

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Sixmile Creek Habitat Restoration

Project No.: 1984-021-00

Project Manager: Allan Whiting, EWM - 4

Location: Grant 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 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) staff for implementation assistance and construction oversight on the Sixmile Creek Habitat Restoration Project; commitments would be limited to staff time associated with the 2024 implementation efforts including the placement of up to 64 Beaver Dam Analogs (BDA), 77 PALS (Post-Assisted Log Structures), and 52 small wood structures (ranging from 1 to 3 logs), fencing installation and spring development to increase habitat availability, increase floodplain inundation, reverse channel incision, and reduce flow velocity and periodicity to improve instream habitat conditions creating potential spawning and rearing habitat for Mid-Columbia steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). This project would treat approximately 1.7 miles (~10 acres of privately-owned property) of Sixmile Creek, a tributary of the lower Middle Fork of the John Day in Grant County, Oregon and is a cooperative effort between the North Fork John Day Watershed Council (NFJWC), the Ritter Land Management Team (RLMT), ODFW, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). NFJWC would be the project lead, providing primary project oversight, contract oversight, planting, some materials, and project monitoring. RLMT would assist with project oversight, planting, and maintenance, ODFW would provide direct assistance with implementation as well as consultation to project design and oversight of instream work.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp) and the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp). These actions also support 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.*).

Large wood structures would be created by tipping or felling large conifers (≥ 10 " Diameter at Breast Height (DBH)) via mini excavator into the stream at desired angles and racking smaller to medium wood against the larger logs. Large wood structures would serve to slow velocity, raise the water level, create pools, trap sediment, and inundate the floodplain where possible. BDAs would be constructed of wooden posts and native material including branches, cobbles, and mud by hydraulic post-pounders and manual labor. BDAs would serve to slow velocity, raise the water level, create pools, trap sediment, and inundate the floodplain where possible. PALS would be

constructed of wooden posts and larger branches by hydraulic post-pounders and manual labor in complexes of 6-8. PALS would serve to slow velocity and create roughness and complexity. In addition to the three structure types, small to medium woody materials would be added to the stream opportunistically in conjunction with other structure types.

Approximately two miles of fence would be installed to protect 10 acres of stream and vegetation. The fence would be constructed using wildlife safe fencing. There would be 16' between the steel t-posts and two tamarack stays evenly spaced between the steel. The structures would be built from 2 3/8" steel pipe welded together. A spring would also be developed for livestock watering. A tile line (perforated pipe) would be installed to capture the water at the collection point and route it to a spring box that would also be installed. A solar pump would be installed to pump the collected water into a 700-gallon aluminum trough.

All inwater-work activities would be completed during the approved dates (July 15 – August 31); however, Sixmile Creek is typically dry during the summer.

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.

Israel Duran
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
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: Sixmile Creek Habitat Restoration

Project Site Description

Sixmile Creek is 8.6 miles long and flows into the Middle Fork John Day River at river mile 6.8. Basalt canyons, riparian vegetation, and some old growth timber keep water temperatures cooler in the upper reaches, although some sections run dry during the year. Sixmile Creek also contains important spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead and is a valuable source of cold water to the lower Middle Fork. Currently, riparian vegetation is present but is sparse, limited by a combination of cattle grazing and current hydrologic conditions. Limited shade is provided by healthy ponderosa pines adjacent to the riparian area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Site-specific National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 consultation for the Project was completed with USFWS as the lead agency. BPA reviewed a cultural resource survey, and based on the results of that survey, BPA determined that the Project would have no adverse effect on historic resources and notified the consulting parties. The consultation was completed on July 10, 2024. BPA did not receive a response from the other parties that it consulted during this process.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary ground disturbances would occur as part of the project. Posts would be driven into the streambed using a hand-held hydraulic post driver. No excavation would be required but posts driven into the streambed may result in small areas of sediment displacement and compaction and tipping trees would displace soils and compaction would occur from tipping, felling, and general construction activities. There may be localized flooding of soils in the riparian area because of the LWD, BDAs, and PALS, but this would align with the intended goal of the project to redirect flow laterally and increase cutting of the entrenched sections of the creek to increase floodplain connectivity over time.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no documented ESA-listed plants or designated critical habitat in the project area and no state special-status plant species documented in the project area. Minor and temporary vegetation impacts would occur due to crews accessing the stream by foot. In the long term,

there would be beneficial effects from improving the channel complexity in the project area, which would lead to an increase in riparian plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), an ESA-listed endangered species, and monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), an ESA candidate species and a state Conservation Status Species, has the potential to be present in the project area, but there is no critical habitat designated for any species (IPaC, 2024). There are no other federally-listed or state special-status wildlife species or their habitats known to occur in the project area. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by crews accessing sites during work hours and from the noise of the hydraulic post driver and mini excavators. It is unlikely the project would result in long-term displacement of wildlife. Some aquatic invertebrates or amphibians may be displaced or killed during installation, but rapid reoccupation of these areas by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following the project would be likely. The structures, and the debris they are designed to collect, would increase aquatic habitat for these species over the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Federally-listed Middle Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) are present in Sixmile Creek, as well as Pacific lamprey (*Entosphenus tridentatus*). There are no other federally-listed or state special-status species in the project area. Project activities would temporarily disturb nearby fish due to crew presence in the stream. It is expected that fish would avoid the area when crews are present but would reoccupy the area immediately after crews leave. Water quality may decrease temporarily due to sediments disturbed during the installation of posts, but turbidity would be monitored during implementation. Impacts would be minimized by following BPA's Habitat Improvement Program Biological Opinion requirements and conservation measures. Adding structures could increase the amount of surface water, reactivate portions of the floodplain, and increase aquatic habitat in the project area, which would result in long-term benefits. USFWS would work with US Army Corp of Engineers to acquire a Clean Water Act Permit prior to implementation.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands are not present; thus, the action does not have the potential to impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The work would not result in an increase in groundwater use nor change the hydrological regime and, therefore, would not affect groundwater recharge.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access to field sites is on existing road networks and all activities are compatible with local land use. Land use would not change. The project is not located in a specially-designated area or Wild and Scenic River.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary and permanent changes would occur during construction. Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as work zone conditions, vehicles, and equipment. Sixmile Creek and surrounding habitat would be permanently changed and restored to natural conditions which would improve visual quality overall. Therefore, the proposed action would not have a permanent impact on visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the project site would be very minor and short-term during construction. A negligible amount of temporary dust and vehicle emissions could be generated during project activities. Emissions and dust levels would return to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase above 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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. Personnel are trained in proper equipment management techniques, and all applicable safety regulations would be followed. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions and no CERCLA sites within the project area.

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 landowner has provided approval prior to accessing project areas and performing work.

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

Signed:

Israel Duran
Environmental Protection Specialist