

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Lower Methow Groundwater Wells Project

**Project No.:** 2010-001-00

**Project Manager:** Joe Connor, EWU-4

**Location:** Okanogan 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 fund the Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation (MSRF) to excavate groundwater test wells and install four or more new wells above the floodplain of the Methow River, and decommission six wells within the floodplain of the Methow River near Pateros, Washington. The information from the test wells would inform the location and number of the new wells and decommissioning of existing wells as well as inform potential floodplain restoration efforts along the Methow River in this area.

Funding the proposed activities would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with both NMFS and USFWS on the O&M of the Columbia River System while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System 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.).

The proposed activity would occur on private property near the Methow River. Test wells would be drilled above the river on a bench in an existing cherry orchard using a truck-mounted well drill rig. Each well would be approximately 60- to 120-feet deep with a 10-inch diameter PVC pipe casing. The lower 10 feet of the wells would consist of a well screen. The subsurface gravel and sands removed from the wells during the drilling activity would be discharged adjacent to the well heads and re-contoured to pre-existing conditions. Upon completing the test well installations, each well would be fitted with a temporary pump tied to a standby generator power source. Each well pump would be capable of delivering between 100 to 150 gpm at the required piping discharge pressure. The well testing would be executed with all wells running simultaneously to confirm the well field design flow, drawdown, and performance during a sustained operation. The water discharged from the pumps would be discharged on the ground adjacent to the well heads. With the testing complete, the temporary pumps would be removed from the wells, and the pumps and generator removed from the project site. A flange would be bolted on to the top of each exposed well head to prevent access and protect the wells.

If the proposed test wells are approved, permanent pumps and equipment would be installed on the wells. Associated utilities and waterlines would be also be installed (buried) to connect the new wells with the existing distribution infrastructure.

Once the new wells are in production, the existing wells would be decommissioned, according to Washington Department of Ecology standards, and the associated utilities and waterlines would be excavated and removed.

Well installations and infrastructure would take approximately two to three weeks, pump testing would take approximate one week, and decommissioning of the existing wells and associated infrastructure would take approximately two weeks. All access and staging of materials would occur via existing access roads in the orchard and on the floodplain.

**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/ Brenda Aguirre  
Brenda Aguirre  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>October 17, 2023</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:** Lower Methow Groundwater Wells Project

## **Project Site Description**

The project site is located in north-central Washington along the Methow River on private and tribal allotment property within T30N, R23E, Section 34, approximately one mile west of Pateros, WA, at an elevation of about 800 feet. The surrounding area consists of agricultural production and rural residential lands and shrub steppe uplands.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA conducted consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and Washington Department of Archaeology & Historic Reservation (DAHP). BPA received concurrence with a determination of no historic properties affected from DAHP on April 24, 2023, with a stipulation for a post-review discovery procedure. No other comments were received from the remaining consulting parties.

Notes:

- During construction, an unanticipated discovery plan would be followed if cultural resources are discovered.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Soil would be displaced during project activities. The depth of soil disturbance would not exceed eight feet for the utilities and waterlines and 120 feet for the wells. Trenches for the infrastructure would be backfilled with native soil from excavations following water and power line removals and installations. Wells would be drilled into unconsolidated sediments according to best management practices to prevent migration of sediment off-site.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal or state special-status plant species or habitats in the project areas. Plants in the immediate vicinity of each project area would be subject to short-term impacts as a result of excavations and trampling by vehicles used to reach the project sites. Vegetation within the utility, waterline, and well locations would be excavated. This would not be expected to have long-term impacts to plant communities. At the completion of the project activities, the area would be filled and contoured to pre-existing conditions. To

reduce impacts to plant species, large mats of topsoil would be set aside during excavation. These mats would be placed on top of the backfilled material following installation of test pits and wells and removal of associated utilities and waterlines. Existing vegetation is predominantly non-native grasses and herbs. The area is managed as agricultural (orchard) and project activities are not likely to affect existing vegetation communities. Disturbed areas would be re-seeded with similar species to surrounding vegetation. These efforts are expected to result in revegetation of the disturbed areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no known Federal or state special-status wildlife species or potential suitable habitat in the project areas. Wildlife in the immediate vicinity of each project area would be subject to short-term impacts as a result of the disturbance of vegetation, presence of humans, and noise from the associated vehicles and equipment. This would not be expected to have long-term impacts to wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Methow River contains ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and steelhead (*O. mykiss*) and their designated critical habitat; however, project activities would occur in the floodplain and upland areas and would not affect these species or their habitats. Removing wells, utilities, and waterlines from the floodplain is expected to have long-term beneficial effects. The proposed wells are replacements for existing points of diversion under existing water rights, and would not result in changes in the amount or timing of water diversions.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands are present in the project area on the floodplain adjacent to the existing wells. The proposed action would not impact wetlands or affect the soils, hydrology, or vegetation of the wetlands.

#### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed replacement groundwater wells would replace existing points of diversion of existing water rights. This would move the point of diversion farther from the river and out of the active floodplain, but would not change the aquifer or point of impact of these diversions. Replacement wells would not change the amount or timing of irrigation, so would not affect groundwater or the aquifer.

Notes:

- Spill prevention measures would be present on site to prevent groundwater contamination.

#### **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Land use would not change as a result of the proposed actions.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Visual quality would have a minor change associated with excavation, but would return to pre-project conditions upon revegetation and would not change in the long term as a result of the proposed actions.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of emissions associated with the use of well drilling and excavation equipment onsite would occur.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary noise increases associated with well drilling, vehicles, and excavation equipment would occur.

## 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 project sites are located on tribal allotment and private property. Adjacent landowners have been contacted directly by the MSRF and have participated in project development.

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

Signed: /s/ Brenda Aguirre

Brenda Aguirre  
Environmental Protection Specialist

October 17, 2023

Date