

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: GRMW Technical Assessment (*Update to previous categorical exclusion issued on August 7, 2020*)

Project No.: 1992-026-01

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser, EWL-4

Location: Union and Wallowa Counties, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.2 - Aviation Activities; B3.3 – Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to provide funds to the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) to work with local and regional partners to complete a number of assessments that would inform future restoration implementation and action effectiveness in Union and Wallowa Counties, Oregon.

These assessments include: sediment budget analysis in the Upper Grande Ronde River Subbasin; professional surveys for ground control points for Small Unmanned Aerial System (SUAS) imagery; development of a habitat suitability index tool to inform restoration project design; assessment of a large scale stage-0 floodplain restoration project; water quality assessment; LiDAR evaluation, and a hydraulic and habitat HEC-RAS evaluation.

Fieldwork for these projects would begin in August 2020 and would be expected to extend through May 2022. Methods would consist of walking the stream with wading boots and capturing water quality samples; walking various sites measuring habitat and river geomorphology and to set up ground control points for surveys; and the completion of LiDAR surveys aerially via plane.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System biological opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These proposed activities also fulfill commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp).

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/ Travis D. Kessler

Travis D. Kessler
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient CRGT, Inc.

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange August 27, 2020

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

The proposed project fieldwork would occur on the ground and aerially via plane in multiple locations throughout the Grande Ronde River Subbasin in Union and Wallowa Counties, Oregon. Site conditions would vary depending on the location, but would generally occur along selected reaches of rivers and streams within the Grande Ronde River Subbasin.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No potential to effect per correspondence with BPA archaeologist (email dated 8/5/20). The action would be limited to funding water quality and habitat assessments including aerial surveys. There would be no ground disturbance or modifications to structures.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to geology and soils would occur as there is no ground disturbance associated with the ground and aerial field surveys for the proposed project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impacts to ESA-listed, state-listed, or sensitive plant species known to exist on the sites as there would be no ground disturbance associated with the ground and aerial field surveys for the proposed project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA listed, state-listed, or sensitive wildlife species have been documented in or adjacent to the project area and no designated critical habitat is present. LiDAR would be collected from a fixed wing aircraft flying approximately 5,000 to 10,000 feet above the ground. Therefore, there would be no effects to wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance or in-water work proposed as a result of the collection of field data via foot or plane. Therefore, there would be no impact to waterbodies, floodplains, and ESA listed, state-listed, special status species, ESU's or habitats as a result of the proposed project.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to wetlands would occur as a result of the collection of field data via foot or plane. Therefore, there would be no ground disturbance as a result of the proposed work.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance as a result of the collection of field data via foot or plane. Therefore, the work would not effect groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur for the proposed project. The project consists of various surveys along selected reaches of rivers and streams in the Grande Ronde River Subbasin in which data would be collected on the ground or aerially via plane. No ground disturbance is proposed.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed fieldwork conducted on the ground or aerially via plane would have no effect on visual quality. Any change in the viewshed due to field vehicles or equipment would be short term and temporary.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the field sites during on the ground surveys would be very minor and short term during data collection, but would resume to normal conditions immediately once the fieldwork has been completed. Aerial surveys would be completed via plane and would temporarily disrupt air quality immediately above survey areas, but would resume to normal levels once the surveys have been completed.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed on the ground fieldwork would not result in an increase in ambient noise as they would be completed by walking project sites and using tools and equipment by hand. The aerial surveys would create a temporary increase in ambient noise associated with the operation of the plane, but would resume to normal levels once the surveys have been completed.

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, no CERCLA sites and no changes to electric or magnetic fields 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: The GRMW would notify nearby landowners prior to commencement of the proposed fieldwork, which would occur in areas where previous work has been completed.

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

Signed: /s/ Travis D. Kessler August 27, 2020
Travis D. Kessler, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient CRGT, Inc.