

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Cascade Forest Conservancy Beaver Reintroduction in Wind River Tributaries

Project No.: 2017-005-00 (Contract Number 88065)

Project Manager: James M. Barron, EWU-4

Location: Skamania and Cowlitz counties, 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 Cascade Forest Conservancy (CFC) to reintroduce beavers near two tributaries of the Wind River: Panther Creek and Pete Gulch in Skamania County, Washington. The work would be funded as part of the larger Pacific Lamprey Conservation Initiative (PLCI), a cooperative effort among agencies and tribes to achieve long-term persistence of Pacific lamprey (*Entosphenus tridentatus*) and support traditional tribal cultural use throughout the Columbia River Basin. Funding supports ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System on fish and wildlife in the main stem 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.).

Nuisance beavers would be trapped by CFC's partners and then transferred to CFC for relocation to release sites near Panther Creek and Pete Gulch. Reintroduction sites were selected based on spatial modeling, presence of suitable beaver habitat, and location in headwaters where natural recolonization is hindered. The exact number of beavers and families would depend on how many beavers are acquired through CFC partners, but one to two beaver families (about two to six beavers per family) are expected for each location. An increase in beaver activity in these areas would be expected to restore or enhance lamprey habitat-forming processes.

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/ W. Walker Stinnette

W. Walker Stinnette

Contract Environmental Protection Specialist

Salient CRGT

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad J. Hamel

Chad J. Hamel

Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange September 13, 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.

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Project Site Description

Beaver reintroductions would occur near Panther Creek and Pete Gulch on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest in Skamania County, Washington. Both locations are remote headwater tributaries of the Wind River with little human development and favorable habitat conditions that will sustain beaver populations, including ample native deciduous or emergent vegetation for food, suitable channel gradients and stream flow, easy floodplain access, and suitable soils.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not result in ground disturbance that could potentially impact archaeological resources. No modifications to existing built historic resources are proposed. Therefore, the proposed action would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed action. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not require any tree or vegetation removal and would not result in adverse modification to suitable protected plant habitats. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on special-status plant species or habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary disturbance of normal wildlife behavior could occur from elevated noise and human presence during beaver release. Beaver relocation may be traumatizing to the beavers, and some mortalities may occur. However, the methods applied would be known to minimize stress and mortality as much as possible, and maximize potential for successful relocation. The proposed actions would not result in adverse modification to suitable protected wildlife habitat. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no effect on special-status wildlife species or habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed action. An increase in beaver activity at the relocation sites could naturally alter stream flow and channel width and improve fish habitat without negatively impacting fish. The proposed action would not negatively impact water bodies and floodplains and could have a beneficial effect on special status fish species or habitats.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed action. An increase in beaver activity at the relocation sites could restore wetland hydrology and increase the extent of wetlands. The proposed actions would not adversely impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or other groundwater withdrawal are proposed. An increase in beaver activity at the relocation sites could increase water storage and raise the local water table. The proposed action would not adversely impact groundwater and aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Release sites would not be located near infrastructure, such as roads and culverts, that could be impacted by hydrologic changes. There would be no change in land use and no impact to specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change in visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Transporting beavers to the release sites would result in minor and temporary vehicle emissions. There would be no permanent change in air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change in ambient noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not generate or use hazardous materials and would not create conditions that would increase risk to human health and safety. Individuals handling live animals would use protective gear and would be trained in proper techniques. No impacts to human health and safety are expected as a result of the proposed actions.

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: Beaver release sites are located on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and CFC has received authorization from the U.S. Forest Service. No additional landowner notification, involvement, or coordination would be required.

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

Signed: /s/ W. Walker Stinnette September 13, 2021
W. Walker Stinnette, EC-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient CRGT