

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Nason Confluence Habitat Enhancement Project

Project No.: 2009-003-00

Project Manager: Tori Bohlen, EWU - 4

Location: Chelan County, WA

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 Yakama Nation Fisheries (YN) to enhance habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed endangered Upper Columbia spring Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), threatened summer steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) at river mile 53.7 of the Wenatchee River on land managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in Chelan County, Washington. The project area is within the active Nason Creek alluvial fan, where historic highway construction and creekside development have disconnected broad sections of the alluvial fan from sustaining fish habitat, and where wood removal and channel simplification have caused a loss of off-channel/side channel rearing habitats compared to historic conditions.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the United States 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.).

The project would occur at the confluence of Nason Creek and the Wenatchee River and include the lower 900 feet (ft) of Nason Creek and about 1,200 ft of streambank along the south bank of the mainstem Wenatchee River, encompassing a total area of about 13 acres. Site access would be gained via a temporary access road approximately 250 ft long from Highway 207, which runs parallel to Nason Creek. Temporary stockpiling/staging would be on a gravel bar directly adjacent to the confluence of Nason Creek and the Wenatchee River. The project would involve about 1,040 cubic yards (cy) of excavation above/outside the ordinary high water (OHW) mark, and 10 cy excavation below/within the OHW mark. A detailed description of the project components follows.

Expansion of Existing Floodplain Channel

An existing floodplain channel would be connected for about 600 ft through excavation in a high flow channel scar. The channel would be approximately 30-ft-wide and 4-ft-deep, discharging into the Wenatchee River approximately 300 ft downstream of the confluence. Large wood would be placed throughout the backwater area to increase habitat complexity and cover and improve fish access to oxbows and historical side channels that have been cut off from the main channel. A log jam structure would be installed at the inlet to the proposed floodplain channel with a vibratory pile driver to direct flow into the floodplain channel. The primary fish benefit would be providing overwintering habitat for juvenile salmonids, but year-round use would also be possible.

Wood would also be placed along the bar in several locations adjacent to the floodplain channel to encourage flow within the channel and to restore roughness that would historically have been present along the gravel bars. Slash would be incorporated into the large wood structures or spread onto the constructed surfaces. Riparian enhancement would be achieved through planting native woody species throughout areas disturbed as part of construction activities.

Fabric-encapsulated soil lifts secured with wooden stakes would be placed above the OHW mark to encapsulate backfill. The non-woven coir fabric would be composed of 100% biodegradable materials. Seed mix would be applied to the soil lifts.

Large Wood Habitat Cover along Mainstem Wenatchee River

Mainstem large wood placement would include small jams along approximately 400 ft of bank to enhance channel margin complexity and cover along the banks of the mainstem Wenatchee River and within an existing small alcove. Approximately 100 logs (includes logs with and without rootwads) would be supplied by the YN via a contractor. All trees and shrubs within clearing limits removed for construction would be temporarily stockpiled within the limits of disturbance and reincorporated into the finished project.

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/ Mandy Hope

Mandy Hope

Contract Environmental Protection Specialist

ACS Professional Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel

Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange June 3, 2021

Katey C. Grange

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: Nason Confluence Habitat Enhancement Project

Project Site Description

The project area sits at an elevation of approximately 1,880 ft. Except for portions of the active point and mid-channel bars, the project area is vegetated with a mix of trees and shrubs dominated by thick stands of alder (*Alnus*) and vine maple (*Acer circinatum*). Large conifers cover the higher active floodplain surfaces. Highway 207 bisects the historically unconstrained Nason Creek fan, disconnecting a large portion of the low gradient depositional fan area from Nason Creek. This has caused Nason Creek to become confined into a single-thread straightened channel within the now confined fan area, whereas historically the creek likely maintained more braided and sinuous threads that were influenced by the hydraulic resistance of large trees and complex wood structures which provided a better diversity of rearing habitat conditions for salmon and steelhead. Historic logging in the area has reduced the recruitment potential for instream large wood habitat, and instream large wood has been removed from the river over previous decades as a result of flood control and highway development. There are wetlands delineated throughout the floodplain area, both within and outside work areas.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act has been completed for this project. Initial consultation on the area of potential effect (APE) was completed on December 10, 2019. On April 14, 2020 the USFS submitted their determination of “no historic properties affected” to consulting parties, with the stipulation that an archaeological monitor would be present during implementation. Consulting parties included the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (WA DAHP), the YN, and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CCT) (WA DAHP project number 2020-03-02550). Both the WA DAHP and the CCT concurred with the effects determination and monitoring recommendation. No response was received from the YN. On June 3, 2020, BPA sent a letter to the WA DAHP notifying the office of BPA’s involvement in the project (BPA CR Project No. WA 2020 061). The USFS would continue to act as lead federal agency throughout the life of the project.

