

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Asotin Creek Project Area 3.2 Fish Habitat Restoration

Project No.: 1994-018-05

Project Manager: Jennifer Lord, EWU-4

Location: Asotin County, Washington

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 Asotin County Conservation District (District) to increase instream habitat complexity in Project Area (PA) 3.2 of Asotin Creek by installing instream structures, enhancing side channel connection, and improving riparian vegetative conditions. These actions would improve watershed conditions and habitat, primarily for ESA-listed steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), but also for Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*) and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*).

The District would achieve its objectives by installing instream structures (boulders and large wood), developing side channels, bank terracing, riparian planting, and treating weeds in the project area. Using outside funding, the District would also install a prefabricated bridge and livestock exclusion fencing at the site to allow cattle and ATVs to cross over Asotin Creek instead of through it to access pasture lands. The livestock exclusion fencing would prevent cattle from accessing the creek at each end of the bridge and would be connected to existing cattle fencing in the pastures along both sides of the creek. The BPA-funded habitat restoration actions would be implemented over two years with the proposed actions over approximately 4,300 feet (0.8 miles) downstream of the bridge occurring in the same year as the bridge and fence construction (Phase 1) and those over approximately 1,500 feet (0.3 miles) upstream of the bridge occurring the following year (Phase 2).

In the project area, Asotin Creek is bordered by private property that would be accessed from Asotin Creek Road on the north side of the creek. Existing ranch roads or feedlot areas would be used for construction access to the creek. Three temporary staging/stockpile areas with nearby refueling/fuel storage areas (minimum 150 feet from the creek) would be created in the existing feedlot.

Single boulders and boulder clusters would be placed throughout the mainstem channel. Boulder clusters would also be used to help stabilize large wood placed within the channel. Boulders would be machine-placed and would not be anchored in any way. Boulders would be imported from offsite, and an excavator would be used to move boulders into place. A total of 540 boulders, 24 to 48 inches in diameter, would be added to the channel bed (414 in Phase 1; 126 in Phase 2).

Large wood (LW) would be incorporated in the main channel and side channels in the form of buried rootwads, sweeper logs, and whole trees/treetops. Stabilizing large wood would require a combination of methods including bank trenching and securing with embedded boulders and piles at the streambank. Material used for these structures would be imported from offsite sources and an excavator would be used to dig trenches, move material into place, and bury portions of the LW structures. A total of 266 individual LW pieces, not including piles and slash material, would be installed as part of the 83 LW structures (64 in Phase 1; 19 in Phase 2) in the main and side channels. Piles would be logs driven into the soil using a vibratory head driver to provide stability for structures and would be cut so they do not extend more than two feet above any key piece of LW. Slash would be smaller woody materials that would be woven into gaps between LW pieces where needed. The proposed LW structures include:

- Flow Deflection Jam - engineered log jam that would be buried in the channel bank consisting of four large logs with rootwads protruding into the main channel, a large log with treetop extending into the channel, and 12 large to small racking logs. The entire structure would be anchored with piles. Four piles would be used in each structure. Biodegradable rope would be used to secure the logs together and provide additional stability. Slash would be placed between logs. Three flow deflection jams would be installed in Phase 1 and three in Phase 2.
- Bank Rootwad Jam - two medium logs with rootwads plus two medium to large treetops and six small racking logs buried in the bank for stability with rootwads partially embedded in the channel. Slash material would be placed in gaps between the logs. Seven bank rootwad jams would be installed in Phase 1 and one in Phase 2.
- Sweeper Logs - tops of two large trees extended into the channel with the base buried in the bank for ballast and stability. Seven sweeper log structures would be installed in Phase 1 and eight in Phase 2.
- Single Rootwads - single logs or clusters of single logs partially buried in the channel bank or in the bed of the main channel with rootwads placed in the flow. These structures would be stabilized with boulders and overburden ballast. Twenty-six single rootwads would be installed in Phase 1 and seven in Phase 2.
- Side Channel Logs – treetops of large or small logs placed individually in side channels. Logs would be woven between existing trees for stabilization. Treetops may be embedded to secure them in place if necessary. A total of 21 side channel logs would be installed during Phase 1.

