

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Pahsimeroi Valley Invasive Plant Treatment and Fence Construction

Project No.: 2008-603-00

Project Manager: Jenny Lord, EWM-4

Location: Lemhi and Custer Counties, 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 fund the Lemhi Soil and Water Conservation District to treat invasive plants in the Pahsimeroi River Valley. BPA also proposes to fund the Custer Soil and Water Conservation District for the construction of a new jack fence along Patterson/Big Springs Creek, also located in the Pahsimeroi River Valley.

Invasive plants would be spot-treated in the spring and summer by hand-pulling and backpack spraying of herbicides at sites in the following table. These locations are former restoration project sites or other bare-soil sites in the Pahsimeroi Valley, and represent locations where individual invasive plants or clusters of such plants, have been found; no broad-scale application of herbicide is proposed here. All herbicide applications would be done in accordance with the conservation measures identified in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Section 7 Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation.

Table 1 Weed Treatment Sites

| Project Site | Riparian miles | Total Acres | Stream | Latitude | Longitude |
|--|----------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Big Springs-10 | 0.02 | 0.1 | Big Springs | 44.594106 | -113.92628 |
| Patterson Bridge (Hooper Lane) | 0.01 | 0.12 | Patterson Creek | 44.563982 | -113.89624 |
| Mulvaney Bridge (Hooper Lane) | 0.02 | 0.14 | Patterson Creek | 44.562160 | -113.89625 |
| Mulvaney Headgate | 0.06 | 0.19 | Patterson Creek | 44.562346 | -113.8949 |
| 7/8 Fish Screen | 0.04 | 0.53 | Patterson Creek | 44.562781 | -113.89013 |
| PBSC-10 bridge and screen | 0.10 | 0.6 | Patterson-Big Springs | 44.544291 | -113.85511 |
| Lower Pahsimeroi River Rehab - Dixon | 0.05 | 1.2 | Pahsimeroi River | 44.664940 | -114.028790 |
| Dowton Lane Bridge | 0.03 | 1.5 | Pahsimeroi River | 44.619125 | -113.98053 |
| P-13 (old site) | 0.10 | 2.8 | Pahsimeroi River | 44.558498 | -113.91132 |
| Big Springs-03 and cross ditch | 0.43 | 5 | Big Springs | 44.595589 | -113.93746 |
| Sulphur Creek Restoration | 0.63 | 21.7 | Sulphur Creek | 44.526445 | -113.926320 |
| IDL property at Furey Lane | 0.85 | 31.4 | Pahsimeroi River | 44.526194 | -113.84846 |
| Page Habitat Project/Big Creek Ranch | 1.25 | 38.8 | Pahsimeroi River | 44.538592 | -113.86965 |
| Bar G Farms | 0.00 | 140.1 | Muddy Springs | 44.587582 | -113.970408 |
| Lower Pahsimeroi River Restoration-Chewing | 0.46 | 3.3 | Pahsimeroi River | 44.669895 | -113.032516 |
| Mill Creek Reconnect | 0.30 | 5.2 | Mill Creek | 44.467949 | -113.683935 |

Also, approximately 1,000 feet of jack (post and pole) fence would be constructed along Patterson/Big Springs Creek to prevent livestock from accessing riparian vegetation along the upper reach of Patterson/Big Springs Creek. No new road construction or other ground disturbance would be required with this fence construction. The post and pole design sits on top of the ground; no post holes would be dug. Location of fencing is at Latitude 44.611618 and Longitude -113.961969.

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/ Robert W Shull

Robert W Shull
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
CorSource Technology Group

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: May 22, 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: Pahsimeroi Valley Invasive Plant Treatment and Fence Construction

Project Site Description

The Pahsimeroi River is a tributary to the Salmon River in east-central Idaho. The Pahsimeroi River Valley has been the location of numerous river and stream restoration projects since the early 2000's. These projects are typically located within stream courses, along river banks, and in adjacent riparian, agricultural, or grazing areas along the Pahsimeroi River and its tributaries. These project sites are primarily in riparian areas within agricultural fields or pastures, in a setting that had naturally been sagebrush steppe prior to conversion to agricultural or grazing use.

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**



Explanation: Neither herbicide application nor jack fence construction disturbs the ground surface. Herbicide application is simply a spraying of plants, and the fence design sits atop the ground with no post holes needing to be dug. These actions have no potential for effect of historic or cultural resources.

2. **Geology and Soils**



Explanation: Weed treatments would occur on sites that have already been disturbed from prior restoration project actions that preceded this weed treatment. No soil displacement, soil mixing, or other mechanical soil disturbance would occur from herbicide application. Herbicide impacts to biological components of soils would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels and further minimized by application of Conservation Measures (timing, amounts/concentrations, location of application, etc.) from BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation.

The fence construction would sit atop the ground and requires no fence holes to be dug; no soil disturbance.

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



Explanation: Herbicide applications would take place primarily on sites with slopes less than 20% and would apply HIP conservation measures to minimize the potential for drift or runoff to non-target vegetation. Though many sites would be in, or near, riparian areas, herbicides application would result in little or no potential for herbicide to reach aquatic vegetation.

Fence construction actions may trample herbaceous vegetation which would quickly recover. No woody plants would be cut.

No ESA-listed, or "special status" plant species are present in these locations.

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

Explanation: Treatments would be conducted during the spring nesting period, so some short-term (hours) temporary disturbance of nesting birds may occur as a result of human presence and activity. Treatments are of herbaceous plants, thus woody plants supporting nesting birds would not be affected. No nest-site destruction would occur.

These are spot treatments that would be highly localized and thus not substantially impact any one animal's home range. No plants identified for treatment are used preferentially for habitat purposes by native species. Larger wildlife using nearby habitats may be disturbed and temporarily displaced by noise and human presence during the short-term herbicide application actions

Fence construction activities would likewise be disturbing to local wildlife. The fence is a "wildlife-friendly" design, providing for safe crossing by native ungulates and smaller wildlife, and would not divide wildlife home ranges.

Fencing would be constructed and herbicide would be applied according to the HIP conservation measures that would minimize the potential impacts on all native wildlife and wildlife habitats. No ESA-listed or "special-status" wildlife species occupy the weed treatment sites. ESA HIP consultation Project Notification Form submitted to US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service on 5/11/20.

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

Explanation: Neither fence construction nor weed treatments would physically alter any site; there would be no adverse physical changes to water bodies, floodplains, or fish from these actions.

ESA-listed fish species and critical habitats would be present in nearby waterways, but HIP conservation measures would be applied for herbicide applications, minimizing the potential for herbicide to reach aquatic habitats. ESA HIP consultation Project Notification Form submitted to US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service on 5/11/20.

The fencing is intended to prevent livestock from accessing riparian habitats and active streams, providing protection to these areas. There would be no effect on aquatic species from this fencing.

6. **Wetlands**

Explanation: HIP conservation measures would preclude the application of herbicides near any wetlands by requiring an adequate buffer.

The fencing is intended to prevent livestock from accessing wetlands, providing protection to these areas.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Explanation: Herbicide impacts to groundwater and aquifers would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels and further minimized by application of HIP conservation measures (timing, amounts/concentrations, location of application, etc.).

Fence construction requires no holes to be dug and has no potential to affect groundwater or aquifers.

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

Explanation: Spot treatment of individual plants or plant clusters using herbicides applied according to manufacturer's labels and under the HIP conservation measures have no potential to alter land uses or impact specially-designated areas.

Fence construction may alter grazing use patterns in the riparian areas along Patterson/Big Springs Creek, but does not change the underlying land use.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The existing condition of weed treatment sites would be varied, as these are small spots where individual plants or clusters of plants have been found. Some sites may be vegetated, some barren; some visible from roads, some not. The killing of these individual plants or small plant clusters may produce unsightly dead plants visible in the foreground in some areas for a season, but would not substantially alter the visual quality.

Jack fencing is a common sight in the Pahsimeroi Valley. The construction of this new fence would not be inconsistent with the current visual character of the area.

There would be no long-term changes to visual quality.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: Driving of vehicles to access fence construction and weed treatment sites, and chainsaw use for fence construction would produce emissions, but the amount would be minimal and short-term, and consistent with that produced by local agricultural activities.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Noise sources would be from motor vehicle and chainsaw use, and from human activity at fence construction and weed treatment sites. Noise would be consistent with that produced by local agricultural activities and would be short-term. These impacts would occur during daylight hours during the spring and summer months.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: No long-term public safety hazards would be created with this project. Routine, short-term, safety hazards would be expected from the incremental addition of vehicle traffic on local roads. Application of herbicides would be according to manufacturer's labels and the HIP conservation measures, thereby minimizing risk to human health and safety.

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: Fence construction and herbicide application on private lands would proceed following notification of the affected land owners. Land owners who authorized the prior restoration project actions on their lands are already aware of, and anticipate, the proposed planting and weed treatments. Spot weed treatments at sites within public road right-of-ways require no site-specific land owner notification.

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

Signed: /s/ Robert W Shull

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Date: May 22, 2020