Notes: An archaeological monitor would be present during implementation. The results of these efforts would be documented in a monitoring report.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some local pool scour and sediment sorting would likely occur where wood structures were placed, but they would not be large or stable enough to have a substantial long-term effect on geomorphic processes such as channel migration. Ground disturbance during

construction would be temporary and stabilized with post-construction revegetation. Any impacts to soils as a result of the project would be short-term. No long-term adverse effects are expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area has the potential to contain habitat for ESA-listed showy stickseed (*Hackelia venusta*). The project would have no effect on Federally listed plant species due to lack of habitat and occurrence in the project area. The project is designed to minimize impacts to native vegetation. Riparian vegetative communities would be restored through seeding and planting native species in disturbed areas following project implementation. The project would have short-term effects on vegetation from construction actions, but in the long term, there would be beneficial effects including increased riparian habitats and restored or improved vegetative conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by human presence (sound, movement, shadows) and vegetation removal. These effects would be short term. Improved habitat conditions would result in long-term positive impacts, including increased plant species richness and diversity, increased habitat structural diversity, and increased habitat heterogeneity.

Northern spotted owls, which are ESA listed, could be disturbed by construction activities, although the likelihood is small because current surveys have not detected them near the project area, and the nearest suitable habitat is approximately 800 ft away. Any disturbance would be short-term and would not be likely to adversely affect the Northern spotted owl. The project would conform to the USFWS-issued ESA Section 7 Consultation Programmatic Biological Opinion for Aquatic Restoration Activities in the States of Oregon, Washington and portions of California, Idaho and Nevada (USDI FWS 2013). This Biological Opinions known as "ARBO II". The effects to threatened and endangered species and the associated designated critical habitat, including Northern spotted owl, were documented as part of the ARBO II consultation for stream restoration projects.

The project area also has the potential to contain habitat for ESA-listed Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*), and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), but based on habitat characteristics and species distribution, the project would have no effect on these ESA-listed species. There would be no effect to other sensitive wildlife species.

Notes: Conservation Measures for Aquatic Restoration Activities (Categories 22, 25, and 26) identified in the USFWS ARBO II Biological Opinion would be followed during project implementation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Nason Creek and the Wenatchee River are designated final Critical Habitat for bull trout, steelhead, and Chinook salmon. The proposed action would result in long-term positive impacts to ESA-listed species by providing complex off-channel habitat for all fish

species during all flow conditions. The project would conform to the ESA Section 7 Programmatic Consultation Conference and Biological Opinion and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Response for Reinitiation of Aquatic Restoration Activities in States of Oregon and Washington (USDC NMFS 2013) and the USFWS-issued ESA Section 7 Consultation Programmatic Biological Opinion for Aquatic Restoration Activities in the States of Oregon, Washington and portions of California, Idaho and Nevada (USDI FWS 2013). This Biological Opinion is known as "ARBO II". Work area isolation would be used in areas with water; no direct effects to salmonids as a result of construction are anticipated. Fish salvage, which could cause a direct effect to fish, would be performed prior to establishing the temporary cofferdams for the side channel excavation. Biodegradable hydraulic fluid would be installed into each piece of heavy machinery working within 50 ft of streams and created side channels. Silt fences or cofferdams would be installed between water and work areas.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: A portion of the new channel would parallel and partially intersect delineated wetlands (approximately 0.05 acres); however, these impacts would be minor and short-term. Long-term benefits to wetlands would occur by restoration of natural flow patterns and wetland quality, which could potentially increase the acreage of wetlands. The YN would obtain Regional General Permit (RGP) #8 through the USFS Entiat Ranger District as the project would disturb less than 0.5 acre of wetlands. This would satisfy US Army Corps of Engineers Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 requirements and Washington Department of Ecology Section 401 Water Quality Certification requirements.

Note: The YN would obtain a RGP #8 to satisfy the requirements of CWA Sections 401 and 404 prior to starting work in wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The placement of log structures in the channel may result in minor impacts to groundwater by encouraging greater amounts of water onto the floodplain during high flows. The long-term increase in floodplain access would benefit groundwater recharge and function.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no known recreational or other uses for the project area. Land use would not change as a result of the project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minimal impact to visual quality as a result of the project. The project would contribute to the natural appearance of the project area in the long term.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Equipment emissions and upturned dust would result in short-term impacts to air quality. These would be temporary and localized in nature and would not have long-term impacts on air quality. Implementation of the proposed action is not expected to generate long-term or short-term violations of state air quality standards.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The use of heavy equipment during project implementation would result in temporary, localized noise increases. These increases would not substantially impact the surrounding environment.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The potential health and safety risks to workers and the public during construction would not be greater than a standard construction project and would be short-term. Routine safeguards such as barricades, construction signage, and flaggers at the entrance to protect the site to protect workers and public safety would be applied to minimize these effects.

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 project would occur on land managed by the USFS, who is the lead federal agency for completing environmental compliance and who is participating in project planning.

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

Signed: <u>/s/ Mandy Hope</u>	<u>June 3, 2021</u>
Mandy Hope, ECF – 4	Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist	
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