Installation of all LW structure types except Side Channel Logs would require that the work area be isolated from the main channel and dewatered first. An isolation structure with an impermeable layer would be used to isolate the work area. Straw wattles and sediment fencing would be used for erosion and sediment control. If aquatic or amphibious species are present in the isolated area, they would be captured and placed in the active channel before the area is dewatered.

Four side channels, ranging from 170 to 380 feet in length, would be developed by excavating the left or right bank of the main channel to expose native soils. The work would not include import of streambed materials or washing fines into the streambed. Three side channels would be developed during Phase 1 and one during Phase 2. Bank terracing would occur along approximately 300 feet of the bank of the main channel and involve excavating soils along the banks. The terracing would maintain the existing bank toe and lay the bank back at a 2:1 (horizontal to vertical) slope to allow for the installation of LW and riparian vegetation. Bank terracing would occur during Phase 1. Approximately 2,050 cubic yards of soils would be excavated for side channel development and bank terracing. Work area isolation and dewatering

would occur prior to excavation. An excavator would be used and material would be disposed of onsite or used for stabilization of LW structures.

Riparian planting would occur in riparian areas throughout the project area. Planting efforts would take place in the winter and spring following construction of each phase. Up to 3.5 acres would be revegetated with approximately 1,700 native trees and shrubs. Planting would focus on areas where there are gaps in the existing riparian canopy and areas disturbed during construction. All shrubs excavated during construction would be salvaged to the extent practical and replanted or buried throughout the excavated areas of the site. Herbaceous grass and forb species would be seeded throughout all areas disturbed during construction, including in temporary access, staging, and fueling areas after they are no longer in use, with native seed mixes that are readily available and appropriate for the site. Seeding would be conducted through broadcast hand seeding methods. Seeding may be accompanied by mulching (weed free straw) to reduce erosion, provide ground cover, and reduce the likelihood of invasive species encroachment. Seeding may also occur a year after construction and may require scarifying the original seed bed. Weeds in the project area may be removed, up to a year after construction, via mechanical or chemical means. Crews may dig up, pull, or spot spray weeds in the project area with herbicides to reduce encroachment of invasive species in the project area. Equipment used for planting, seeding, and weeding would include shovels, weed eaters, brush cutters, planting spades, and planting bars.

The District would monitor the effectiveness of the improvements for 10 years after construction is complete. If failures in system function, structure function and integrity, or risks to infrastructure, riverscape processes, or fish passage occur, the District would implement adaptive management procedures. These procedures would include installation of new structures of the same type originally installed (not to exceed two per year) and/or modification to structures (not to exceed addition of more than 100% of materials used during original construction of the structure).

Funding the proposed actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River Power 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.).

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.

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Project Site Description

The project site is located on Asotin Creek approximately four miles southwest of the city of Asotin, Washington, along Asotin Creek Road, from river mile 4.0 to 5.2. Asotin Creek watershed runs through Columbia River basalts and cuts into the landscape to form steep valleys separated by flat-topped ridges. Most of the land in the watershed, including the property where the project would be installed, is privately owned and used for agriculture or cattle operations. The project area is surrounded by shrub-steppe grassland with a thin strip of riparian vegetation along the creek. The channel has been straightened and confined by levees to protect private property from high-flow events and is mostly confined against the right bank valley wall. Most of the left bank floodplain is used for cattle operations and includes barns, outbuildings, feed storage, equipment storage, and a winter feeding/calving area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no historic properties affected on May 30, 2024 (BPA CR Project No.: WA 2023 120). Consulting parties were the Nez Perce Tribe, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). On July 16, 2024, BPA sent consulting parties an amended letter with no change to the determination. DAHP sent concurrence with BPA's determination on the same day and the Nez Perce Tribe concurred on July 18, 2024. No other responses were received.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The installation of large wood structures, development of side channels, bank terracing, and planting of riparian vegetation would disturb soils in the project area. Best Management Practices (BMPs) for erosion and sediment control would be followed to minimize in-stream turbidity and excessive runoff during work. Work areas would be isolated and dewatered to minimize erosion and turbidity. All disturbed areas would be stabilized after construction by planting, seeding, and mulching.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), ESA-listed as Threatened, has the potential to be in the project area. Current land use practices in the project area (cattle feedlot, pastures, and storage buildings) have resulted in limited vegetation in the project

