

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Upper John Day Conservation Lands Program, Slaughter House Gulch Juniper Removal 2020/2021

Project No.: 2000-015-00

Project Manager: Timothy Ludington, 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 the Confederate Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWSRO) to cut, pile, and burn juniper stands in Slaughter House Gulch within the Forrest Conservation Area. Funding the proposed actions would 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.).

Work crews from CTWSRO would manually thin dense stands of juniper with handsaws and chainsaws to promote the growth of native forbs and shrubs, thereby improving the habitat conditions and water quality. Work would occur between November and March. Juniper would be cut using handsaws and chainsaws, and would be placed by hand into piles no larger than 6 feet in diameter and 4 feet high. Juniper piles would then be burned in accordance with Oregon Department of Forestry permits during work windows that allow for burning (early spring or late fall). Pickup trucks and similar vehicles would be used to access sites on existing, maintained two-track roads. Approximately 140 acres of land would be thinned during 2020 and 2021.

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/ Lindsey Arotin

Lindsey Arotin
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange _____ October 22, 2020

Katey C. Grange and Date
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

Activities would occur on approximately 140 acres during 2020 and 2021, on non-wetland forest owned and operated by the CTWSRO in Slaughter House Gulch outside of Prairie City, Oregon. The purpose of the conservation area is to restore native upland forest conditions. Due to previous land uses, such as overgrazing and dredge mining, the upland area natural habitat has been severely degraded by non-native vegetation with an overgrowth of western juniper and noxious weeds.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed project would result in no historic properties affected based on inventory work completed in 2017 (SHPO Report No. 28707; SHPO Case No. 16-0847). BPA notified consulting parties, ORSHPO, CTUIR, and CTWSRO, on July 31, 2020. The CTWSRO concurred with BPA's determination on August 12, 2020. No additional responses from consulting parties were received within 30 days.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would have limited, if any, effects on the soil and geological values. All junipers would be manually cut and piled on site. There would be no digging or other ground disturbances as part of this process.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ESA-listed or Federal/State special-status species or habitats within proposed work areas. Removal of juniper would help promote native forbs and shrubs and reduce noxious weeds, which would result in an overall improvement.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minimal impact to wildlife and habitat related to temporary disturbance associated with noise and tree removal. No work would occur during breeding or nesting season and there are no terrestrial ESA-list species and there would be no effect on ESA-listed wildlife species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although ESA-listed species, steelhead and bull trout, can be found near where the proposed action would occur, activities would not involve any in-water work or impact to water bodies or fish; therefore, the proposed project would have no effect on ESA-listed fish species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not take place within or around wetlands. Therefore, there is no potential to affect wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There is no potential to affect groundwater and aquifers. There are no ground disturbing activities involved in this project.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no permanent changes to land use and no impacts to specially designated areas. Recreation is not likely to be effected. Visitorship where activities are proposed is minimal and primarily on weekends, work would be conducted during normal business hours on weekdays. Therefore, there is no potential to affect land use or specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Juniper removal and burning activities would be limited to a short period, would result in no long-term impairments, and would ultimately improve vegetation conditions and restore the land to a more natural visual appearance.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Prescribed burning activities would result in period of reduced air quality; however, burning would be limited to a short period of time and when weather conditions are favorable.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Negligible amount of noise would be generated by chainsaws and hand tools.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: This activity would not be considered hazardous and would not result in any health or safety risks to the general public. All workers implementing the project would follow OSHA guidelines

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: No notification necessary. All work is on existing tribal-owned lands, and would include the use of two track private roads and existing public roads.

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

Signed: /s/ Lindsey Arotin October 22, 2020
Lindsey Arotin, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist