

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Spokane Wildlife Areas Operations & Maintenance

Project No.: 1998-003-00

Project Manager: Corrie Veenstra

Location: Stevens 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 the Spokane Tribe of Indians to conduct the daily operations and maintenance of wildlife lands acquired through the Spokane Tribe Wildlife Mitigation Project. These actions would support 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 proposed actions consist of the following:

- Invasive/noxious weed control on Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) through chemical, biological, and mechanical methods. This would include cover cropping, mowing, hand pulling of weeds, distribution of biological control agents, controlled burns, and use of herbicides. Additionally, this would include the planting of cover crops on agricultural lands, which would serve to improve cover/forage for local wildlife species and reduce weed infestations.
- Maintain 2017/2018 riparian plantings by watering, weed eating, spraying herbicides and maintaining exclusion fencing to ensure the best survivability rates possible.
- Maintain 40 miles of boundary fences to exclude feral horses and escaped livestock from entering mitigation lands. This would include removal of trees, brush, and debris that may cause damage to the fence lines; as well as maintenance to cattle guards.
- Operate and maintain 14-acre irrigation pivot to provide adequate soil moisture for growth of forage/cover plantings for local white-tailed deer, elk, and other species that use the property.
- Install 12,566 feet of barbed and/or smooth wire fence around Fox Creek WMA. This fence would serve to protect 765 acres from cattle ingress and grazing damage that occurs annually to cover crops planted for wildlife.

- Produce and post signage on the mitigation properties to reduce all-terrain vehicle (ATV) traffic on project lands. Signs would be attached to existing fences or trees. Larger signs would be posted onto two 4"x4" posts.
- Manage overstocked forest stands to restore historical range of variability. The forest is densely stocked and would be thinned to a sustainable density. Thinning would stimulate natural, healthy growth of conifers that provide cover for deer and elk, as well as increase structural diversity and reduce the spread of bark beetle and mistletoe infections. Additionally, encroaching vegetation along access roads would be thinned to maintain existing access.

The forest thinning would be accomplished through use of heavy equipment, a chipper, and chainsaws. A "Cut-to-Length" system is preferred as it would have less impact to the ground and surrounding habitat. Post-treatment practices would include reseeding of all skid trails and landings.

Project sites would be accessed by ATV or foot in rough terrain.

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/ Shawn Skinner

Shawn Skinner
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>April 29, 2021</u>
Sarah T. Biegel	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: Spokane Wildlife Areas Operations & Maintenance

Project Site Description

The project area is located across six WMAs which cover 8,407 acres on the Spokane Tribal Reservation in Stevens County, Washington, approximately 25 miles northwest of Spokane, Washington. Elevations range from approximately 500 feet to 1,400 feet. The area is within the Lower Spokane River subbasin: the Spokane River lies to the south of the project area while the Columbia River lies to the west.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no adverse effects to historic properties on March 12, 2021 (WA 2020 210). Concurrence was received from the Spokane Tribe of Indians on April 14, 2021.

Notes:

- In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, work would be stopped immediately and a BPA Archaeologist and Historian would be notified, as well as consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor soil displacement would be expected during replacement of rotten or broken fence posts, and the addition of post holes for new signage. Temporary impact to soils and increase in erosion potential by use of heavy equipment during thinning operations would be expected. Long term impacts would be minimized through reseeded.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal or state special-status plant species in the project area. Non-native vegetation would be disturbed, but the project goal of a restored native plant community would result in a long-term benefit to wildlife and plant communities. Native vegetation would be removed only where necessary to prevent encroachment on access roads or boundary fences. All herbicide application is proposed using a backpack sprayer with minimal potential for drift or runoff to non-target vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal or state special-status wildlife species in the project area. Minor, short-term disturbance to local wildlife due to human presence and ATV use during maintenance work and inspections would be expected. Some animals may be exposed to applied herbicides through contact with, or ingestion of, treated vegetation. However, application rates would be according to label restrictions, which would be too low of toxicity to be of harm. No long-term effect on wildlife or wildlife habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Anadromous fish are anthropogenically blocked from the project site. Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed bull trout are present in project area. Herbicide application would not occur within 0.5 miles of any fish-bearing streams. No impact to water bodies, floodplains, or fish would be expected.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term impact to wetlands during weed management activities and exclusion fence installation would be expected. Long-term benefits to wetland plant communities would be expected as native vegetation is re-established.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Herbicide impacts to groundwater and aquifers would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's label. The proposed actions would have no long-term impact to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would not impact or change land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Maintenance would generally improve the appearance of existing structures from enhancements to fences, signage, and vegetation management. No visually-prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change is proposed.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term impact to air quality from vehicle emissions and dust generated by equipment use (mowing lawns, weed eating). Herbicides would be applied as spot treatments by hand-held backpack sprayers with limited or no impact to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term increase in ambient noise during use of vehicles and equipment.

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: 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: All work would occur on the Spokane Indian Reservation and in coordination with the Spokane Tribe of Indians.

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

Signed: /s/ Shawn Skinner April 29, 2021
Shawn Skinner, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist