

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Tucannon River Large Wood Placement Project (*Update to CX issued July 23, 2020*)

Project No.: 2020-077-00

Project Manager: Jenny Lord EWU-4

Location: Columbia 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 provide funds to the Columbia Conservation District (SWCD) for restoration activities to increase channel roughness and floodplain connectivity through Large Wood Placements in various locations along a 3.7-mile-long stretch along the Tucannon River. Large wood placements would be placed in channel at locations and in orientations to increase floodplain connectivity. These treatments would provide structural diversity/roughness and sediment heterogeneity that is currently lacking throughout the river and floodplain and restore natural processes. This CX has been updated to reflect changes after several delays in implementation. These changes are additional wood placements (from 70 to 105) and the movement of an irrigation pivot and associated pipeline out of the floodplain.

Specific actions include:

Instream Wood Placements – Up to 60 wood placements would be constructed along and/or within the Ordinary High Water (OHW) of the main channel of the Tucannon River. Excavator(s) would be used to excavate channel alluvium and floodplain sediments, to place large wood, and backfill the structures with the excavated substrates. Rock would be used to ballast the wood.

Floodplain Wood Placements – Up to 45 single logs with root wads would be placed on gravel bars within and on throughout the floodplain. Excavator(s) would excavate sufficient alluvium to allow the log to lay flat on the gravel bar or floodplain surface.

Riparian Plantings – Native Species would be used to revegetate any disturbed areas following completion of constructed project elements. Grass seeding of access routes, staging areas and other disturbed areas would be completed immediately following construction.

Irrigation System Modification – A center-pivot irrigation system would be moved approximately 100 feet northeast. New water and power lines would be constructed to accommodate the irrigation system.

Maintenance to these structures (addition of wood or ballast in previously disturbed areas) would occur on subsequent years in response to unforeseen high flow events. Construction of project elements below OHW would be carried out during the summer in-water work window for the Tucannon River, July 15th through August 30th. Project elements above OHW may be completed August through September. Existing gravel access roads and compacted floodplain terrace surfaces would be used for access and staging areas would be located within the overall project footprint away from wetlands and waterbodies.

This project was broadly informed by the Snake River Salmon Recovery Plan for Southeast Washington and the project location and project design were informed by several basin-wide assessments including The Tucannon Sub-basin Plan and The Tucannon Geomorphic Assessment and Habitat Restoration Study. These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. 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/ Dan Gambetta

Dan Gambetta
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey Grange
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: Tucannon River Large Wood Placement Project

Project Site Description

The Tucannon River through the project area contains sections of dynamic and complex channel networks as well as wide, plane-bed stretches with little complexity. In the upper portion of the project area, the river is confined to a single-thread, plane-bed channel against the valley wall by bank armoring and levees. The levee materials are typically composed of angular armor rock, as well as a rock/wood revetment just downstream of the Turner Road bridge. Three large vortex rock weirs mid-reach control the channel grade. The current land use is a combination of rural residential and agricultural development. A portion of the historical riparian floodplain has been converted to hay fields. The existing riparian condition is cottonwood and alder dominated tree canopy with patches of aspen and locust. The understory is dominated by invasive vegetation consisting predominantly of Himalayan blackberry and reed canarygrass.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On October 2018, BPA initiated Section 106 consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribes and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP).

The CTUIR conducted cultural resources surveys through its Tribal Historic Preservation Office and prepared a report. BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no historic properties affected (WA 2018-272). The SHPO concurred with BPA's determination (Log No# 2018-10-07821-BPA). No tribal responses were received within 30 days.

In 2022, the SWCD contracted a professional archeological survey and report for the irrigation system modification. BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no historic properties affected (WA 2020-108). The SHPO concurred with BPA's determination (Log No# 2022-09-06310-WSCC). No tribal responses were received within 30 days.

Note: 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 and cultural committee and DAHP notified.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The excavation associated with placement of wood structures would temporarily disturb soils on the project site. Best Management Practices (BMP) have been developed to avoid or minimize temporary fine sediment impacts during construction and project elements were sited

to minimize channel crossing locations. All ground disturbance would be stabilized and rehabilitated using native plantings.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although ground disturbance is proposed, there are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species known to exist on the site. Areas disturbed as a result of large wood placement would be planted with native willows. Areas outside of the side channels that would be disturbed would be seeded with a locally derived and adapted native seed mixture. Any temporary impacts to on-site vegetation that may result from the implementation of this project would be completely restored to diverse, native vegetative communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The property has been used almost exclusively for growing crops or grazing cattle. No wildlife species have been documented in or adjacent to the project area and no designated critical habitat is present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is covered under the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion (BiOp) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. Listed fish species include Middle Columbia River steelhead and Columbia River bull trout and their critical habitat. Plans were reviewed by BPA engineering technical services, and a series of conservation measures were proposed to ensure that the project would benefit ESA-listed fish species. The project was designed to work with and restore natural riverine sedimentation, flooding, and vegetation processes over the long run, by re-introducing instream natural roughness and increasing floodplain connectivity.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no permanent adverse impacts to wetlands as a part of this project. No fill would be added to wetlands. Wetlands would be improved by adding wood only. A JARPA permit was submitted with a subsequent HPA granted. Existing gravel access roads and compacted floodplain terrace surfaces would be used for access and staging to avoid and minimize potential impacts. The project would be following the BPA HIP guidelines and BMPs to protect and avoid impacts to existing wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although there would be ground disturbance as a result of the excavation on the floodplain, the work would have no effect on groundwater and aquifers because excavation would not intersect groundwater and containment measures would be implemented to prevent contamination of groundwater from equipment leaks or spills.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur for the proposed project. The relocation of irrigation system would not result in any loss of productivity.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality. The new large wood structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and the topography of the proposed side channels and the relocated irrigation system would be consistent with the visual appearance of the area's agricultural land use. The project would not be located in a visually sensitive area. Any change to the viewshed due to construction vehicles or equipment would be short term and temporary.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the field site would be very minor and short term during construction, but would resume to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions or CERCLA site impacts as a result of the proposed project.

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 underlying landowner have been involved in all design stages and has signed off on the JARPA permit. Adjacent landowners are supportive of the project.

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

Signed: /s/ Dan Gambetta October 26, 2022
Dan Gambetta Date
Environmental Protection Specialist