

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Buck Meadows Fence Reconstruction Project

Project No.: 2010-003-00

Project Manager: Jenny Lord, EWM-4

Location: Idaho 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 the Nez Perce Tribe to reconstruct livestock exclusion fencing around Buck Meadows in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest.

Existing fence line, constructed around 1990 and reconstructed in 2002, would be replaced. The fence surrounds Buck Meadows along American Creek, a tributary to the South Fork Clearwater River (Latitude 45.753481/Longitude -115.951668). The current fence is constructed of wooden posts and four-strand barbed wire and would be reconstructed of the same design. Approximately 2.3 miles of deteriorated post and wire fencing would be reconstructed.

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

/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/ Katey C. Grange August 23, 2021
Katey C. Grange Date
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist, List of Fish Screen O&M Sites

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: Buck Meadows Fence Reconstruction Project

Project Site Description

The Buck Meadows fence is located along a forest edge around a large meadow and riparian zone along American Creek. In this edge habitat, dense conifer forest and woody shrubs occupy the upslope areas with grass/forb meadows and riparian woodlands downslope. Fence lines are located in and across all of these habitat types, and in the ecotone where two or more of these come together. The fence reconstruction would occur on USFS-managed lands in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Past (2002) cultural resource surveys and consultations have been conducted on this fence line. One "Not Eligible" historic site (a cabin ruin) was identified within the area of potential effect for this project, but project actions do not overlay the site and would thus not affect it. The US Forest Service completed the Section 106 consultation and made a "No Inventory" decision using the USFS's Programmatic Agreement with Idaho SHPO.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Fence reconstruction would require wooden post replacement in numerous locations at corners, gates, other locations where metal posts would not suffice. Metal post would be used between wooden post locations and would be driven into the ground rather than digging post holes. The total amount of soil disturbance would be minimal.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Fence replacement would not disturb plants beyond the minimal trampling by workers and post-hole digging in the immediate vicinity of wooden post replacement sites. No ESA-listed, or "special status," plant species are present at Buck Meadows.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status wildlife species or habitats are within the project site. Larger wildlife using nearby habitats may be disturbed and temporarily displaced by noise and human presence during fence reconstruction activities, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely.

No habitats would be modified to any degree that might permanently displace any resident wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No 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.

ESA-listed fish species (steelhead and bull trout) and their designated critical habitats are present in American Creek but there would be no effect to these species or their critical habitat.

HIP conservation measures would be applied for fence construction.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed fencing is along the forest/meadow edge upslope of the wetlands along the creek. The existing fence crosses five small tributary creeks to American Creek with their associated riparian wetlands, but fencing across wetlands is with metal posts driven into the ground, thus no post holes would be dug into wetlands in this project. This protective-fencing impact to wetlands is minimal, and necessary to keep cattle from creating more extensive damage to wetlands through trampling and vegetation removal.

Fence maintenance workers would likely walk through wetlands during fence inspections and construction, but no other surface disturbance would occur.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The fence construction would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The fence construction would not change land use or the designation of any land.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Visual quality of the immediate area may be impacted during construction activities due to material staging and motor vehicle presence, but this impact would be short-term.

The new fence replaces a fence that had been on the site for decades, so no new artificial features would be introduced in this landscape by this fence reconstruction.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Air quality may be impacted by the workers' motor vehicle travel to the project site, but this impact would be local and temporary

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Work activities would raise noise levels above ambient levels for short periods of time, but the noise level is low and would only be during regular working hours for a few weeks.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicle operation, working with hand tools, and working in forest and meadows have their attendant risks to workers, but there would be no condition created from these actions that would introduce new human health or safety hazards or risk into the environment.

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: NA

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: Work would occur on National Forest System lands managed by the Nez Perce Clearwater National Forest. The National Forest is a cooperator on this project and would be notified of project activities

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 August 23, 2021
Robert W Shull Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
CorSource Technology Group