

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Latah SWCD Planting at East Fork Potlatch and Fence Maintenance at Previous Restoration Sites

Project No.: 2008-604-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz – EWM-4

Location: Latah County, Idaho

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 Latah Soil and Water Conservation District (Latah SWCD) to plant riparian vegetation and maintain fencing at restoration project sites in the Potlatch River watershed. The Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) and Latah SWCD have planned construction, in 2024 through 2025, of in-stream habitat structures along 0.6 miles of the East Fork Potlatch River on state-owned land for a separate project not funded by BPA. Under the proposed action, with BPA funding, Latah SWCD would seed and plant native plants in approximately 36 acres of riparian area disturbed by construction to improve shading, future natural tree recruitment, and resources for beaver. Fence repairs would occur at several previously restored sites. These actions would improve the quality and quantity of habitat and address several factors limiting steelhead production.

All plants and materials would be transported to the site via 4x4 truck and/or ATV. Disturbed locations would be seeded and mulched with a native grass and forb mix. A diverse mix of native trees, shrubs, forbs, grasses, and grass-like plants would be planted throughout the project site to provide a variety of rooting depths for soil stability, to provide increased ground coverage to prevent weed encroachment, and to increase wildlife and pollinator habitat. Planting would be conducted by Latah SWCD field crews and would utilize hand tools such as shovels, gas-powered augers, and water-jet stingers for installation of vegetation cuttings. Temporary protective fencing would be installed around plants as needed. Riparian plantings would be focused in the stream channel to the top of the bank. Some additional caged plantings would be offset from the stream bank but would remain within the riparian corridor.

Planting efforts would occur over multiple years. The site would be revisited annually to ensure plant survival and to control weeds. Vegetation maintenance would include selective replanting if necessary to replace mortalities in previously planted areas to support a robust, native riparian plant community. Existing plants would be maintained with mulch additions, repair or replacement of temporary protective fencing, and weed control activities to assure survival. Weed control would be limited to removal by hand or with weed eaters.

Fence maintenance would include repairing or replacing broken or damaged wires, fence panels and wooden spans, tightening loose wires, securing fences with t-posts, adding/replacing fence stays, replacing vertical fence posts, removing downed trees across fences, replacing wire with removable panels at stream crossings, and adjusting or replacing broken gates. Latah SWCD field crews would utilize hand tools such as manual or gas-powered post drivers and augers. Fence maintenance would occur at the previously restored sites listed below.

Site	Ownership	Latitude, Longitude
Upper Corral Creek/ Vassar Meadow	Federal (Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, US Forest Service (USFS))	46.846528, -116.538210
Upper Corral Creek/ Five-Acre Meadow	Federal (Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, USFS)	46.842440, -116.536252
East Fork Potlatch River/ Two-Mile Meadow	Federal (Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, USFS)	46.801801, -116.409293
Corral Creek/Upper Tee Meadow	Private & State (IDL)	46.841844, -116.503382

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 State of Idaho 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.

Jacquelyn Schei
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: Latah SWCD Planting at East Fork Potlatch and Fence Maintenance at Previous Restoration Sites

Project Site Description

Proposed activities would occur on federal, state, and private lands in the Potlatch River watershed in Latah County, Idaho. All sites are locations of previous restoration activities, and the proposed actions would be within the boundaries of the original restoration extent. The Potlatch River watershed is part of the Palouse Prairie ecosystem of Northern Idaho and Eastern Washington. Riparian conditions along streams have been affected by extensive logging, agriculture, and grazing land uses. Over forty percent of the basin is now devoted to farming and ranching. Fencing at sites has been installed with the intent to keep livestock out of the restored areas to protect vegetation and streams and address steelhead limiting factors, including high water temperatures, flashy stream flows, low summer base flows, lack of complexity in stream composition, barriers to migration, and sedimentation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: For all sites, BPA reviewed Section 106 consultations conducted during the original restoration implementation and made the following determinations:

Site	Section 106 Lead, Original Consultation Date, Determination, Responses	BPA Determination and Date
East Fork Potlatch River (planting)	US Army Corps of Engineers, July 2024, No Historic Properties Affected, Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred on 7/22/2024.	BPA has reviewed the decisions and documentation for this project, which remain valid. No further consultation is required for the current proposed actions having BPA funding related to plantings and revegetation work that would occur in this area. 10/7/2024 (ID 2024 050)
Upper Corral Creek/Vassar Meadow (fence maintenance)	USFS, 2/15/2015, No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties, Idaho SHPO concurred on 3/15/2015.	USFS confirmed their original Section 106 review remains valid and that no further work is required for the current proposed actions having BPA funding. BPA reviewed and agreed with this determination. 9/3/2024 (ID 2024 046)
Upper Corral Creek/Five-Acre Meadow (fence maintenance)	USFS, 2/15/2015, No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties, Idaho SHPO concurred on 3/15/2015.	USFS confirmed their original Section 106 review remains valid and that no further work is required for the current proposed actions having BPA funding. BPA reviewed and agreed with this determination. 9/3/2024 (ID 2024 045)

