

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Operations, Maintenance, and Aquatic Habitat Research in the Pend Oreille Subbasin

Project No.: 1995-001-00

Project Manager: Lee Watts, EWM - 4

Location: Pend Oreille County, WA; Bonner County, ID

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat; B1.3 Routine maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Kalispel Tribe to conduct ongoing watershed assessments and maintenance of previously-installed habitat restoration projects in the Pend Oreille subbasin, where habitat has been degraded due to construction of Albeni Falls Dam. Project objectives include increasing the abundance of westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*) and Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) populations. BPA funding would contribute toward the following proposed activities:

- Maintain existing riparian fencing – Annually inspect approximately two miles of fencing at Whiteman Creek, Fourth of July Creek, and Middle Branch LeClerc Creek, re-hang barbed wire where knocked down, and carry out in-kind replacement of broken fence posts. No new ground disturbance is proposed.
- Watershed assessments – Determine the quality and quantity of aquatic habitat within the Cedar Creek, Ruby Creek, LeClerc Creek, Sullivan Creek, Indian Creek, Mill Creek, Cee Cee Ah Creek, Upper Priest River, Upper West Branch Priest River, Lower Priest River, East River, and Hughes Fork watersheds to estimate basic riparian and hydrologic conditions and inform restoration strategies. This would involve reviewing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) database information, as well as, collecting field data such as bankfull measurements, average wetted width measurements, thalweg length measurements, biological survey via electroshocking, snorkeling, seining, and/or hook and line, taking photographs, and taking thermography readings using thermographs attached to logs in the stream using waterproof rope. Electrofishing would be conducted via backpack-mounted devices. No boats/boat launches would be used.
- Maintain Goose Creek Channel Reconstruction Project – The Goose Creek Channel Reconstruction project was completed in 2018 and created an 8,000-foot-long stream channel to provide emergent wetland and open water habitat, while filling the old channel and revegetating with native upland seed mix to control erosion/sediment. The Kalispel Tribe would conduct yearly inspection and maintenance of the site as needed, including vegetation planting, erosion control measures, removal/replacement of woody materials that have been washed away or caused flow/velocity issues, and repair or placement of beaver dam analogs in response to high velocity flows, which would involve a crew of two workers hand-pounding

fence posts into the streambed. The site would be reached using an existing access road. Ground disturbance would not occur outside the former restoration project footprint.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, 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/ Mandy Hope

Mandy Hope
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange April 21, 2021

Katey C. Grange 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.

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Project Site Description

All activities would occur at field sites associated with the Pend Oreille River and its tributaries Cedar Creek, Ruby Creek, LeClerc Creek, Sullivan Creek, Indian Creek, Mill Creek, and Cee Cee Ah Creek in northeastern Washington; and Upper Priest River, Upper West Branch Priest River, Lower Priest River, East River, and Hughes Fork in northwestern Idaho. The majority of the worksites are located on US Forest Service (USFS) land (Colville National Forest in WA and Kaniksu National Forest in ID).

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Goose Creek Channel Reconstruction Project was implemented in three phases, each of which was surveyed and consulted on in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Review No. 2011-1310; 2016-711; and 2018-1056, respectively). Maintaining this site would have no potential to affect cultural resources due to the limited ground disturbance associated with the actions. The remaining actions would have no potential to affect historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground-disturbing activities would be limited to minor fence repairs, watershed measurements, and project site maintenance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or sensitive plant species are present in the project area. Vegetation management such as re-seeding would only occur within the previously-disturbed Goose Creek Channel Reconstruction Project area that has since been re-seeded and planted with native vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Canada lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*), grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*), yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), and four species of migratory birds have the potential to occur within the project area; however, no

known occurrences have been documented in the worksites. Activities would be limited in duration, and impacts to wildlife from human presence (minor, temporary increases in noise and emissions resulting from the use of trucks to access field sites) would be temporary. Therefore, there would be no effect to ESA-listed or sensitive terrestrial wildlife species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Westslope cutthroat trout and ESA-listed bull trout and its critical habitat are present in the Pend Oreille River and its tributaries. No anadromous species are present due to anthropogenic blockages (Albeni Falls Dam).

Proposed watershed measurements could include capture, handling, tagging, and holding bull trout. The Kalispel Tribe has obtained a USFWS Section 10 recovery permit (#TE844478-8, expiration 6/5/2023) for research activities in support of bull trout recovery.

Proposed fence repairs and former restoration site monitoring would occur in upland areas and would not affect fish. Maintenance of the Goose Creek Channel Reconstruction Project would involve repair or placement of beaver dam analogs in the channel. Such actions would be localized and would not affect fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Removal, fill, or disturbance of native vegetation within wetland areas is not anticipated. Activities within or near wetlands would be limited to vegetation planting and in-kind fence replacement and would have positive long-term effects.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impact to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change in land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change in visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of emissions associated with increased vehicular traffic (trucks used to access field sites) would occur as part of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary noise increases associated with increased vehicular traffic (trucks used to access field sites) would occur during project inspection activities.

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: The Kalispel Tribe owns the Big Meadows property, within which the Goose Creek Channel Reconstruction Project is located. The Tribe maintains contact with the USFS to coordinate site visits. It is not anticipated that private land would need to be accessed, but if it were necessary, the Tribe would correspond with private landowners in writing.

