

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Couse Creek PALS Project (*update to previous Categorical Exclusion issued on July 17, 2020*)

Project No.: 1994-018-05

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz, EWM-4

Location: Asotin County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B 1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Asotin County Watershed District in the installation of Post-Assisted Log Structures (PALS), a Beaver Dam Analog (BDA), Boulder structures, and riparian planting within Couse Creek. This categorical exclusion is an update to the July 17, 2020 version to address the addition of the BDA and boulder structures to the proposed activities. After further review of the area, it was determined that the project area would benefit from these additional activities.

PALS would be installed along Couse Creek between river miles 1.4 to 3.5. The flow in this section of river goes subsurface or puddles and riparian function is limited. The primary limiting factors are low or no flow, oversupply of sediment, high stream temperatures, and limited geomorphic and hydraulic diversity due to a lack of structural elements. Reconnecting flood channels and promoting overbank flow would increase off-channel habitat and adding structural elements would increase geomorphic and hydraulic complexity, improve sediment sorting, and reduce sediment and woody debris transport time. These activities would also increase high flow and predator refuge for fish and create more suitable rearing habitat.

PALS installation would consist of untreated wooden posts that would be inserted into the stream bed using a hand-held pneumatic post-pounder. Installing 117 structures, each structure would consist of approximately 4 to 25 posts depending on the width of the stream at the installation locations, plus the addition of several pieces of woody debris that would be woven in between the posts by hand. Posts would penetrate roughly 2 to 3 feet into the stream bed at each structure. Chainsaws, handsaws, sledgehammers, shovels, and drills may also be used in the installation of the PALS. A 4-wheeler would be used to access the site via pre-existing roads and two-tracks, and to stage materials at least 150 feet from the creek or along existing roadways near creek.

One BDA would be installed along Couse Creek in the northern section of the project area. The BDA would be located within the floodplain and not in the main channel. The BDA structure would consist of assorted rocks, cobbles, and sediments that would be sourced from the streambed and floodplain within 10 yards of the BDA location. Excavation of material would occur using hand-tools (shovels, picks, prybars, and buckets) then be replaced in the floodplain in a way that would promote ponding within low-flow conditions. The stream bed would be scoured using hand-tools

and buckets to build subsequent layers of substrate between 6 to 12 inches in diameter into the BDA formation. Fill materials would not be removed from the floodplain or streambed, all fill would be rearranged and incorporated into the BDA. Fine woody debris and sediment would be woven by hand between the layers. If the BDA would be post-assisted, up to 25 untreated wooden posts would be installed into the stream bed using a hand-held pneumatic post pounder. The BDA, if built as channel spanning would not exceed 2-ft in height and if partially spanning it would not exceed 3-ft in height.

Boulder structure placement would consist of small boulders and rocks from the stream channel and adjacent floodplain to be manipulated by hand and using hand tools (pry bars and shovels). These materials would be reincorporated into the stream channel in linear clusters, perpendicular to stream flow to mimic natural configurations of boulder ribs. A total of four boulder structures would be installed along Couse Creek. The number of rocks manipulated would vary based on site conditions at the time of installation, however, no rocks used in the boulder structures would exceed 2 feet in diameter (approx. 600 lbs or 0.15 cubic yards). All boulder structures would span less than 80 percent of the channel width to ensure they would not obstruct or plug the channel.

Site restoration measures would include seeding and planting of native riparian vegetation at disturbed areas. Planting would consist of hydro-seeding, drill seeding, harrowing, or by hand.

These activities would support conservation on ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River Power System while also supporting 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.).

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/ Catherine Clark

Catherine Clark

Contract Environmental Protection Specialist

Motus Recruiting and Staffing, Inc.

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel

Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange

July 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

The Couse Creek project area would be located along Couse Creek between RM 1.4 to 3.5. The project area is dominated by very coarse substrate and an undefined channel. Sections 01, 02, 11 of Township 08N Range 46E. Vegetation in the project site is widely spaced trees and shrubs. Primarily netleaf hackberry, chokecherry, and black cottonwood, but also including some coyote willow, red alder, woods rose, and Ponderosa Pine. Herbaceous vegetation varies. Some locations are mostly invasive species including cheatgrass, ventenata, and yellow star thistle while others include native bunchgrasses (bluebunch wheatgrass and/or Idaho fescue) or introduced grasses (intermediate wheatgrass). Project site is all privately-owned land.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed project would result in no historic properties affected (WA 2020 055). The SHPO concurred with BPA's determination on June 17th, 2020. The Nez Perce Tribe concurred with BPA's determination on July 7th 2020. No additional responses from consulting parties were received within 30 days.

Notes:

- In the event that archeological 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.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The installation of the PALS would temporarily disturb soils on the project site. Best Management Practices (BMP) have been developed to avoid or minimize temporary fine sediment impacts during construction. All ground disturbance would be stabilized and native seeding and planting would occur post-construction.

BDA implementation would not exceed 0.25 cubic yards of fill. No fill would be removed or disposed of during installation.

Boulder structures would manipulate less than 2.4 cubic yards for all 4 structures proposed, and would directly impact less than 1,000 square feet of the streambed. No fill or rock material would be removed from the floodplain or disposed of during installation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or special-status plant species are known to exist on the site. Areas that are disturbed would be revegetated with native plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or ESA-listed wildlife species or habitat would be negatively impacted by the installation of the proposed structures. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed and displaced by construction noise during implementation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is covered under the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion (BiOp) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (HIP #2020090 & 2021102). Listed fish species include Snake River Basin steelhead and bull trout and their critical habitat. The project plans were reviewed by BPA engineering technical services and a series of conservation measures in accordance with the HIP consultation would be implemented to ensure that the project would benefit ESA-listed fish species.

Project work would occur in low to no flow conditions along the creek bed, therefore no impact to non-ESA-listed fish species or to the waterbody would occur. In the long term, this project was designed to increase fish habitat complexity.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no designated wetland located in the project areas.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground-disturbing activities are not likely to intersect with groundwater and would have no impact on aquifers. Construction BMPs would be implemented to prevent contamination of groundwater from equipment leaks or spills.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is located on private property. No changes to land use would occur.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor changes to visual quality. The new post-assisted log structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and topography of the proposed structures would not be located in a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the site during construction activities.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in ambient noise during construction. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities are not considered hazardous nor would result in any health and safety risks to the general public.

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 landowner has been in coordination with Asotin County Watershed District staff.

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

Signed: <u>/s/ Catherine Clark</u>	<u>July 13, 2021</u>
Catherine Clark, ECF-4	Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist	
Motus Recruiting and Staffing, Inc.	