Site	Section 106 Lead, Original Consultation Date, Determination, Responses	BPA Determination and Date
East Fork Potlatch River/Two-Mile Meadow (fence maintenance)	USFS, 5/18/2017, No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties, Idaho SHPO concurred on 6/26/2017.	USFS confirmed their original Section 106 review remains valid and that no further consultation is required for the current proposed actions having BPA funding related to fence maintenance. The USFS decision is valid through 2029 unless revoked. BPA reviewed and agreed with this determination. 9/30/2024 (ID 2024 044)
Corral Creek/Upper Tee Meadow (fence maintenance)	BPA (ID 2018 027), 6/24/2019, No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties; Idaho SHPO concurred on 7/8/2019.	Proposed actions fall within the scope of BPA's previous Section 106 consultation efforts and the original determination remains appropriate. 5/21/2024 (ID 2024 052)

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Planting tools would be limited to shovels or mechanized hand tools. No heavy equipment operations (e.g., bulldozers, excavators) would be used, so there would be no large-scale soil displacement, soil mixing, or other mechanical soil disturbance. Fence maintenance would have minimal soil disturbance where posts need to be replaced. Hand tools would be used (post hole digger or augers) to make holes for replacement posts. The majority of the fence maintenance work would be above ground and completed by crews with hand tools (wire tightening, wire and panel replacement, debris removal) with minimal to no soil disturbance. Minor and temporary ground disturbances would occur as part of the proposed actions but would not impact the geology and soils. Proposed treatment areas have been previously disturbed by work during implementation of original restoration activities. The proposed actions would be intended to improve habitat conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no federal or state special-status plant species known to exist in the project area. Minor and temporary vegetation disturbances associated with site access would occur as part of the proposed activities but would have short-term effects on vegetation. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects from planting native plants and repairing fencing to keep cattle out of restored areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), which is ESA-listed Threatened, has the potential to be in the project area; however, there is no critical habitat in the project area and the elevation of the sites (below 3,000 feet) is not considered suitable habitat for foraging and reproduction (typically 4,000 feet and above). Wolverine generally avoid areas with human activity and would be unlikely to be present in project areas when work is being conducted. Therefore, the project would have no effect on the North America wolverine.

There are no state special-status wildlife species or their habitats known to exist in the project area. Wildlife present during project activities may be temporarily disturbed by human presence and noise, but effects would be temporary and removed when the crews

leave. Improved habitat conditions would result in long term positive impacts, including increased riparian plant density, diversity, and habitat structure.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project's potential impacts to federally-listed species would be covered under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program Biological Opinion (HIP BiOp). Relevant HIP conservation measures pertaining to project activities would be applied. Federally-listed Snake River Basin steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and designated critical habitat are present in the Potlatch River watershed. There are no other federally-listed or state special-status species in the project area.

The proposed actions would take place near, but not in, any water bodies. No changes to the existing conditions of streams would occur. Short term impacts on listed and non-listed fish in the project area would be disturbance from human presence, noise, and possible minimal sediment runoff at the planting site. Conservation measures would be implemented to minimize potential effects. Proposed actions would help restore native riparian vegetation for the benefit of aquatic species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the hydrology within the project areas, and any activities within or near wetlands would be limited to methods with little to no ground disturbance. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur. Effects on wetlands would be temporary and limited to plantings and fence repair to improve conditions for native wetland species. This would have the long-term effect of improving the quality of local wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater are proposed. No herbicide use is proposed. The proposed actions would have no impacts to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change and there would be no impact to specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality. Fencing already exists at the sites and the proposed repair actions and plantings would help return the project areas to more natural vegetative conditions.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to the air quality from dust and exhaust due to vehicle use for site access because of this project. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from crews or equipment would be short-term and temporary, would occur 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. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions. All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and 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: The Latah SWCD has landowner permission to access and implement proposed actions at sites on private lands. Access would be coordinated on an annual basis with landowners. Latah SWCD coordinates work on state endowment lands with the Idaho Department of Lands and on federal lands in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests with the US Forest Service, Palouse Ranger District.

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

Signed:

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist