be placed to a depth of up to three inches along the route and graded to form a road. No digging or excavation would be required and all work would be within areas that are already regularly used for access.

In addition, ODFW would remove debris located near the southwestern terminus of the access road. Dirt spoils from excavation on a neighboring property were dumped on the property without permission. ODFW would remove the pile by scooping it out using hand tools (shovels) or small equipment (skid steers, mini excavators) and spread the soil evenly across the surrounding area.

Any non-natural debris, such as trash and refuse, mixed into the pile would be removed and disposed of off-site.

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/ Thomas DeLorenzo

Thomas DeLorenzo

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: Sorenson Meadows Road Improvements

Project Site Description

The Sorenson Meadows property is owned by BPA and maintained by ODFW as part of the Willamette Wildlife Management Program. The wildlife area sits on the eastern bank of the Willamette River roughly seven miles southeast of Eugene, Oregon. The property was acquired in the mid-1990s by BPA and, in conjunction with ODFW and the Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program, has undergone extensive habitat restoration efforts since. The majority of the property is now maintained upland grassland, with a band of remnant riparian forest running along the bank of the river. The climate of the area is typical of the southern Willamette Valley, with wet winters and dry summers. The property is bordered on the east and north by a commercial berry farm and a private residence to the south.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: BPA cultural resources staff reviewed the proposed actions (BPR CR No. OR 2022 083). After identifying an Area of Potential Effect (APE), a BPA archaeologist conducted a desktop records search of past reviews of the property and a pedestrian survey of the site. The archaeologist determined that the project would result in no adverse effects to historic properties, contingent on the protection measure detailed below. Consulting parties were the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), ODFW, the Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde Community of Oregon, the Cow Creek Band of the Umpqua Tribe of Indians, and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. SHPO assigned the project SHPO case number No. 22-1219. ODFW concurred with BPA's determination on September 29, 2023. No other responses were received. The consultation period ended on October 18, 2023.

Notes:

- There is one identified cultural resource site within the project APE. The site would be flagged prior to implementation. ODFW would lay down a layer of fabric geotextile fabric along the path of the road within the flagged area before placing gravel on top of the fabric layer to reduce compression and disturbance of the site.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be mild effects on geology and soils from project actions. Debris removal would involve excavating a large pile of dirt dumped by the neighboring landowner. ODFW would only remove soil originating from off-site to restore the natural conditions of where

the soil was dumped. There would be some minor disturbance caused by excavation equipment used for the removal. This disturbance would be minimized by doing all work when the ground is dry and hard and would have only minor effects on local soil. Laying down gravel on the access roads would not involve any earthmoving. Improving the access road would have positive effects on local soil by reducing the amount of ground disturbance and erosion caused by vehicles during wet months.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Kincaid's lupine (*Lupinus oregonus*) has been documented in Lane County (USFWS; Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool). Kincaid's lupine has not been documented at the Sorenson Meadows WMA. ODFW biologists routinely survey WMAs for Kincaid's lupine and other conservation status species. Since no Kincaid's lupine has been documented on the Sorenson Meadows WMA, there would be no effect on the species.

No other separately listed Oregon state-listed endangered species have been documented in the project areas (Oregon Department of Agriculture; Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate Plant List).

Non-listed plants would be largely unaffected by project actions. Project actions would take place in previously disturbed areas with little vegetation. The access track is already largely devoid of vegetation other than a limited amount of grass, which is routinely mowed to maintain efficacy as a firebreak. What little vegetation within the path of the road would be buried under the new gravel road, but the effect would be localized.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphys marmoratus*) streaked horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris strigata*), northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), and Fender's blue butterfly (*Icaricia icarioides fenderi*) have the potential to be found in Lane County (IPaC). None of these species have been documented on the Sorenson Meadows property, though the riparian forest on the property is appropriate habitat for lark and owl. ODFW biologists routinely survey WMAs for conservation status species. Moreover, the proposed actions would not affect this habitat, nor would there be any disturbance beyond minor disturbance caused by human presence and noise. There would be no effect on these species.

No separately listed Oregon state-listed endangered species have been observed in the project areas (ODFW Fish and Wildlife Division).

Non-listed wildlife would be affected by noise and human presence during project activities. Work would be done using small machine equipment, such as skid steers and trucks, which would create noise and potentially disturb wildlife in the area. These effects would be temporary, consistent with usual human presence during O&M actions on the WMA, and cause no lasting impacts to wildlife in the area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Willamette River runs along the western edge of the Sorenson Meadows property. ESA-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are present in the river (StreamNet, IPaC). No project actions would take place in or near the river. There would be no effects on fish and waterbodies as a result of the project actions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are mapped seasonal wetlands at the Sorenson Meadows property along the bank of the Willamette River (USFWS National Wetland Inventory). Project actions would not take place in these wetlands and would therefore have no effect on these wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no new wells or groundwater use proposed. The new gravel access road would be slightly less permeable than the current unimproved dirt track and potentially affect the local water table, but the effects would be minor because of the small footprint of the roadway.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No changes to access, ownership, or use of the property are proposed. The Sorenson Meadows WMA is not open to the public and no changes to public recreation or access would occur. The property is held and maintained solely for wildlife habitat and this use would persist following project actions.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The current access tracks at Sorenson Meadows are unimproved dirt paths. While the new gravel roads would be a noticeable change to the visual quality of the area, the effects of improving the roads and removing debris would be minor, localized changes to the roadway that runs on the borders of the property and cause no large-scale changes to the aesthetic quality of the overall WMA. The Sorenson Meadows WMA is not open to the public and these changes in visual quality would have no effect on the public's enjoyment of the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be generation of exhaust emissions from equipment (trucks, skid steers, etc.) used for project actions. This exhaust would be temporary, limited in scope, and cause

no long-term changes to air quality at the properties and negligible contributions to climate change.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be increases in local noise caused by equipment (trucks, skid steers, etc.) used for project actions. This noise would be temporary, limited in scope, and cause no long-term noise increases at the properties.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All workers would use best practices to ensure health and human safety.

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: BPA owns the Sorenson Meadows property and it is closed to public access. No external coordination beyond the land manager, ODFW, is required.

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

Signed: /s/ Thomas DeLorenzo October 23, 2023
Thomas DeLorenzo Date
Environmental Protection Specialist