

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: YKFP South Fork Cowiche Wood Replenishment Project

Project No.: 1997-051-00

Project Manager: Michelle O'Malley

Location: Yakima County, Washington

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 provide funding to support implementation of the Yakima/Klickitat Fisheries Project (YKFP) South Fork Cowiche Wood Replenishment project located on Washington Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) property in the Yakima Basin watershed. BPA funds would contribute about 40 percent of overall project costs and the Salmon Recovery Board would provide cost share for the remaining 60 percent. The project seeks to increase floodplain function, enhance in-stream habitat complexity, improve riparian habitat, and increase groundwater recharge and stream flow.

Construction activities would include loose placement of about 200 logs on 2.5 acres of floodplain along a 2-mile-long stretch of South Fork Cowiche Creek. A selection of floodplain logs would be anchored using vertical log piles and rope lashing. Anchored logs would encourage sediment accumulation and floodplain roughness, and improve riparian planting success. Log piles would be installed using a tractor-mounted auger to create the holes for vertical piling. Live stake plantings would be placed at or below baseflow groundwater surface elevations using an excavator with an expandable stinger tool attachment. No ballast, boulders, excavation, or structural connections would be needed to perform this work.

As part of the project, three abandoned irrigation wells would be decommissioned. The wells would be filled with bentonite clay to stop or slow flow exchange, then filled with compacted soil. The concrete top rings would be removed and discarded.

Site access would be via the existing Cowiche Mill Road. Temporary access roads within the project area would be established to transport logs and heavy equipment. Equipment staging and refueling would be located more than 150 feet from the stream channel and refueling would occur outside of the floodplain. After construction is complete, soils would be de-compacted and topped with weed-free straw mulch to minimize erosion potential. Native seeding would be planted in disturbed areas.

Inspection and maintenance of the project site would occur annually, and could result in minor on-site adjustments to wood placements, the addition of woody materials to the site, or additional vegetation planting and management.

Funding for the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp), commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp), and Bonneville's commitments to the Yakama Nation under the 2018 Columbia River Fish Accord Extension agreement, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the FCRPS on fish and wildlife in the mainstem Columbia River and its tributaries pursuant to the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act) (16 U.S.C. (USC) 839 et seq.).

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 C. Grange

Katey C. Grange

NEPA Compliance Officer

September 16, 2020

Date

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: YKFP South Fork Cowiche Wood Replenishment Project

Project Site Description

The project area is located within the WDFW-owned Oak Creek Wildlife Area Cowiche Unit. The proposed project is located along South Fork Cowiche Creek, which is a tributary to Cowiche Creek and is located in the Yakima River basin. The area is actively managed for wildlife habitat enhancement, including improvements to Mid-Columbia steelhead habitat. Recreation uses in the area includes hunting, wildflower and bird viewing, hiking, and fishing. The site is characterized by floodplain vegetation such as grasses, alders, willows, and cottonwood. Upland species such as oak, ponderosa pine, and wild rose are also present.

The project area has been heavily manipulated by historical agricultural use, resulting in a straightened and incised channel with limited floodplain access. In 2017, YKFP completed a larger-scale wood replenishment project within the proposed project reach of the South Fork Cowiche Creek that included construction of instream log jams to encourage floodplain access. Since then, YKFP staff have observed high velocity surface flows across the project area floodplain that were not initially treated with wood.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no Historic Properties Affected on September 16, 2015. The Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) concurred on September 21, 2015 (Log No. 042015-15-BPA). An additional determination of no effect was sent September 1, 2020 to address the removal of the abandoned irrigation wells, which are not considered eligible resources. DAHP concurrence was received on September 3, 2020.

Notes:

- 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, cultural committee, and DAHP notified.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary impacts to soil from increased erosion potential during construction and grading activities. Sediment control BMPs would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Post construction seeding and mulching would further minimize erosion potential.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status, including Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed, plant species are known to be present. Temporary impacts to existing vegetation during grading activities. Post construction seeding and monitoring would re-establish native upland and riparian plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status, including ESA-listed wildlife, are present within the project area. Minor, temporary impact to local wildlife from noise and vegetation removal would be limited to during construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project would provide 2.5 acres of long-term floodplain reconnection to areas that have been historically altered by human influence.

No known state-listed special-status species present. ESA-listed Middle Columbia River steelhead and bull trout are present within the project stream reach. The project is covered under Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion under Section 7 of ESA with Project Notification Form (PNF) number 2020044. The project would result in long-term net benefits to fish species within the project reach from increased habitat availability, floodplain access, and decreased summer stream temperatures.

Notes:

- Project sponsors would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impact to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Long-term increase in floodplain access would benefit groundwater recharge and function.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary, minor impact to the fall hunting season while access to the project area is restricted during construction. The WDFW Cowiche Unit has hunting opportunities adjacent to the project area that would be unaffected. No long-term change to land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor change to visual quality with the addition of wood on the floodplain. The project is not within a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in vehicle emissions and dust during construction. No long-term impacts to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in noise during daytime construction activities due to vehicles and equipment use. No long-term noise impacts.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impact expected.

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: WDFW completed a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) determination of non-significance (DNS) for the initial wood loading project on September 1, 2015. An addendum to cover the 2020 proposed wood placement was signed on July 31, 2020 (SEPA DNS 15-046, Addendum 20-035). The determination will allow WDFW to issue a right of entry permit to the Yakama Nation.

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 September 16, 2020
Claire McClory, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist