

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Restoration Projects at Albeni Falls Wildlife Areas

Project No.: 1992-061-02

Project Manager: Lee Watts, EWM-4

Location: Pend Oreille County, 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: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund habitat protection, restoration, and improvement projects on lands owned and managed by the Kalispel Tribe in Washington to address the negative impacts to wildlife species and habitats affected by the construction and operation of Albeni Falls Dam. The Kalispel Tribe manages wildlife on 3,510 acres in Washington. BPA funding would be provided under the Albeni Falls Wildlife Mitigation Program to mitigate for effects of the Albeni Falls Dam and the ongoing loss of wildlife habitat from the reservoir pursuant to Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act) (16 U.S.C. (USC) 839 et seq.).

Project implementation would occur at the following management areas in Washington:

Trimble Creek (Scheibel)
Cusick Meadows
Indian Creek

Building Renovation – Indian Creek

The Shell House on the Indian Creek property would be converted into office space to meet county building codes. This would involve interior modifications only. There would be no disturbance beyond the building footprint.

Kiosk and Parking Lot Installation – Scheibel, Cusick Meadows, Indian Creek

A new parking area and associated kiosk would be installed at the Scheibel, Cusick Meadows, and Indian Creek properties to provide safe vehicle pull-off areas as well as property information and regulatory requirements for property use. The parking lots would be adjacent to existing roads. Parking lots would be 50x50 feet and would consist of filter fabric ground cover topped with 4 to 6 inches of packed gravel. Vegetation would be mowed prior to placing the filter fabric. Kiosks would be installed within the parking lot footprint. Kiosks would consist of 4x4 foot plywood boards attached to two posts with a protective roof, and would be placed near access gates.

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/ Mandy Hope

Mandy Hope
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u> | <u>September 16, 2020</u> |
| Sarah T. Biegel | Date |
| 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.

Proposed Action: Restoration Projects at Albeni Falls Wildlife Areas

Project Site Description

The project area is primarily at floodplain elevation, approximately 2,040 feet. The area is largely within the Upper Pend Oreille watershed and consists of agricultural lands and broad floodplains. The Pend Oreille River runs through the majority of the project area. Descriptions of the individual wildlife mitigation sites are as follows:

Trimble Creek/Cusick Meadows

The Calispell – Cusick Valley, located approximately 20 miles north-northeast from Chewelah, WA and 10.5 miles west of the WA/ID border, includes Trimble Creek and Cusick Meadows. The Pend Oreille River flows through the area from north to south. Historically, this area of the Pend Oreille River was a large shallow floodplain. Habitat types on both sides of the River included meadow grass and camas (*Camassia quamash*), marshes, riparian forests, and meandering stream channels. Calispell Lake is a large lake and marsh system in the project area and is used extensively by migratory waterfowl, and historically as a fisheries resource for both indigenous people and settlers. Many small tributaries drain into the Pend Oreille River in this valley, including the Calispell, Trimble, Tacoma, Skookum, Mill, Middle, Cee Cee Ah, Cusick, Davis, and McCloud Creeks. The valley's hydrology and habitats have been altered substantially in the last century. Multiple dams exist on the River both upstream and downstream. A system of levees was built to protect the surrounding lands from annual inundations. Dikes and drainage ditches have been built throughout the valley to de-water lands for the production of agricultural resources, particularly cattle, bison, and hay. A large railroad levee also exists along the west side of the River. Pumps must be continuously operated to move excess water from the lands west of the levee over the railroad and into the River. As a result, the majority of wetlands have been altered or degraded, and much riparian and native meadow vegetation have also been lost.

Indian Creek

The Indian Creek property is located approximately 7.5 miles south-southeast of Usk in Pend Oreille County, WA, at an elevation of 2,000 to 3,400 feet. Native vegetation primarily consists of conifers, shrubs, forbs, and grasses. The property is mostly mixed, lightly harvested coniferous forest. The only open areas are in irrigated hay fields with the exception of the western 30-acre opening that is being actively reforested and consists of forest and upland meadow. Indian Creek and the associated riparian zone bisect the property flowing north to south, where it empties into the Pend Oreille River. The shoreline and creek provide for waterfowl and furbearing animals such as muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*), beaver (*Castor*), skunk (*Mephitidae*), weasel (*Mustela*), mink (*Neovison vison*), and otter (*Lutrinae*). Moose (*Alces alces*), elk (*Cervus canadensis*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), white-tailed deer (*O. virginianus*), and black bears (*Ursus americanus*) are all native to the area and utilize forested areas. Upland areas of hardwoods contain ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) as well as numerous species of resident and neo-tropical migrant birds. Raptors that nest within the project area include bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), ospreys

(*Pandion haliaetus*), marsh hawks (*Circus cyaneus*), and owls (*Strigiformes*). Amphibians and reptiles are also present in the area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Consultation was completed for parking lot and kiosk installation under WA DAHP Log No. 071315-10-BPA. The remaining activities would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Parking lot installation would involve ground-disturbing activities. Minimal new ground disturbance is anticipated and would mainly occur adjacent to existing access roads on grassy fields. During construction all appropriate BMPs would be used to implement site-specific erosion and sediment control. All disturbed areas would be stabilized and seeded.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Whitebark pine (*P. albicaulis*) is an Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed candidate plant species in Pend Oreille County. Project implementation would not occur in areas where whitebark pine is present, and would therefore have no effect on listed plants or Federal or state special-status species and habitats. Parking lots would be installed adjacent to existing roadways to minimize impacts to vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed wildlife species in Pend Oreille County include Canada lynx, grizzly bear, North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). However, suitable habitat is not present where project implementation activities would occur; therefore, there would be no effect to listed species or their habitats. Any impacts to non-listed wildlife species would be limited to the immediate area where there would be a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary elevated noise disturbance. New parking lots would not significantly detract from suitable habitat as they would be installed near roads, which wildlife tend to avoid.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and its critical habitat are present in the Pend Oreille River and its tributaries. No instream work would occur as part of the proposed action; therefore, the actions would have no effect on fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Intermittent Freshwater Emergent and Freshwater Forested/Shrub wetlands are present along the Pend Oreille River and tributaries. The proposed action would not result in discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater is proposed; therefore, there would be no impact to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change as a result of this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no adverse effects to the visual quality of the environment as a result of this project.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of emissions associated with increased vehicular traffic would occur during project activities. There would be no significant changes to air quality as a result of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The noise generated by project implementation would not substantially impact the surrounding environment.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker 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: 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: Areas where project implementation would occur are owned and managed by the Kalispel Tribe.

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

Signed: /s/ Mandy Hope September 16, 2020
Mandy Hope, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing