

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Yankee Fork Restoration Bonanza Phase III

Project No.: 2002-059-00

Project Manager: Jennifer Lord, EWM-4

Location: Custer County, Idaho

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 Trout Unlimited (TU) to implement Bonanza Phase III, a restoration and improvement project in Custer County Idaho. This project is consistent with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program. The Phase III habitat restoration, and improvement actions, would enhance fish habitat for all life-stages of migratory and resident fish, provide refugia during high flows, provide cover during high and low flows, provide winter habitat for juvenile salmonids, and provide spawning areas for all salmonids. Salmonids that would benefit from this project include Federally-listed Snake River Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Snake River steelhead trout (*O. mykiss*), bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and westslope cutthroat trout (*O. clarkia lewisii*).

Phase III restoration actions for the project would consist of bypassing water from the current Yankee Fork channel into a series of bypasses to allow the construction of about 1,500 feet of new main and side channels, installation of approximately 100 wood structures and 250 trees, floodplain graded and the remaining dredge pile berm removed. The abandoned portions of the current main channel would be filled with sorted dredge material to become three of the nine side channels created. Wood structures and trees would be placed throughout the project area as apex jams, meander jams, debris flow jams, single log sweepers, and deflectors in the main channel, side channel habitat and cover logs in the side channels and floodplain logs and relic beaver dams on the floodplain. With the exception of the cover logs, floodplain logs and relic beaver dams, all other structures would be installed in the bank, the apex jams and deflectors would use boulders as ballast, sourced onsite. The debris flow jam would incorporate boulders into the structure, but not as ballast. Construction activities are anticipated to last between July 15, 2020 and August 15, 2021. Access to the site is available from the Yankee Fork Road and all staging would be on site. Excavated materials would be disposed off-site or spread in the upland areas. The site would be replanted and reseeded with locally derived and adapted native seed mixture following project construction and through 2021.

These actions would specifically satisfy some of BPA's Columbia River tributary mitigation commitments begun under the 2008 NMFS' Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (as supplemented in 2010 and 2014) (2008 BiOp) and ongoing commitments under the 2019 NMFS' Columbia River System BiOp (2019 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/ Israel Duran

Israel Duran
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient/CRGT

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange *July 13, 2020*

Katey 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: Yankee Fork Restoration Bonanza Phase III

Project Site Description

Activities would occur at approximately river mile 8 of the Yankee Fork of the Salmon River, about 22 miles northeast of Stanley, in Custer County, Idaho on privately-owned property. The Yankee Fork supports a diverse array of native fishes; however, past and current land management activities (i.e. intense timber harvesting, and dredge mining) have impacted areas critical to their survival. Although the project area is under private ownership, the area is within the Salmon-Challis National Forest. The Yankee Fork Gold Dredge is nearby and there are camping, mining, trails, other recreational activities and interests within a several mile radius. Currently the area is dominated by dredge tailings, which are comprised of streambed material (rocks, gravel and sand) and contains very little vegetation. The Yankee Fork itself is channelized and provides little habitat complexity. There are no wetlands within the project site.

The Yankee Fork of the Salmon River has been drastically altered as a result of mining activities, particularly where dredging occurred. Dredging, which occurred intermittently between 1940 and 1952, obliterated the Yankee Fork stream channel and mostly eliminated the floodplain. After dredging, the channel was channelized and constrained between the dredge tailings, and the valley hillside. Unable to reestablish a natural meander pattern or connect to the floodplain the increased stream energy mobilizes spawning gravels and wood out of the reach. The inability for this area to naturally recover is also exacerbated by the removal of trees from the streamside, which occurred during the mining boom of the late 1800's and associated with dredging.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: This project is covered under an existing Section 106 consultation that was completed April 25, 2018 (SHPO #2018-638) and a 2015 Programmatic Agreement with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office for the impacts to the dredge tailings. In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, work would be stopped immediately and a BPA Archaeologist or Historian would be notified, as well as consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary impact to soils and geologic resources during construction activities would occur. However, there is little soil within the project area and impacts would be limited to

dredge material within the project area and conclude with the rewatering of the channel. All ground disturbance would be stabilized and rehabilitated with native planting and seeding.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would be expected to cause impacts to plants from construction activities such as channel construction, wood structure placement and floodplain grading. However, due to past dredging there is little available habitat for plants and there is little vegetation and within the project area. Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plants or Federal or state special-status species and habitats are not in the immediate project area. The vegetation impacts would be temporary and limited to the construction period. The project area would be seeded and planted with native plants at project completion and the following year. Existing vegetation would be salvaged where possible.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Activities may have minor, temporary effects on wildlife, due to project activities. However, due to past activities the project area does not contain suitable habitat for animals, including ESA-listed wildlife or Federal or state special-status species or their habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although the proposed project activities are designed to improve aquatic habitat conditions for aquatic species over the long term, short-term adverse effects to water quality, fish, and other aquatic organisms would occur because of construction activities. Water quality would be affected by short term impacts related to construction, including turbidity resulting from channel excavation, floodplain and channel re-contouring, placement of natural wood structures and other similar actions. Discharge could carry sediments or contaminants to nearby water bodies, floodplains, wetlands, or riparian areas. Some fish injury or mortality may occur during fish salvage, dewatering, and in-stream construction of the project elements and lowered water quality.

Turbidity-related impacts would be minimized by implementing the appropriate best management practices (BMPs) and adhering to applicable regulatory requirements and permit conditions. Temporary and permanent erosion and sedimentation control BMPs could include, but would not be limited to, the use of turbidity curtains, straw bales, etc., and completing most of the work in the dry. Thus, potential impacts to water quality related to accidental spills of contaminants would be low. Impacts to ESA-listed fish are covered under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion (HIP # 202017). All applicable site-specific conservation measures identified, including, but not limited to, HIP conservation measures or other mitigation measures would be followed.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands that currently exist at the project site. However, floodplain grading to create depressions and use loose wood placement on the floodplain are designed to create habitat complexity, this may lead to the creation of wetlands as the project matures.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or groundwater use is proposed. However, restoration activities may result in locally increased groundwater storage through improved floodplain function.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not interfere with current land or recreational use in or near the project area. Additionally, the project would be consistent with and improve the condition of the project area for the water quality and habitat values, which would be consistent with the underlying land use designation.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Visual quality of immediate project areas would be temporarily impacted during project activities. However, over the long term, the project would enhance the natural appearance of the area and would improve the existing visual value of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Dust and vehicle emissions would increase in the local area during construction activities. These impacts would be temporary in nature and only during normal working hours.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Noise levels would temporarily increase in the local area during normal working hours as the work occurs.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work activities

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: NA

Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation: NA

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: Mercury and selenium are present in the undisturbed ground, dredge tailings, sediments, and water column as a result of the historical mining activities and natural occurrence of selenium in the Yankee Fork watershed. In October 2011, CH2M HILL conducted a geochemical characterization of the dredge tailings to evaluate the potential risk and concluded that the levels of contaminants in the tailings were not higher than background levels and disturbing the tailings would not release additional mercury or selenium into the system.

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: The private landowner has been notified and approved of all activities as described. Underlying and adjacent landowners were notified of the project activities.

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

Signed: /s/ Israel Duran 07/13/2020
Israel Duran, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient/CRGT