

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Aldrich Point Restoration Project

Project No.: 2010-004-00

Project Manager: Anne Creason, EWL-4

Location: Clatsop County, OR

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 Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce (CREST) to implement a channel reconnection project on State-owned land in Clatsop County, Oregon. The project aims to reestablish and improve floodplain connectivity and juvenile salmonid access to wetland habitat where railroad infrastructure along the Oregon shoreline of the Lower Columbia River Estuary has limited hydrologic connectivity.

The project would create a new opening through the railroad prism to provide additional access to approximately 24 acres of wetland habitat for migrating and rearing juvenile salmonids. Strategically breaching the railroad prism and channel excavation would increase wetland capacity and improve hydrologic connectivity. Creating a new opening would also reduce the velocities at the existing trestle bridge opening to below the juvenile bi-directional fish passage target velocities 100% of the time, completely removing the current velocity barrier without altering the trestle itself. Additionally, materials generated from the project actions that improve hydrologic connectivity would be used to restore conditions capable of supporting scrub-shrub and spruce swamp vegetation communities in areas currently dominated by non-native reed canary grass. Native wetland plantings along with restored hydrology would increase wetland plant diversity, improve edge habitat complexity along channel margins, and create a variety of prey resources and foraging interface for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed salmonids.

The work elements for this restoration project would include breaching the railroad in one location approximately 1,867 feet (0.35mi) east of the existing trestle, constructing two fully passable 10-foot diameter side by side culverts, excavating a tidal channel to connect the new opening to provide fish passage during all phases of the tidal cycle, placing all the channel excavation material in designated areas to reduce non-native cover while improving topographic complexity and species diversity, and seeding and planting all disturbed areas with native species.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These proposed activities also fulfill commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp), while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System (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/ Shawn Skinner

Shawn Skinner

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

March 15, 2023

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: Aldrich Point Restoration Project

Project Site Description

The project area is located at approximately River Mile (RM) 32 of the Columbia River Estuary in Clatsop County, Oregon. The purpose of the Aldrich Point Restoration Project is to enhance Columbia River mainstem-adjacent tidal marsh ecosystem functions within habitat bisected by a defunct railroad line. The existing conditions at the Aldrich Point site present a hydrologic barrier to fish, as well as a stranding risk. The site currently has one small connection point between the interior 24-acre wetland complex and the Columbia River Estuary. This existing connection is an undersized trestle bridge that presents a velocity barrier (velocities above 2ft/second) to juvenile salmonids 61% of the time. In a 24-hour day, the site is only accessible 9 hours due to velocities that exceed the bi-directional juvenile salmon fish passage threshold.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties on July 17, 2022, (OR 2022 024). BPA consulted with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the Shoalwater Bay Tribe, the Oregon Department of Forestry, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. Concurrence was received from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. BPA did not receive concurrence from any of the other consulting parties within 30 days.

Notes:

- In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, work would be stopped immediately and a BPA Archaeologist and Historian would be notified, as well as consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary, minor impacts to soil may occur from potential increased erosion during construction and grading activities. Sediment control Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Work area would be isolated to prevent increased levels of erosion or turbidity.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/State special-status plant species are known to be present. Some tree and shrub clearing would be necessary to get from the barge to the railroad, and some clearing of vegetation may be necessary on the railroad itself where it has become overgrown. Clearing of existing vegetation would be strategically designed to minimize impacts to the maximum extent practicable to provide access. There would be a long-term benefit by restoring the project area to a more natural condition through the treatment of invasive plants and replanting with native plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/State special-status wildlife species are known to be present. Minor, short-term disturbance to local wildlife would occur due to noise associated with construction and human presence. There would be long-term benefits from restoring the project area to a more natural condition and restoring habitat for local wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish in proximity to the project area include coho, Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout. Pacific lamprey (State sensitive species) may be present in the Columbia River, which is adjacent to the project area. The project was reviewed and consulted on under the HIP Biological Opinion under Section 7 of the ESA. The project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval, including turbidity monitoring requirements and in-water work timing. The work area would be isolated using a temporary bulk bag cofferdam (or a small sheet pile cofferdam). This would be a new opening in the railroad prism, so all flows would have an existing outlet at the trestle bridge located on the western edge of the site. Temporarily blocking off this area for construction activities would not result in any changes to site access for fish or existing hydrology, but would provide a means of isolating the construction activities from the adjacent waterbody/wetlands.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Most of the proposed work would take place within waters and wetlands, with the exception of staging and fill placement, but these areas would be restored following construction. Wetland quality would improve due to the restoration of natural flow patterns and the replacement of invasive species with native plants.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some miniscule potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills from the equipment used for construction, but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater are unlikely.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to project actions. There would be no land use changes, and no impact to specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some changes in vegetation and the associated visual quality would occur in the immediate project area, but the restoration project would be returning the area to a more natural state and would be consistent with the visual quality of the surrounding area. There would be long-term improvement in the visual quality of the area due to the restoration of a more native plant and animal habitat condition.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any increase in emissions from vehicles accessing the project site would be very minor and short term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some noise impacts from the heavy equipment used for construction, but this would be very minor and short term.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work activities.

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: There are several interested parties in this project and CREST has solicited feedback throughout the design, permitting, and review processes. The defunct railroad line is owned by ODOT and operated by Portland & Western Railroad Inc. This project would occur on land owned by the State of Oregon (managed by Oregon Department of Forestry) and ODOT. All project actions would be coordinated with the landowners.

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

Signed: /s/ Shawn Skinner March 15, 2023
Shawn Skinner Date
Environmental Protection Specialist