

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Chiwawa Outlet Fish Habitat Enhancement Project

**Project No.:** 2009-003-00

**Project Manager:** Tori Bohlen, EWU-4

**Location:** Chelan 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 Yakama Nation Fisheries (YNF) to implement the Chiwawa Outlet Fish Habitat Enhancement Project located on federally-managed and Chelan County PUD-owned properties along the Chiwawa River west of Plain, Washington (WA). The project seeks to enhance adult spawning and juvenile rearing habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Upper Columbia River (UCR) spring Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) and UCR summer steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*).

The project proposes to construct seven large wood structures within the lower section of the Chiwawa River from the mouth of the river upstream approximately 1,500 feet to improve mainstem habitat complexity. Two of the seven structures would be constructed near the left bank of the Chiwawa River at the head of gravel bars. These structures would be ballasted using wood piles. One structure, located along the right bank would be ballasted solely with wood piles, while the other four right bank structures would include piles and partial bank burial. During construction, the partially buried structures would be isolated from flow in the channel using bulk-bag cofferdams. The bank buried large wood structures would be designed with bumper logs oriented to shed debris and alluvial material. This strategy also would provide for improved boater safety by minimizing roughness along the face of structures.

The project would use approximately 103 logs with rootwads and 50 logs without rootwads, which would be used for pilings, to construct the large wood structures. The staging area for the construction material is about 2.5 acres and located approximately 750 feet northeast from the main project area. Here, logging trucks and excavator would work to prepare material for helicopter transport to the construction sites. Using a helicopter reduces the overall impact of the project, limiting the amount of times excavators and other large equipment travel on the temporary access route.

Heavy equipment such as excavators, dump trucks and skid steers would be used to construct the wood structures. Access and staging would occur via existing roads, previously-disturbed areas and short temporary access routes to reach proposed structure site. Vegetation removed during construction would be salvaged and used to supplement the large wood structures. All areas disturbed during construction would be planted with native vegetation. Project

implementation would occur during the summer of 2024 with instream work occurring during the in-water work period of July 1 – 31.

Funding the proposed activities would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These activities would also support 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.).

**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:

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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.

**Proposed Action:** Chiwawa Outlet Fish Habitat Enhancement Project

## **Project Site Description**

The project area is located in a rural area along the Chiwawa River near River Mile 63 within T26N, R17E, Sec 1 and T27N, R17E, Sec 36. The project area includes two areas, one is approximately 12 acres in size and the other, a staging area, is about 2.5 acres in size. The project would occur on Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF)-managed lands and Chelan Public Utility District (PUD)-owned property. Vegetation types and land use in the project area consist of riparian forest stands interspersed with areas of scrub/shrub lands. Adjacent properties are rural residential and agricultural use (forestry). There is a Chelan PUD Fish Hatchery, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife smolt trap, residences, and access roads to the west side of the project area. Recreation within the Chiwawa River is classified as low with occasional fishing and boating. The project area has been heavily manipulated by historic agricultural use, which has depleted the riparian area and river of large wood.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA identified an area of potential effects and initiated consultation with the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), Chelan County Public Utility District (PUD), Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and United States Forest Service Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF) starting March 9, 2023. On September 15, 2023, BPA submitted an inventory report and determined that the proposed undertaking would result in no historic properties affected. On September 18, 2023, DAHP concurred with the effects determination with the stipulation for an unanticipated discovery plan. On September 20, 2023 OWNF concurred with the determination. No other responses were received from the consulting parties. The consultation period ended on October 15, 2023.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA will require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction of temporary access routes, installation of cofferdams, placement of large wood, and excavation of bank materials to implement project elements would disturb soils. Erosion control BMPs would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. All excavated soils

would remain onsite and be used as fill material within the large wood structures. Post construction site restoration measures would further minimize erosion potential, and provide long-term stability to soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal or state special-status plant species or habitats are known to be present in the project area. The project is designed to minimize impacts to vegetation by use of a helicopter to fly wood to each site. Existing vegetation would be selectively removed during construction, and areas disturbed as a result of construction of temporary access and areas near excavation of banks for placement of large wood structures would be planted with native vegetation suitable for the project area, resulting in long term benefit to the riparian vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) and its designated critical habitat are present in the project area. Potential impacts to the northern spotted owl or their habitat during project activities would be minimized by following the measures outlined in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) ESA Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Any impacts to non-listed wildlife species in the project area would be limited to the immediate project area, where there would be a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary elevated noise disturbance.

Notes:

- YNF and its contractor would adhere to all conservation measures described in the HIP consultation (HIP Project Notification Form 2024002) to minimize impacts to northern spotted owl and its critical habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed Upper Columbia River (UCR) spring Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), UCR summer steelhead (*O. mykiss*) and Columbia River bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are present within the project stream reach. No separately listed state fish species have been recorded in the project area. While project activities are scheduled to take place during the in-water work window and outside of spawning season, there is the potential that some listed fish would be present in the stream reach during the proposed construction period. Potential impacts to ESA-listed fish species during project activities would be minimized by following the measures outlined in BPA's HIP ESA Section 7 consultation with the NMFS and USFWS. The proposed restoration actions would aid in floodplain re-connection, increase local water table, and improve instream complexity for fish habitat. Despite the short-term effects on fish in the area, the long-term effects of the project on fish, floodplains, and water bodies would be positive.

Notes:

- YNF and its contractor would adhere to all applicable conservation measures described in the HIP consultation (HIP PNF 2024002) to minimize impacts to ESA-listed fish species.

## **7. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands present in the proposed project area. Therefore, there would be no impact to wetlands.

## **8. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Placement of the large wood structures in the channel and along the stream banks may result in minor impacts to groundwater by encouraging greater amounts of water onto the floodplain during high flows. The long-term increase in floodplain access would benefit groundwater recharge and function.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have a temporary impact to recreational users due to access limitations during construction in the immediate project area. No long-term change in land use would occur. No specially-designated areas are present.

## **10. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality. The new wood structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and would not be located in a visually sensitive area.

## **11. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor increases in local air pollution during project activities due to exhaust from machinery and equipment. These effects would be limited in scope and duration and cause no long-term impacts to air quality.

## **12. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor increases in noise generated by machinery and equipment used during project activities. These effects would be limited in scope and cause no long-term impacts.

## **13. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to ensure human health and safety. Solely licensed and trained professionals would operate all machinery.

### **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 and staging area are located on federal and private property. All landowners have been contacted directly by the YNF and have participated in the 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

12/19/2023  
Date