

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Operations and Maintenance

**Project No.:** 1996-094-01

**Project Manager:** Andre L'Heureux, EWU-4

**Location:** Okanogan County, Washington

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.20 Protection of Cultural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Habitat; B1.3 Routine Maintenance; B1.11 Fencing; B1.15 Support Buildings

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) (Sponsor) to conduct ongoing operations and maintenance of the Scotch Creek Wildlife area located throughout 24,947 acres of shrub steppe and riparian habitat in north central Washington state.

The proposed activities are consistent with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program as authorized by the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act.

The following major tasks are annual in nature and are necessary for ongoing operations and maintenance.

- **Vegetation Management:** Vegetation management actions would include the following control techniques: biological (introducing bio-agents that control weeds), chemical (approved herbicide by backpack sprayer or ATV mounted sprayer), cultural (burning or grazing) and mechanical (removal by hand, shovel, weed eater, tractor or hedge trimmer). The specific combination used would be tailored to the weed species, site, topography, and management goals.

Re-vegetation actions would occur by hand, shovel, or planting bar, and would consist of planting of seeds, seedlings, and/or cuttings of native grasses, forbs, and herbaceous and woody plants and trees.

- **Road Maintenance and Parking Area Maintenance:** Road maintenance and improvement actions would occur annually to improve and repair road surfaces and parking areas). Primary road surfaces and shoulders would be graded, spot rocked and new aggregate would be imported, placed, and compacted. Road and parking improvements would occur within depth and width of the original prism
- **Tunk Valley Road:** Access road improvement on Tunk Valley Road would involve reshaping the road to correct and prevent further erosion. Equipment used would be an excavator, dump truck, small dozer and finished with a grader. 350 CYs of the main access road on the Tunk

Valley unit would be cut back with the banks sloped, removed and hauled out. The road alignment would be adjusted, the bank sloped and the surface stabilized with 350 CY of crushed gravel to prevent further washout.

- **Fence Maintenance:** Annual maintenance, repairs and replacement of perimeter exclusionary fencing would occur from snow load, fallen trees, wild ungulate movement, and domestic livestock trespass. All elements of barbed wire and wood fence systems would be maintained and/or replaced in kind, including barbed wire strands, steel t-posts, wooden stays, rock jacks, crossbars, wood posts, cattle guards and gates, using hand tools and non-ground disturbing actions.
- **Avian Habitat Improvement:** Perch deterrents would be installed on existing power poles and power lines in areas of high sharp-tailed grouse activity to minimize the potential for predation by raptors.
- **General Maintenance:** Actions include the repair and maintenance of all buildings, equipment, and infrastructure. Actions also include the repair and maintenance of existing gates, parking areas, and public information sign boards. Structures would be fire-proofed by clearing brush, wood piles and overgrown and/or flammable vegetation around building perimeters (50-100 feet) and from adjacent managed work-areas. 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.

Any ground disturbance areas would be reseeded after disturbance and no ground disturbance would occur in wetlands or waterbodies. Work would largely be conducted by workers traveling on foot or via existing access roads on the wildlife area. Work would be accomplished with hand tools and equipment with the exception of the road and trail maintenance, which may require excavators and dump trucks, depending on the level of repair.

**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/ Dan Gambetta

Dan Gambetta

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange                      April 23, 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:** Scotch Creek Wildlife Area Operation and Maintenance

## **Project Site Description**

The project area is located in Okanogan County, WA, encompassing 24,947 acres of shrub steppe and riparian habitat within seven separate management units in north central WA. Project actions would take place on land owned and managed by WDFW.

Waterbodies consist of Scotch Creek, a spring fed stream originating approximately 3 miles west of the Wildlife Area (WLA) boundary. Tunk Creek, which traverses the northern boundary and Mary Ann Creek, a perennial stream that flows in a southerly direction. Riparian vegetation flourishes on the floodplain and along stream channel. Several lakes and man-made ponds are within the management units.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

**Explanation:** BPA has concluded several Section 106 consultations with Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CCT), WDFW and the DAHP. In letters dated October 2016 (WA 2016 099) and November 2019 (WA 2018 221) February 2020 (WA 2019 233). BPA determined the actions described herein would have no effect to historic properties.

Vegetative Management actions such as reseeding and hand-pulling, mowing, or applying herbicides for the control of invasive plants would have no potential to affect cultural resources.

The actions that require ground disturbance (road and parking area repair, fire breaks around structures) would take place within the previously surveyed APEs for which BPA conducted cultural resource surveys, consultations and determinations of no effect to historic properties.

All building and fence maintenance activities are non-ground disturbing and 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.

**Note:**

- In the event that archaeological or historic materials are discovered during project activities, work in the immediate vicinity must stop, the area secured, and the concerned tribe's cultural staff and cultural committee and DAHP notified.
- The existing historic homestead located at Chesaw (barn(s), corrals, stock trough, residence(s), outbuilding) must be entirely avoided.

## 2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Vegetative Management actions such as hand-pulling, mowing, or applying herbicides for the control of invasive plants would cause no or minimal disturbance to soils.

For actions that require ground disturbance (road and parking area repair, fire breaks around structures and russian olive removal) would have a small footprint within the overall area and represent a negligible level of short-term disturbance as erosion control and other rehabilitation efforts would prevent soils from becoming mobilized.

Ground disturbance associated with fence management actions would be minimal to nonexistent as all work would be done by hand using materials on-site.

