

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Wilson/101 Ranch Operation and Maintenance, Vegetation Management, and Plantings projects

Project No.: 1995-057-03

Project Manager: Cecelia Brown, EWM-4

Location: Elko County, NV

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 Shoshone-Paiute Tribes for routine operation and maintenance actions on the Wilson/101 Ranch's buildings, fences, roads, water developments, and irrigation infrastructure; and to implement established vegetation management plans on six ranch parcels: Angel, Baker, Bend, Home, McGinnis, and Ratliff.

Ranch Operation and Maintenance Actions

Actions include the maintenance of all buildings associated with the ranch. Actions also include the repair and maintenance of existing fencing, gates, and water developments, including all elements of the irrigation system including log dams, culverts, irrigation ditches, etc.; and maintaining the protection and clear flow of the developed spring above the ranch house that provides water to the ranch buildings on the Home Parcel.

Work would include making routine minor repairs as necessary to maintain function of all buildings, equipment, and infrastructure. All proposed actions are those that retain the existing structure, with no modifications, additions, or removals of structures or structural elements that might affect its potential eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

Maintenance of ranch roads and water crossings are those limited to the existing road prism, including the roadside ditches, culverts, and bridges.

All proposed operational actions are those routine activities with no ground disturbance such as fence maintenance or repair not requiring the digging of post holes, irrigation, grazing in established pastures, seeding, mowing, removing weeds, or removing woody and herbaceous plants as needed to maintain and safeguard property improvements. A 50 to 100-foot-wide buffer would be maintained around the ranch house and outbuilding to prevent wildfire from threatening structures.

Vegetative Management Plans

Each of the ranch's six parcels has a specific Vegetative Management Plan developed by the Natural Resource Conservation Service that details annual management activities for the property. Vegetation management tools in those plans are integrated to maintain or enhance habitat for wildlife. Actions include haying or grazing (depending on forage availability, contractor availability, and productivity of the site); irrigation to maintain wet meadow habitats; rest, if conditions warrant; and invasive plant treatments by manual pulling, herbicide treatments using backpack sprayers, and tilling or plowing of historically-plowed agricultural fields.

Plantings

In addition to the vegetative management plans, aquatic and riparian restoration, seeding of native grasses and forbs; and hand planting of willow, aspen, and cottonwood cuttings is proposed along California Creek, Van Duzer Creek, and the Owyhee River and their tributaries.

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 Grange

Katey Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: 07/07/2020

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist, Ranch parcel map, Cover Type descriptions

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/101 Ranch Operation and Maintenance, Vegetation Management, and Plantings projects

Project Site Description

The 938-acre Wilson/101 Ranch is comprised of six parcels. Three are bisected by the East Fork Owyhee River and are located adjacent to Highway 225/51, a north-south roadway that originates in Elko, Nevada and terminates in Mountain Home, Idaho. One is located on Van Duzer Creek off of Maggie Summit Road and two are located on California Creek along U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Road 016 of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (see attached figure). A ranch house, outbuildings, corrals and barn are located on the Home parcel and a calving barn, feedlot and holding corrals are located on the Ratliff parcel.

The vegetation types on the ranch include farmstead (9 acres); agriculture/pasture (342 acres), deciduous scrub-shrub wetland (170 acres), shrub-steppe (417 acres). Attachment 1 provides descriptions of these vegetation types.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Routine maintenance and operations of structures and irrigation systems (e.g. mowing, irrigating, fence repair, ditch/diversion cleaning, etc.) with no new ground disturbance or alteration of existing structures would have no potential to affect historic resources.

Seeding and planting of cuttings (inserting cuttings directly into the soil with no digging); plowing or tilling of previously plowed agricultural fields; and hand-pulling, mowing, or applying herbicides for the control of invasive plants would have no potential to affect cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

No heavy equipment operations (e.g. bulldozers, excavators) would be used, so there would be no large-scale soil displacement, soil mixing, or other mechanical soil disturbance.

Common farm equipment (mowers, tractors, backhoes) are rubber-tired with minimal compaction or displacement of soils.

Herbicide impacts to biological components of soils would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels.

Fence maintenance would be almost exclusively wire tightening and replacement. Post replacement needs would be accomplished using metal T-posts driven into the ground, with no digging required.

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

Potential for Significance: No

No Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed, or “special status” plant species are present in these locations.

All herbicide application is proposed using backpack sprayer with minimal potential for drift or runoff to non-target vegetation.

Maintenance of existing buildings and ranch infrastructure would not disturb plants, beyond the minimal trampling by workers.

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

Potential for Significance: No

No federal/state special-status wildlife species or habitats are within the project sites.

The herbicide treatments are small spot treatments of individuals or clusters of target plants that would be highly localized and thus not substantially impact any one animal's home range.

No plants identified for herbicide treatment are used preferentially for habitat purposes by native species. Some animals may be exposed to applied herbicides through contact with, or ingestion of, treated vegetation, but application would be according to label restrictions which would be too low of toxicity to be of harm.

Wildlife may be disturbed and displaced by human presence during these actions 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

No action proposed here would physically alter aquatic habitats; there would be no adverse physical changes to water bodies, floodplains, or fish from these actions.

Herbicide application would be according to label restrictions which would minimize potential for chemicals to reach water bodies.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

There are no wetlands at the facility maintenance or weed treatment sites.

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

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

There would be no groundwater withdrawal.

Herbicide impacts to groundwater and aquifers would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels.

Fence maintenance has no potential to impact ground water.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

There would be no land use changes, and no specially-designated areas are present.

Spot treatment of individual plants or plant clusters using herbicides applied according to manufacturer's labels have no potential to alter land uses or impact specially-designated areas.

No project action would change the land's capability to be used as it previously was.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

No visually-prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made.

The existing condition of weed treatment sites would be varied, as these are small spots where individual plants or clusters of plants have been found. Some sites may be vegetated, some barren; some visible from roads, some not. The killing of these individual plants or small plant clusters may produce unsightly dead plants visible in the foreground in some areas for a season, but would not substantially alter the visual quality.

Fence maintenance would change some wooden fence post to metal fence posts, altering the rustic appearance of old posts; but the presence of metal posts is not inconsistent with fencing throughout the area and surrounding lands, which is predominantly metal post and wire.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Driving of vehicles to access project sites would produce emissions, but the amount would be minimal and short-term.

Hand spraying of herbicide would not produce elevated spray drift that might be carried by air currents to adversely affect localized short-term air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

The only noise sources would be from humans working on the sites, and the use of vehicles to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the project sites.

All noise sources are of low intensity and short-term.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Vehicle operation, working with hand tools, and working along rivers have their attendant risks to workers, but there would be no condition created that would introduce new 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:

All actions are proposed by Shoshone-Paiute tribal members and employees and would be performed on lands owned by the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe.

