

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Desert Wildlife O & M Project

Project No.: 2006-003-00

Project Manager: Corrie Veenstra

Location: Grant County, Washington

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

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration proposes to fund Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's ongoing operations and maintenance (O&M) activities at six (TD-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) wetland enhancement sites within the Desert Wildlife Area Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area. The proposed O&M actions at the wetland enhancement sites would include:

1. TD-1: coordinate water use with Bureau of Reclamation and Quincy Irrigation District; implement moist soil management strategies (i.e. tilling); inspect and repair enhancements (i.e installing wire mesh for rodent prevention, maintaining dike armor, vegetation maintenance, erosion control); establish desirable vegetation through seeding and supplemental seed plugs; operate and maintain existing water control structures (i.e. pig launchers); and monitor and report annual waterfowl use;
2. TD-2: inspect and repair enhancements (i.e installing wire mesh for rodent prevention, maintaining dike armor, vegetation maintenance, erosion control); establish desirable vegetation through seeding and supplemental seed pugs; and maintain duck nest tubes;
3. All sites: monitor and control undesirable vegetation via biological, chemical (glyphosate/imazapyr applied via aerial, broadcast, or other methods) and mechanical controls (tilling, mowing).

No new control structures would be installed and ground disturbance and herbicide applications would be limited to the sites during the dry periods.

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), Bonneville 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, Bonneville finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

/s/ Israel Duran

Israel Duran
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient/CRGT

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: May 14, 2020

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: Desert Wildlife O&M Project

Project Site Description

The project sites (TD 1-6) are part of the highly managed temporary wetlands of the Desert Unit of the Columbia Basin Wildlife Area, and are located approximately 6.5 miles west of Potholes Reservoir, in Grant County, Washington. The Columbia Basin Wildlife Area is part of the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. The 34,920-acre Desert Unit is accessed from multiple roads, including Road M SW, Frenchman Hills Road, and Dodson Road.

The Desert Unit is the lowest part of the very large Quincy Basin that once was filled with glacial floodwater and was wholly desert prior to the Columbia Basin Irrigation Project. The natural basin now serves as a collector for irrigation water from northern, upslope farmlands collected in the Winchester and Frenchman Hills wasteways, which pass southeasterly across the Desert Unit and eventually empty into the southwestern part of Potholes Reservoir, where the water is stored for irrigation. During fall through spring the wetland water levels are either managed by passive flow from the Winchester Wasteway or intensively managed via water control structures accessing the Frenchman Hills Wasteway.

The sites are managed temporary wetlands and are allowed to dry out during the spring. This allows for operations and maintenance activities and vegetation control, which would include treatments (tilling, mowing, herbicides, etc.) combined with seeding or additional plug plantings to reduce weed species (i.e. reed canarygrass, bulrush, knotweed), to improve native and nonnative, noninvasive plants (i.e. millet, smartweed barnyardgrass, witchgrass, beggar's tick), and stimulate plant production for waterfowl. In the fall, after the plants mature, the areas are flooded for waterfowl.

Activities would occur in previously-restored wetland areas (TD 1 and 2) and unmodified areas (TD 3-6), approximately 6.5 miles from Potholes Reservoir and 80 miles from the Columbia River. Most activities would occur while wetland areas are dry or as needed to maximize waterfowl winter habitat. While many other species may directly benefit from the temporary wetlands as well, there are no known listed species or habitat within or near the project areas.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Explanation: Washington State Department of Archeological and Historical Properties concurred with BPA's determination that the proposed activities would have 'No Adverse Effect' on cultural resources. Activities outside the APE presented in the 2013 and 2017 consultations are not planned.

2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Explanation: Any ground-disturbing activities required for the completion of this work would be within the confines of the existing footprint and implemented during drier summer months. Soil is not anticipated to travel outside of the work areas.

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

Explanation: Because the sites are managed for waterfowl habitat, herbicides and other vegetation controls are intended to target invasive plant species for the benefit of waterfowl friendly plants. There are no anticipated impacts to Federal/state special-status species or habitats; none exist within the immediate area of impact.

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

Explanation: There are no sensitive species (including Endangered Species Act-listed) wildlife species within the project area. The project is designed to provide waterfowl habitat during fall to early spring, and may have positive effects on local wildlife through the benefits provided by the additional vegetative growth and return of native plants.

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

Explanation: The project area is not within anadromous fish species ESU or range. All herbicides are approved for use within or near waters (glyphosate/imazapyr) and are used when sites are dry. Due to the downstream distance to the Columbia River (~80 river miles), the location of the project area above the Potholes Reservoir, lack of outflow at some sites, and application of the herbicides during dry periods, no effect to listed anadromous or other fish species are expected from herbicide use.

The activities would not impact water bodies or floodplains.

6. **Wetlands**

Explanation: No long-term negative effect to wetlands are expected from the activities listed. Management of the project wetlands would be used to maximize habitat quality for wetland obligate birds, and would have a positive effect on wetlands. However, as part of the overall management strategy the wetlands are allowed to dry out annually and some activities (tilling or spraying) may have an immediate short term effect, but these are expected to be beneficial overall.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Explanation: All work would occur in the footprint of the existing site, and would not impact or change groundwater or aquifers.

8. **Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Explanation: All work would occur in the existing site, and would not impact or change land use.

9. **Visual Quality**

Explanation: All work would occur in and be consistent with the visual characteristics of the existing site, and would not impact visual quality.

10. **Air Quality**

Explanation: The work would not impact air quality.

11. **Noise**

Explanation: The work would occur in existing sites and would not raise noise levels above background.

12. **Human Health and Safety**

Explanation: All work would occur in the site, and safety regulations would be followed as necessary.

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, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: This work would be implemented in the Desert Wildlife Area Unit of the Bureau of Reclamation's Columbia Basin Project. The Desert Wildlife Area Unit is managed by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to improve wetlands for the benefit of waterfowl.

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

Signed: /s/ Israel Duran

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Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
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Date: May 14, 2020