

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Pole Creek Wildlife Area Maintenance

Project No.: 1995-057-03

Project Manager: Cecilia Brown, EWM-4

Location: Owyhee 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 provide funding to the Shoshone Paiute Tribe for maintenance activities on lands managed for fish and wildlife habitat. Fences, gates, and signage would be maintained (in-place and in-kind); 300 feet of new fenceline would be constructed; and invasive weeds would be treated with herbicide. Surveys for native plants and the Columbia Spotted Frog would be conducted. Prescribed grazing would be applied to maintain plant health and vigor, and small (stage 1 – less than 10' tall) juniper trees would be cut by hand and laid on the ground (no heavy equipment would be used in any of these actions).

Activities would occur at the Pole Creek Ranch wildlife management area located at Latitude 42.561973 and Longitude -116.577285.

Funding these actions assists Bonneville in mitigating for effects of development and operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System on fish and wildlife in the Columbia River and its tributaries, under the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (the Northwest Power Act) (16 USC § 839b(h)(10)(A)).

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/ Robert W. Shull

Robert W Shull
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
CorSource Technology Group

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

November 6, 2020

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date

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: Pole Creek Wildlife Area Maintenance

Project Site Description

The Pole Creek Wildlife Area is a former private ranch that was recently acquired for the Shoshone Paiute Tribe to manage for wildlife benefit. Most of the project sites are on flat and gently sloping sagebrush steppe habitat along Pole Creek, a tributary of the Owyhee River. The vegetation is primarily grass and sage, with essentially no trees other than scattered juniper on the upper slopes of the canyons, which are gradually extending their reach into the lower grasslands. The riparian areas and streambanks have been overgrazed for decades; they support no willow or other woody riparian vegetation, and the stream condition is degraded.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some of the proposed actions have potential to affect cultural resources: the fence maintenance and construction, the managed grazing, and the juniper cutting. All of these actions have completed consultation under NHPA Section 106 which was concluded in prior years. The actions considered in this Categorical Exclusion are the remaining portions of projects consulted on in the recent past.

The fence work (maintenance and construction), and grazing were consulted on in 2019 under BPA consultation # ID2018 036, with SHPO concurrence (No Adverse Effect) under SHPO Review No. 2019-133.

The juniper cutting was consulted on in 2020 with proposed avoidance measures to ensure no adverse effect to historic properties (ID2019 042). SHPO concurrence (No Adverse Effect) was received on 1/24/20 (SHPO Rev. No.: 216).

The other actions: invasive weed spraying, and the plant and Columbia spotted frog surveys would not have any ground disturbance and would have no potential to impact cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No heavy equipment would be used in the juniper cutting or fence work. No surface soils would be displaced, mixed, or compacted by these actions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status species or habitats are within the project sites. Herbicide would be used for spot-treatment of targeted invasive/non-native plants only;

Juniper cutting would kill young juniper less than 10' tall that are extending the range of this plant into other vegetative zones in the absence of natural fire. All juniper larger than 10-feet would be retained. This action would help restore native grasses and shrubs that had been displaced by the encroaching juniper.

The prescribed grazing that is proposed would be designed to protect and restore the vigor of native bunchgrasses on the site.

Fence maintenance and construction would not disturb plants beyond the minimal trampling by workers.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status wildlife species or habitats occupy the project sites.

No plants identified for herbicide treatment are used preferentially for habitat purposes by native wildlife species. Some animals may be exposed to applied herbicides through contact with, or ingestion of, treated vegetation but applications according to label instructions would prevent harmful exposure levels.

No habitats would be modified to any degree that would permanently displace any resident wildlife. All human presence and activity associated with these actions would temporarily disturb and displace nearby wildlife, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No fence work, weed treatment, or other action proposed here would physically alter any aquatic habitat site; there would be no adverse physical changes to water bodies, floodplains, or fish from these actions. All spraying for invasive plant species would occur in upland areas outside of the wetted areas of the streams.

No Federal/state special-status fish or aquatic species occupy Pole Creek Ranch.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The wildlife area being maintained contains only stream-side wetlands, but these areas would not be impacted since no heavy equipment would be used, and no action would modify stream beds, banks, or riparian areas. Some riparian wetland plants may be affected as invasive plants would be treated with herbicide with some small potential for contact with non-target native plants.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no groundwater withdrawal. There would be no potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills since no heavy equipment is being used. Herbicide would be applied as spot treatments only, with limited or no potential to reach groundwater if applied according to label instructions (as is required).

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No action would 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: No prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made. Cutting of juniper would introduce downed trees across the landscape, which may be unsightly to some, but the trees are small and would be expected to breakdown and lie closer to the ground surface over time and be less visible. Fencing is common across this landscape and 300' of new fence would not be a change in visual character.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be limited potential for exhaust and greenhouse gas emissions since no heavy equipment is being used. The only source would be from vehicles used to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the sites. Herbicide would be applied as spot treatments by hand-held back-pack sprayers only, with limited or no potential to aerosolize or drift.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be limited potential for noise impacts since no heavy equipment is being used. The only noise source would be from humans working on the site, the use of hand tools and chainsaws for fence maintenance and construction, juniper cutting, and the use of vehicles to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the sites.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicle operation and working with hand and power tools have their attendant risk to users, but there would be no condition created from these actions that would introduce new human health or safety hazards or risk. No condition created by these actions would increase the burden on the local health, safety, and emergency-response infrastructure. Neither project actions nor operation of project-associated vehicles on public roads would hinder traffic or access by emergency vehicles.

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 Shoshone Paiute Tribe is the owner of the properties being maintained and is the sponsor of the actions considered in this CX.

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

Signed: /s/ Robert W. Shull

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CorSource Technology Group

November 6, 2020

date