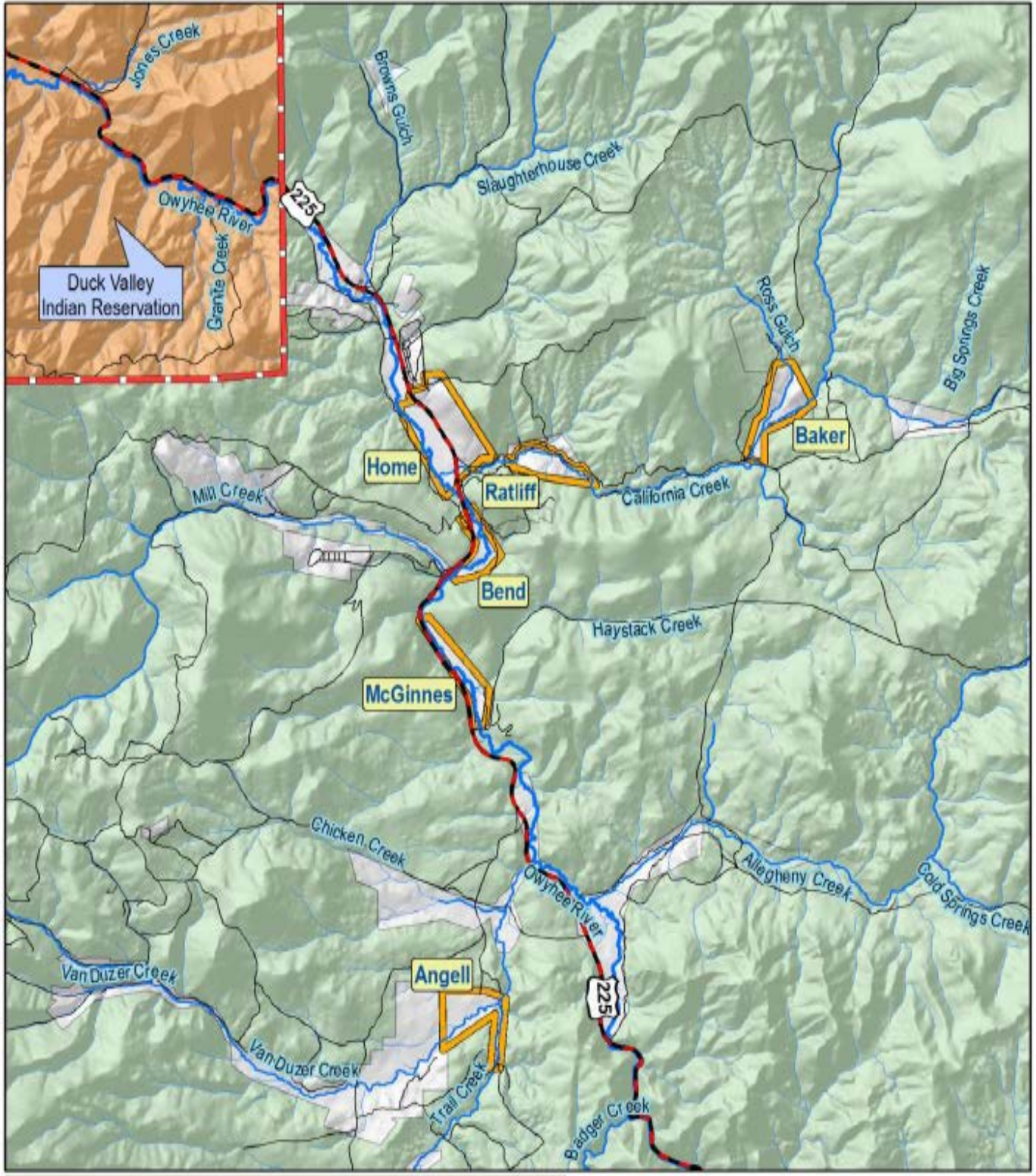
Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed: /s/ Robert W Shull

Robert W Shull
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
CorSource Technology Group

Date: July 7, 2020

Wilson/101 Ranch parcels



Cover Type Descriptions

Cover Type	acreage	General Description
Farmstead	9	Buildings, structures, corrals and parking lots.
Agriculture/ pasture	342	Sites used for pasture and/or hay production that are located on floodplains or benches adjacent to floodplains. Some are irrigated. Herbaceous vegetation is primarily introduced pasture grasses. Shrubs (primarily willow) are present at less than 5% canopy coverage.
Deciduous scrub-shrub wetland	170	This cover type is found along the Owyhee River and in patches along California Creek and Van Duzer Creek, though much of the riparian areas in these creeks have been heavily grazed and can be characterized as pasture or shrub-steppe. Deciduous scrub-shrub wetland is dominated by willow (<i>Salix</i> spp.) with rose (<i>Rosa</i> spp.), gray rabbitbrush (<i>Ericameria nauseosa</i>), and currant (<i>Ribes</i> spp.) also present. The understory component includes both native and introduced herbaceous vegetation.
shrub-steppe	417	Deeper soils support big sagebrush (<i>Artemisia tridentata</i>) while lowsage (<i>Artemisia arbuscula</i>) and an occasional rigid sage (<i>Artemisia rigida</i>) occur on shallow soils. Green rabbitbrush (<i>Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus</i>) is present throughout this cover type along with the infrequent rose (<i>Rosa</i> spp.). The herbaceous layer is comprised of native and introduced grasses and forbs alike.