

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Asotin Creek Wildlife Mitigation Project Operations and Maintenance (O&M)

Project No.: 2006-005-00

Project Manager: Tracey Hauser, EWL-4

Location: Asotin and Garfield, 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: The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to continue annual funding the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) for Operations & Maintenance (O&M) of the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area. The goal of these activities proposed actions are to "protect, manage, and restore" habitat values for wildlife.

Asotin Creek Wildlife Area is divided into two units located in Asotin and Garfield Counties. The lower unit is the George Creek property at approximately 12,000 acres and Bickford property which is comprised of 5,600 acres. The upper unit is named the Smoothing Iron Ridge unit and is approximately 20,000 acres located on the North and South Forks of Asotin Creek.

The primary objectives are to reduce noxious weed populations on the upper and lower units, rehabilitate riparian zones and provide a wildlife food source. O&M activities would continue improving existing areas. No new construction or renovations are scheduled. Observational routine maintenance would lead to repair of fence only if damaged. Plumbing routine maintenance would ensure that water systems do not have leaks, plug ups from rodents are cleared, and pumps are operating at full capacity. Plumbing maintenance is critical O&M for fire protection and wildlife watering stations. Observational quality control of buildings would occur to ensure no damage from the natural elements or the public that would result in health and human safety issues on the grounds (i.e. graffiti, break-ins, property damage). Routine equipment inspection/maintenance would occur inside buildings and adjacent driveways to ensure all equipment in stored buildings is operational and functional for the summer/fall high visitor field season. Maintenance of vegetation around buildings and public sites for fire break protection would occur through weed spraying and mowing tall grass.

As defined above the property has 2 units of land that were traditionally used for livestock production and dry land farming. The land has several problems associated mainly with noxious weeds and degraded riparian management zones. Vegetation Management O&M would include the following activities:

- Annual observation of weeds on all units are addressed through ATV mounted sprayers, and/or pickup mounted sprayers to control noxious weeds such as Scotch Thistle, Yellow Starthistle, Mediterranean Sage, Sulfur Cinquefoil, Houndstongue, Dalmation Toadflax, Rush Skeletonweed, and Leafy Spurge.
- Plowing and seeding would occur on the Smoothing Iron Ridge Unit. By using a tractor and plow, approximately 50 acres would be seeded with winter wheat to be used as a

food source and attraction for big game species - mainly elk. The field has been plowed annually for the last 40 years with a tractor and plow.

- Mowing and herbicide applications would occur on the Smoothing Iron Ridge Unit. Approximately 400 acres of the Unit was seeded to a native forb/grass mix in the spring of 2013 and is experiencing challenges with noxious weeds. The main control method would be mechanical mowing using tractor pulled 15' mower. Intense or isolated patches of heavy weed growth would be controlled by herbicide spot spraying with ATV mounted sprayers.
- Monitoring for Spalding's Catchfly, which is a federally-listed plant, began in 2009 and took place in 2010 by graduate students from Washington State University (WSU). 2020 efforts would be funded by BPA and would continue each year after. US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) approved survey protocols that would be used. There would be no physical plant samples removed and/or collected with observational data collection employed to inform vegetation management of the property.

No new gates, fencing, signs, water systems or structures would be installed as part of this project and no renovations are scheduled in FY 2020 for buildings, barns or houses.

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/ Luca T. De Stefanis

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Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: May 20, 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: Asotin Creek Wildlife Mitigation Project Operations and Maintenance (O&M)

Project Site Description

Activities would occur on WDFW-owned property within the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area, an approximately 38,0000 acre property made up of uplands and riparian areas comprised of steep canyons with timbered North facing slopes and predominately South facing slopes with shrub/steppe habitat type interspersed with retired farmland parcels and active agriculture lands. The Tucannon, Snake, Grande Ronde, and Walla Walla rivers, plus Asotin Creek and the many tributaries of these stream systems support fish, wildlife, and recreational opportunities in portions of the wildlife 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:

On May 15, 2020, BPA conducted a cultural resources file search utilizing information provided from the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) WISAARD system for the Asotin Creek Wildlife Management Project O&M (2006-005-00/Contract 74314) located in Asotin County, WA (T9N R44E Sec 31). According to their records, there have been no previously recorded sites within the vicinity of the project area. Two previous archaeological inventory efforts have been conducted in the vicinity – one for BPA-funded wildlife and livestock water developments (Cannell 2007, NADB 1349553), and one for BPA-funded O&M actions related to terrace removal and guzzler installation (Yorck 2014; NADB 1685589).

As a result, the BPA archeologist determined that as long as proposed project activities are limited to using a tractor and plow to seed an existing field, in a manner that is consistent with recent and historic use of the area, and where ground disturbance is limited to the existing plow zone, that the project would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Explanation: Ground disturbing activities would be limited to the winter wheat seeding, for which soils would not migrate beyond the existing agricultural field. No other ground disturbing activities are proposed and, thus, the other proposed activities would not have the potential to affect geology and soils.

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



Explanation: Limited ground disturbance would occur that would disturb vegetation. Monitoring for Spalding's Catchfly, which is an Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant, would occur. There would be no physical plant samples removed and/or collected with observational data collection employed to inform vegetation management. USFWS approved survey protocols that would be used.

Proposed vegetation management would use herbicides and adjuvants based on BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion to remove weeds. The ongoing annual actions are similar to vegetation management activities already occurring in the surrounding area. In the long term, the vegetation management O&M activities would result in an improvement in the vegetative condition of the wildlife area.

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



Explanation: Minor temporary disturbance to wildlife. Equipment use would be stopped during nesting and breeding season in locations where nesting birds may be present to minimize effects. All actions would be deferred until later in the season. All work performed would avoid eagle nesting areas, which typically are in extremely rugged areas and located on rocky cliffs; these areas are avoided all together by project actions. There would be no impact to ESA-listed or state sensitive species.

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



Explanation: The proposed activities would not involve any in water work or impact to water bodies, floodplain or fish.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: None present in the proposed action areas.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: There would be no potential to impact groundwater. No use of groundwater proposed. No deep digging proposed.

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



Explanation: There would be no changes to land use and no impact to specially designated areas. The ownership of the land is by WDFW. Opportunities for public recreational use are offered on the property. Sign in kiosks are posted at all property access points and online with information including hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking, walking photography, camping, horseback riding along with property regulations.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: O&M construction/repairs would be limited to buildings and fence infrastructure. Construction repair would improve appearances of existing structures and infrastructure from enhancements to building, fences, and vegetation management. This is not inconsistent with the long-term ongoing land use operations through use of light trucks, and ATVs on the property and surrounding properties.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: There would be short-term effects of vehicle and equipment generating dust only for short durations and not inconsistent with the long-term ongoing land use operations through use of light trucks and ATVs on the property and surrounding properties.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: There would be short-term effects of vehicle and heavy equipment (i.e. tractor/mower) generating noise and consistent with the long-term ongoing land use operations in the area defined in the land management plan and not inconsistent with surrounding land uses of agricultural and forest working lands.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: Wildlife Area employees attend herbicide/pesticide recertification workshops to keep their Washington State Public Operator weed spraying licenses up to date according to Washington State Law. 12 credit hours per year are required to maintain license. Human health and safety would follow federal guidelines. Appropriate PPE would be worn by all employees across all tasks. Human health and safety conditions would be maintained and or improved by the structural and or infrastructural improvements proposed.

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: WDFW, the underlying land manager, would be conducting the proposed work.

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

Signed: /s/ Luca T. De Stefanis
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Date: May 20, 2020