

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: St. Joe River Bank Stabilization and Restoration Project

Project No.: 1992-061-06

Project Manager: Lee Watts, EWM-4

Location: Benewah 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 provide funding to the Coeur d'Alene Tribe for an ongoing streambank and wetland restoration project along the St. Joe River. The site is located in Benewah County at Latitude 47.343135 and Longitude -116.616417.

Project actions would include stabilizing about 1,500 feet of an eroding bank of the St. Joe River. Heavy equipment would be operated on approximately three acres of eroding river bank to re-contour, terrace, and stabilize the bank using rock, large wood structures, and live cottonwood poles to prevent loss of valued habitat and cultural resources. The work would be accomplished primarily from atop the river bank, with no in-water work being planned, though a contingency plan for isolating specific work sites from high water has been developed in case flows rise during construction. Staging areas for construction material and equipment storage and refueling would be located outside of the 100-year floodplain. Access routes would use existing roads and minimize impacts to riparian vegetation during overland access. No temporary road construction is proposed.

Topsoil and sod would be salvaged for use in site restoration. Seeding of grasses and native herbaceous plants for erosion control and wildlife benefit would follow construction activities.

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.

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

This project site (approximately 3 acres) is on the long sloping riverbank of the St. Joe River approximately two miles north of St. Maries, Idaho. The area is managed for fish and wildlife and is sparsely vegetated with riparian herbaceous plants with few cottonwoods and willows. No wetlands are located within the project site, but a large wetland is located immediately to the northwest and upslope from the bank being treated.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

The project site is known to have historical resources that would be impacted. These resources have been impacted by the ongoing erosion, and their protection is part of the reason this project is proposed. The site was surveyed and consultation was completed with the Coeur d'Alene Tribal Historic Preservation Office (BPA CR project Number ID 2017 036). The project was found to affect the known resources and a Memorandum of Agreement between BPA and the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (December 2018) was successfully negotiated to mitigate for the effects on cultural sites.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Soils would be mixed and compacted in the short term by heavy equipment use to reshape and terrace the banks. But the final result would be a stabilized river bank, resistant to erosion, and planted to restore riparian vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

No Federal/state special-status species or habitats are within the project sites. Native riparian plants would be removed from about 1 acre during short-term construction actions, then the site would receive intensive plantings of riparian shrubs and trees that would likely persist on a more stable riverbank than is present currently.

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

Potential for Significance: No

No Federal/state special-status wildlife species or habitats occupy the project sites. Project actions would likely disturb and harm some wildlife species occupying the banks of the St. Joe River planned for treatment, but riparian habitat conditions following this action would be more diverse and wooded with a higher capacity for wildlife occupancy than the current condition.

Wildlife using nearby habitats may be disturbed and temporarily displaced by noise and human presence during the short-term construction activities, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely.

Construction actions would occur in the late fall and winter months, thus no migratory nesting birds would be impacted.

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

Potential for Significance: No

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was consulted in 2018 concerning effects to bull trout from the St. Joe River bank erosion control project and was concluded with a Letter of Concurrence from the USFWS on January 30, 2018 (USFWS reference number 01EIFW00-2018-I-0425) that the three-acre action would not be likely to adversely affect bull trout.

All work on the St. Joe River bank erosion control project would be conducted during low flows on dry lands between November 1 and March 1. A contingency plan, should sufficiently low flows not be available was included in the consultation with USFWS to protect fish and aquatic habitats from turbidity effects.

6. *Wetlands*

Potential for Significance: No

The large wetland immediately to the northwest of the project site would be identified for avoidance, and is upslope of project actions and would therefore have no potential to be affected by potential runoff from project activities.

7. *Groundwater and Aquifers*

Potential for Significance: No

There would be no groundwater withdrawal. There would be some potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills since heavy equipment is being used, but it is highly unlikely that any spill would contain enough volume to reach groundwaters.

8. *Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas*

Potential for Significance: No

There would be no land use changes, and no impact to specially-designated areas. This project site is managed for fish and wildlife habitat and this project action improves the land's capability for this use.

9. *Visual Quality*

Potential for Significance: No

No prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made. Though the construction activity would be within 1,000 feet of, and visible from, State Highway 3, the visual effect would be short-term only. The completed action would result in native species growing in natural-appearing riparian habitat conditions.

10. *Air Quality*

Potential for Significance: No

There would be some potential for exhaust and greenhouse gas emissions since heavy equipment would be used. There would also be potential from vehicles used to transport workers, supplies,

and equipment to the sites. The emissions however would be short term (single season), with no long-term air quality effects created.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

There would be some potential for noise impacts since heavy equipment is being used, but this would be short-term (single season), with no long-term noise source created.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Heavy Equipment operation and working with hand and power tools would 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

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 project site is owned by the Coeur d'Alene Tribe who are also the sponsors of this project.

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

/s/ Robert W. Shull

Robert W Shull

Contract Environmental Protection Specialist

CorSource Technology Group