Notes:

- Implement sediment and erosion control best management practices (BMPs) immediately after clearing and prior to initiating ground-disturbing activities to prevent erosion and runoff.
- Native seed mix, vegetation plugs, shrubs, and/or slash shall be placed on the disturbed soil to assist in the reestablishment of native vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed plants have been documented in the wildlife area units.

Vegetative management that utilizes herbicide applications shall utilize the Conservation Measures identified in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) ESA consultation, which would result in minimal potential for drift or runoff to non-target vegetation.

Temporary, short-term impacts to vegetation from construction activities associated with road maintenance would be minimized by post-construction native revegetation efforts.

Plant disturbance associated with fence management actions would be minimal to nonexistent as all work would be done by hand using materials on-site.

Overall, vegetative management activities would result in minor beneficial impacts due to the reduction of invasive species and an increase in native vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The wildlife area supports a variety of wildlife, including black bear, bobcat, cougar, mule and white-tailed deer, bluebird, chukar, eagle, blue and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, gray partridge, ring-necked pheasant, quail, upland birds, songbirds, and waterfowl.

All human presence and activity associated with these actions would temporarily disturb and displace nearby wildlife, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely.

Vegetative management herbicide treatments would be 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.

Road maintenance could cause temporary, short-term disturbance to and displacement of nearby wildlife, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely. The operation of vehicles and equipment associated with these project actions are planned to take place after migratory birds have completed nesting and fledging.

Suitable habitat for Canada Lynx and Grizzly Bear have the potential to occur in the four northernmost management units. If individuals are present, project actions would cause temporary, short-term disturbance to, or displacement of, these individuals. However, there have been no recent documented sightings or known populations of these species in the wildlife area. Therefore, due to lack of presence there would be No Effect to these species.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo has the potential to occur in the project area due to the presence of suitable habitat along riparian areas. There are no documented sightings or history of prior occurrence for this species in the project area, and therefore no effect to Yellow-billed Cuckoo is anticipated from project activities. No other threatened, endangered or proposed species of birds have the potential to occur within the wildlife area. Therefore, due to lack of presence there would be No Effect to this species.

Overall the project would result in beneficial impacts to terrestrial wildlife due to the reduction of invasive species and the expansion and enhancement of native plant assemblages in riparian and shrub-steppe habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No ESA-listed aquatic species are present on any of the wildlife area units.

The fencing, road, trail and parking area maintenance actions would not disturb water bodies or floodplains.

Road and parking lot maintenance would not result in an overall increase in impervious surfaces that would result in additional discharge to water bodies and floodplains.

Herbicide applications would be conducted in accordance with conservation measures and methodologies to minimize potential for drift or runoff to water bodies and floodplains.

Fuel or fluid drips or spills from equipment and vehicles have the potential to occur during project activities, but are unlikely to do so in the volume necessary to contaminate water bodies.

Overall, habitat conditions for aquatic species are expected to improve in the long term from project actions as riparian and shrub steppe areas are revegetated with native species.

Notes:

- Petroleum products, sediment, or other deleterious materials shall not be allowed to enter any stream, wetland, water body, or drainage conveyance.
- Spill containment and cleanup materials shall be readily available at project sites, staging areas, and in construction vehicles and equipment.

## 6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Removal, fill, or disturbance of wetlands and native vegetation within wetland areas is not anticipated from road and parking area maintenance, fence maintenance and general maintenance within project areas.

Vegetation Maintenance would involve removal of invasive weeds and non-natives using methods with little to no ground disturbance. Herbicide treatments are not planned to occur in or in the vicinity of wetlands.

## 7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or withdrawal of groundwater is planned for the project areas.

Potential impacts to groundwater and aquifers from herbicide treatments would be minimized by application in accordance with HIP conservation measures.

Fuel or fluid drips or spills from equipment and vehicles have the potential to occur during project activities, but are unlikely to do so in the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater.

## 8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Scotch Creek Unit is a major recreation area for deer hunting in the fall; hiking, biking and horseback riding are among other recreation activities also enjoyed there. There would be no changes to these activities, ongoing land use, and no impact to specially designated areas.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually prominent vegetative, landform, or structural changes would be made.

The appearance of post-treatment vegetation removal sites may produce unsightly dead plants visible in the foreground in some areas for a season, but would not substantially alter the visual quality in the long term.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary, short-term impacts from small amounts of dust and vehicle emissions would occur during project actions.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some noise impacts for a few hours at each project site while the work is being done, but this type of noise is not inconsistent with that of common, ranching, mining, or farming operations throughout the area.

Other noise sources would be from humans working on the site, 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

Explanation: Vehicle operation and working with hand and power tools have their attendant risk to users, but there would be no condition created from these actions that would introduce new human 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.

Project actions are not anticipated to create conditions, which would increase the burden on the local health, safety, and emergency-response infrastructure.

### **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: Project actions proposed by the WDFW within the Scotch Creek Wildlife Area would be implemented by employees or contractors on lands owned and managed by the WDFW. WDFW staff works with a citizen-based advisory group to develop a regular draft management plans that addresses the status of wildlife species and their habitat, forest management, restoration efforts and public recreation on the wildlife area.

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

Signed: /s/ Dan Gambetta April 23, 2021  
Dan Gambetta, ECF-4 Date  
Environmental Protection Specialist