Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Wilson-Haun Wallowa River Restoration

Project No.: 1992-026-01

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser

Location: Wallowa County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat; B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish and wildlife

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund Trout Unlimited and the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) to restore a reach of the Wallowa River and the surrounding floodplain, wetlands, and riparian habitat. Restoration would include floodplain grading, large woody material (LWM) placement, and low-tech process based restoration techniques (LTPBR). The proposed project would improve water quality and habitat for adult and juvenile spring Chinook, summer steelhead, bull trout, and Pacific lamprey. Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp) and commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp), 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.)."

Floodplain Connectivity: Excavator grading and channel fill would broaden and level the floodplain; fill incised channels; reconnect side channels; and construct ponds and alcoves. Maximum excavation depth in the channel would be approximately 4 feet, and approximately 6 feet for alcoves and ponds. Excavated material would be used to back fill portions of the channel and for other habitat development activities. The estimated increased acreage of floodplain inundation would be approximately 10 acres at average peak flows.

Instream Complexity: To build habitat and mimic natural stream conditions, a combination of LWM and LTPBR structures would be positioned throughout the floodplain. Methods could include: margin deflector jams; apex jams; channel spanning jams; sweeper logs; floodplain roughness logs; beaver dam analogues; and post-assisted structures. Materials would be locally sourced, transported, and stockpiled at the project site. An excavator would be used to trench or pit the streambed; the wood structures would be embedded; and excavated material would be used to ballast the structures in position.

Riparian and Wetland Vegetation: During construction, mature trees would be avoided; invasive species would be manually removed; and salvageable vegetation within the project

area would be replanted. Nursey plants, plant cuttings, and seed would be used to improve diversity, revegetate excavated topsoil, and reduce invasive species.

The project would occur during the in-water work window (July 15th-August 15th) with the possibility of an extension coordinated with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Department of State Lands (DSL). The site would be accessed by existing access roads. Staging and stockpiling areas would be designated and flagged, and a spill prevention plan would be provided to BPA.

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/ Sarah T. Biegel *June 8, 2022*
Sarah T. Biegel 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.

Proposed Action: Wilson-Haun Wallowa River Restoration

Project Site Description

The Wilson Haun Wallowa River Restoration would occur on the mainstem of the Wallowa River and floodplain about 1 mile north of Lostine, OR in Wallowa County. The proposed project site is privately owned and located within a broad valley bottom and floodplain, downstream of the Hurricane Creek confluence in the Grand Ronde Basin. The project site is at an elevation of approximately 3,200 feet and land use in the valley is mainly residential and agricultural. Existing vegetation consists of a mix of deciduous and conifer trees, native grasses and sedges in wetland areas, and reed canary grass throughout much of the project site. Current in-stream and floodplain conditions are degraded due to historical developments such as overgrazing, channelization, and habitat removal.

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 November 5, 2021 (BPA CR Project No.: OR 2020 053). BPA did not receive a response to the determination correspondence from Oregon State Historical Preservation Office, the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Indian Reservation, or the Nez Perce Tribe within the 30-day consultation period.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Channel and floodplain restoration would permanently disturb the soil during construction. Best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to prevent erosion during construction activities. Construction equipment operated within the channel or lower floodplains would use bio-based hydraulic fluids. All areas denuded of vegetation would be refurnished with topsoil and replanted to prevent erosion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Permanent changes to the project area vegetation would occur as a result of the restoration. According to the U.S. FWS's Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) the MacFarlane's four-o'clock and the Spalding catchfly, both threatened species, may be present in this region; no designated critical habitat is present. However, there are no documented occurrences of any special-status plant species on or near the project site.

Project sponsors and the landowner confirmed that these species have not been observed on or near the project site. In addition, presence is highly unlikely due to the site's degraded condition, elevation, lack of associated species, and predominant coverage of invasive species, such as reed canary grass. If either species were found, efforts would be made to avoid disturbance, but the proposed action is not anticipated to impact any special-status species. During construction, invasive species would be removed during excavation. Native vegetation would be salvaged when possible and disturbed areas would be revegetated with seed and native species. Overall, this project would improve the riparian habitat and prevent erosion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, state-listed, or sensitive wildlife species were documented in, or adjacent to, the project areas and no designated critical habitat is present. Wildlife present on the site during channel and floodplain restoration may be temporarily disturbed by construction traffic, noise, and human presence. 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: Restoration of the channel and floodplain would permanently alter the waterway and temporarily disrupt wildlife. No known state-listed special-status fish species are present. Impacts to ESA-listed species (Snake River steelhead, bull trout, Snake River spring Chinook, and lamprey) would be covered under BPA's programmatic Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinion with the USFWS and NMFS. BMPs would be used to prevent soil erosion and excess sediment downstream. Work zone isolation structures would be installed and fish salvage would be conducted by ODFW biologist prior to dewatering; these activities would have temporary effects to the body of water and fish such as: increased turbidity, habitat disturbances, and increase in physiological stress to aquatic life. This project would improve critical spawning and rearing habitat for ESA-listed species.

Trout Unlimited obtained the following permits:

- Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permit under the Regional General Permit (RGP) 6 from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on May 26, 2022. RGP-6 is covered by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) under a CWA Section 401 Water Quality Certification for the Reissuance of Regional General Permit #6 with Modifications for Bonneville Power Administration Funded Habitat Improvement Projects – Corps No. NWP-2022-93
- Removal-Fill Permit from the Oregon Department of State and Lands (DSL) on April 21, 2022, to satisfy Oregon Statutes (ORS), Chapter 196—Columbia River Gorge; Ocean Resource Planning; Wetlands; Removal and Fill-Section 196.795-990 – Permit No.: 63718-RF
- Zone Permit from the Wallowa County Planning Department on September 30, 2021, to fulfill the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) ESA Section 7(a)(1) Conservation Action Program – Zone Permit no.: 21-78

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands are present and would be permanently impacted as result of the channel and floodplain restoration. However, wetland disturbances would be minimal and involve grading to reconnect the floodplain and involve adding LWM to improve habitat complexity. Efforts would be made to preserve the wetlands to the greatest extent possible. No fill would be added, and staging and site access routes would avoid wetlands. If wetlands are disturbed, they would be restored to pre-construction conditions. The proposed restoration project intends to activate and reconnect historical floodplains, promote groundwater recharge, and improve river processes; all of which would expand and promote the health of existing wetland habitat.

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Permits: Please see section *5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish* for permit information.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbances and changes in hydrology would occur during channel and floodplain restoration. This project would increase instream complexity and floodplain engagement; which would promote groundwater recharge, form hyporheic flow paths, and reconnect historical floodplain wetlands. Overall, the project would benefit groundwater and increase water storage.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur as a result of the proposed channel and floodplain restoration. The project is located on private land historically used for agriculture. In the past several years, the landowner discontinued grazing activities and began restoring the floodplain. This project would contribute to restoration efforts.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed restoration efforts would temporarily and permanently change the landscape of the project area. Changes to the landscape due to construction vehicles or equipment would be short term and temporary. Permanent changes such as increased riparian habitat and natural water ways would overall improve visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the field site would be very minor and short term during channel and floodplain restoration construction. Air quality would resume to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed restoration work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions as a result of the proposed project.

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: Trout Unlimited (TU) in partnership with the Grande Ronde Model Watershed Council (GRMW), the landowners, funders, the design firm, and local partners (Nez Perce, ODFW) would plan, design, and implement the project.

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* *June 8, 2022*
Lindsey Arotin, ECF - 4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist