

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Stabler Bend Invasive Vegetation Removal and Water Data Collection

Project No.: 1998-019-00

Project Manager: Jamie Cleveland

Location: Skamania 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 Underwood Conservation District (UCD) to remove invasive vegetation at the Stabler Bend Side Channel project site and collect water data along the Wind River. Vegetation treatment in riparian areas and water monitoring would contribute to ongoing steelhead habitat restoration efforts within the Wind River watershed. These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with National Marine Fisheries 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.).

Invasive Vegetation Removal: UDC would coordinate with Skamania County Noxious Weed Department to treat and remove invasive vegetation such as: reed canary grass, Himalayan blackberries, and Scotch broom within the proposed Stabler Bend project site. Treatments would consist of manual vegetation removal by hand or with hand tools and spot treating with herbicides and surfactants using a backpack sprayer. Activities would occur in fall and spring prior to and following construction as needed. The site would be accessed by landowner approved access roads and foot paths.

Water Data Collection: UDC would operate temperature and stage loggers at 7 locations along approximately 10 miles of the middle and lower Wind River watershed. Site visits would occur 1-2 times per year and consist of visual inspection, data download, and adjustments to logger position as needed. All data loggers are existing, non-intrusive, and require minimal maintenance. Sites would be accessed by existing roads or by foot on established trails.

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);

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 Wind River is located in the Washington Cascades range and discharges into the Columbia River upstream of the Bonneville Dam. The Stabler Bend Project site is located on private residential land in Stevenson-Carson, in Skamania County, Washington. One of the water data collection sites is located at the Stabler Bend site; the remaining 6 are located along the Wind River on federally-owned land within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The region's landscape and habitat are largely influenced by past logging and agricultural activities, resulting in excessive growth of invasive vegetation and diminished riparian zones and floodplain functions.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation:

Vegetation Maintenance: BPA made a determination of no historic properties affected on January 24, 2017. Washington State Historical Preservation Office concurred with BPA's determination January 26, 2017. BPA did not receive comments or additional correspondence from the Yakama Nation within the 30-day consultation period.

Water Data Collection: BPA made a determination that these actions have no potential to cause effects on historic properties on August 12, 2021.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The removal of invasive vegetation would permanently disturb the soil at the project site. The proposed activities are in preparation of the Stabler Bend side channel restoration project. Treatment prior to construction would serve as a preventative measure to reduce spreading of invasive species and prepare the site for restoring native riparian vegetation as part of the Stabler Bend side channel project. Water data collection would have no anticipated impact.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground and vegetation disturbances would occur as part of the vegetation removal. No ESA-listed, state-listed, or sensitive plant species are known to exist on the site. No designated critical habitat is present. Vegetation disturbance as a result of invasive vegetation removal would later be replanted with native species. Herbicide and surfactants

use would be minimal and targeted so as not to impact surrounding areas. Minor and temporary disturbances may occur during water data collection; lasting impacts would not be anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, state-listed, sensitive wildlife species, or designated critical habitats were documented in, or adjacent to, the vegetation removal area where herbicide application would occur. ESA-listed species; the northern spotted owl, the yellow-billed cuckoo, and the grey wolf; have been found near some of the water data collection sites and two of the northern water data collection sites are located within designated critical habitat for the northern spotted owl. Wildlife present on the sites during vegetation removal and water data collection activities may be temporarily disturbed by human presence and noise, but lasting impact would not be anticipated. The proposed actions would restore riparian vegetation and stream processes, which would likely improve conditions for surrounding wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Bull trout critical habitat is designated throughout the Wind River project area. Although vegetation removal and water data collection would both occur stream adjacent, activities would not involve handling of fish or in-water disturbances aside from handling the data loggers. Herbicides would only be applied by the Skamania County Noxious Weed Department. The herbicides and surfactants used are labeled "for use near water" and approved by the WA Department of Ecology.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the project area and no wetlands would be disturbed during vegetation removal or water data collection.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No actions during vegetation removal or water data collection would have the potential to impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur as a result of vegetation removal or water data collection.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality. The site would be temporarily denuded but restored during the next iteration of the project. Water data collection would have no anticipated impact.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in dust and pollen may occur during vegetation removal. Temporary mist and vapors may occur during herbicide use; however, the herbicide approved by the WA Department of Ecology is used for spot treatment only and has a low evaporation rate. Impacts would be minimal and short term. No impacts are anticipated as a result of water data collection.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The vegetation removal and water data collection would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise due to human presence.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work activities

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 Underwood Conservation District developed and agreed upon the proposed vegetation removal in collaboration with the landowner. The water data collection sites are accessible via public trails, and when water data collection takes place on private property, UCD would coordinate with the private landowner as needed for site access.

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

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| Signed: <u>/s/ Lindsey Arotin</u> | <u>August 24, 2021</u> |
| Lindsey Arotin, ECF - 4 | Date |
| Environmental Protection Specialist | |