area upland of the creek. There are no known occurrences of Spalding's catchfly in the project area and unlikely to be so given the current use. There are no state special-status plant species documented in the project area. Minor and temporary vegetation disturbances would occur as part of the proposed actions, mainly in the riparian area. BMPs would be employed to avoid damage to native trees and to salvage native shrubs and replant them after construction. All areas disturbed by construction activity would be replanted or seeded with native species to stabilize topsoil, prevent introduction of invasive species, and improve habitat quality. Overall, this project would have a positive impact on vegetation conditions in the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), ESA-listed as Threatened, has the potential to be in the project area; however, there is no critical habitat and no known occurrences of the species in the project area. Therefore, no ESA-listed species would be affected by the project. The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), an ESA Candidate species, also has the potential to be present in the project area, but its presence at the site would likely be temporary due to current land use practices and lack of food sources.

There would be temporary disturbances to non-listed wildlife due to human presence and equipment noise. Conservation measures would be used to minimize impacts. Equipment use would be avoided during nesting and breeding seasons of nesting birds. Work would avoid eagle nesting areas, although it is unlikely any will be present in the project area as they are typically located in extremely rugged areas and on rocky cliffs. No habitats would be modified to any degree that might permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from equipment noise and human presence. Wildlife would likely reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed activities. The proposed project is expected to improve aquatic and riparian habitat, which would have a beneficial effect for wildlife species in the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed actions would alter portions of the waterway and would temporarily disrupt aquatic life. Impacts to ESA-listed species, including steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), and to critical habitat for steelhead and bull trout, would be minimized by adherence to conservation measures in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion (BiOp) under Section 7 of the ESA. Construction activities would have temporary effects such as increased turbidity, habitat disturbances, and increased physiological stress to aquatic life. The project would be constructed during low flows and the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife in-water work window. BMPs would be implemented to minimize impacts such as soil erosion, excessive runoff of sediment into the creek, and increased turbidity. Work areas would be isolated from the active channel to minimize impacts to aquatic species. In the long term, this project would improve water quality and habitat for ESA-listed and non-listed aquatic species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no designated wetlands located in the project area per the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground-disturbing activities are not likely to intersect with groundwater and would have no impact on aquifers. Construction BMPs would be implemented to prevent contamination of groundwater from equipment leaks or spills. Groundwater recharge and water table levels would potentially improve as a result of increased water storage with the proposed side channel development. The proposed project would either have no effect or a positive effect on groundwater.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minimal change to land use and no impact to specially designated areas. The project is located on private property used for cattle ranching and there is no public access to the creek. Although the project would limit access to the creek by cattle, that is the intended outcome of the restoration work. Minor changes to overall land use associated with a slight decrease in cattle use would occur.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would result in temporary and permanent changes to the landscape. Material staging, excavation equipment, vegetation disturbances, and human presence would be minor and short-term throughout the construction period. Upon project completion, changes such as increased riparian habitat, boulders and LW in the creek, and reconnected side channels would be permanent and visually consistent with a naturally occurring stream. Overall, the project would improve visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be short-term effects from use of vehicles and equipment generating exhaust and dust. The emissions would be of short duration and consistent in amount and duration with routine vehicle and equipment use currently at the site for cattle operations. BMPs would be used to limit the amount of dust created by equipment. Conditions would be expected to return to normal immediately after the project is completed. There would be no long-term effects to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Noise from vehicles and equipment is anticipated. The noise would be of short duration, during daylight hours only, and consistent in volume or duration with routine activities at the property and surrounding properties. This noise would be temporary and cause no long-term impacts.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All staff would use BMPs to protect worker health and safety during construction. Equipment may use hazardous materials; these materials would be disposed of off-site.

according to all local, state, and federal regulations. The proposed activities are not considered hazardous, nor would they result in any health risks to the public.

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 District has an agreement in place with the private landowner to access the property to perform the proposed work and to monitor for up to 10 years.

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