

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: North Fork Touchet (Warren) Floodplain and Fish Habitat Restoration RM 1.3-2.0

Project No.: 1996-046-00

Project Manager: Jesse Wilson – EWL-4

Location: Columbia County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20
Protect/restore/improve fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to provide funds to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) for restoration activities in a relatively confined one-mile stretch of the North Fork Touchet River, which is devoid of instream channel diversity, to a more naturally functioning channel by re-introducing instream natural roughness and increasing floodplain connectivity.

Restoration actions would occur within an about 8.5 acre area and would consist of approximately 32,000 cubic yards (CY) of floodplain excavation and berm removal. Berm material would be disposed of outside of the 100 year floodplain and on an adjacent landowner property. The placement of approximately 25 large wood structures would consist of approximately 260 CY of large wood placement below Ordinary High Water (OHW) and 250 CY above OHW. Large wood structures would be driven in place using vibratory pile drivers or secured with rock ballast. Rock ballast would be utilized for stability if vertical logs cannot be driven to depths shown in plans. Maintenance to these structures (addition of wood or ballast in previously disturbed areas) would occur on subsequent years in response to unforeseen high flow events.

Excavation would require the use of heavy equipment (most likely backhoe, 200 or 300 series excavator with bucket, small dozer, and 10-30 CY dump truck) to place large wood structures. All work areas involving disturbance adjacent to the wetted channel would be isolated from the stream flow. Installation of temporary coffer dams, bridges, and abutments would occur to provide access to both sides of the river during construction. All work near and adjacent the river would occur during a 6 week period during the in-water work window, typically July 15 – August 30, but may change upon approval of the State Fishery Biologist.

Site restoration measures would include seeding and planting of native trees and shrubs at excavation locations. Revegetation efforts would consist of 0.5 acre of upland seeding and mulch, placement of about 1,000 willow baffles, and about 21,000 native vegetation plantings. Follow up plantings would occur on subsequent years dependent upon survival and revegetation success.

As the project is implemented, an as-built conditions 2D hydraulic model would be developed and used to assess the need for minor design alterations due to an early 2020 flood event. This analysis may result in minor alterations to the floodplain grading to assure flood flow conveyance capacity is retained at pre-project conditions within the project extent.

These activities fulfil commitments begun under the 2008 NOAA Fisheries Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (as supplemented in 2010 and 2014) (2008 BiOp) and ongoing commitments under the 2019 NOAA Fisheries 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/ Claire McClory

Claire McClory
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey Grange
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

Throughout this reach of the North Fork Touchet, the vegetation community is made up of a mosaic of riparian plants and trees including cottonwood, alder and willows immediately bordering the channel. There are scattered conifers along the stream as well. Outside the riparian area the main vegetation type is grass used for grazing cattle and hay production, and an apple orchard.

Much of the North Fork Touchet is channelized and hemmed in by push up berms and levees that reduce interaction with the natural floodplain. The river is also starved of in-stream diversity such as large pools and downed wood. The North Touchet is an important steelhead spawning and rearing area, but Chinook salmon were extirpated many years ago. The North Fork Touchet is critical habitat for bull trout, which use this reach for both spawning and rearing

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no historic properties affected (WA 2017 066). The SHPO concurred with BPA's determination on May 4, 2020. The Nez Perce Tribe deferred consultation to CTUIR, and CTUIR requested that a cultural resources monitor be present within 100 feet of the bank of the North Fork Touchet River. No other responses were received from consulting parties.

Since BPA's determination of effect, an additional soils offset area was identified and surveyed for cultural resources. BPA has determined that the additional site would result in no historic properties affected on June 15, 2020 with DAHP concurrence the same day. The BPA archaeologist confirmed that consultation is complete for in-water and floodplain work within the original APE as described above. Offset soils cannot be disposed of in the additional soil offset area until the consultation period ends on July 15, 2020.

Notes:

- A cultural resources monitor shall be present during floodplain excavation activities within 100 feet of the banks of the North Fork Touchet River.
- 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.
- Offset soils cannot be disposed of in the additional soil offset area until the BPA archeologist confirms that the consultation period for the additional area has been complete (scheduled to end on July 15, 2020).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No or No with Conditions

Explanation: The removal of the berm 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 and project elements were sited to minimize channel crossing locations. 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: No ESA-listed or special-status plant species are known to exist on the site. Areas disturbed as a result of the excavation of the proposed side channels would be planted with native willows. Disturbed areas would be seeded with a locally derived and adapted native seed mixture.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA listed wildlife species have been documented in or adjacent to the project area and no designated critical habitat is present. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by construction traffic and noise, but would likely avoid the area during this time and return once the project work is completed.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project is covered under the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion (BiOp) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. Listed fish species include Middle Columbia River steelhead and Columbia River bull trout and their critical habitat. Since the project is considered to be medium risk under HIP, plans were reviewed by BPA engineering technical services, and a series of conservation measures were proposed to ensure that the project would benefit ESA-listed fish species. The project was designed to work with and restore natural riverine sedimentation, flooding, and vegetation processes over the long run, by re-introducing instream natural roughness and increasing floodplain connectivity.

This project area is within the 100 year floodplain. All work areas involving disturbance adjacent to the wetted channel would be isolated from the stream flow. The CTUIR has applied for a Clean Water Act Nationwide Permit (NWP) number NWP-2020-441. BMPs to avoid or minimize temporary fine sediment impacts during construction and project elements would be employed to minimize channel crossing locations. Site restoration measures include restoring riparian vegetation and floodplain large wood sources for future instream habitat formation.

Site restoration measures would include seeding and planting of native willows and conifers at excavation locations. By removing the berm along stream bank in upper portion of project reach, the project would increase floodplain hydrologic connectivity, benefit floodplain wetlands and increase habitat complexity.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no designated wetlands on the property.

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 change to land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor changes to visual quality. The new large wood structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and the topography of the proposed side channels and 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 work is not considered hazardous nor would result in any health or 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 underlying landowner has been in coordination with CTUIR staff. Adjacent landowners are supportive of the project.

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

Signed: /s/ Claire McClory 06/29/2020
Claire McClory, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist