

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Little Wind River Phase V Restoration Project

Project No.: 1998-019-00

Project Manager: Allan Whiting, EWL-4

Location: Skamania 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 Underwood Conservation District to restore approximately 1.5 river miles of habitat along the Little Wind River, located in Skamania County, WA. The restoration would improve fish habitat through the felling of 10 to 20 perched logs as well as 20 to 30 standing conifers, and the placement of smaller slash materials, to create log jams. The project goal would be to increase floodplain inundation, the number of pools recruited and retained over the project site, cover locations within the stream, and recruitment and retention of gravel.

Selected alder and conifer trees within the project area would be felled by hand, utilizing chainsaws. Trees would be directionally felled with a priority of placing large wood instream at the upstream end of the floodplain surfaces and at the head of existing pools. Log jams would be created, where possible, by felling alders and smaller conifers first, then larger firs on top of them. Implementors would avoid felling trees that provide significant shade to the channel. Selected trees would meet the US Forest Service's Westside Forest large wood criteria in the Level II Stream Inventory Handbook (USFS 2016) and would be limited to <24" diameter at breast height.

Existing channel-spanning logs would be cut so they engage with the channel bed and create localized scour and substrate deposition. This is especially true for larger diameter and newer logs that would take longer to end up in channel.

Implementors would access the site utilizing existing roads and two-tracks by vehicle, then would access felling locations by walking the stream with chainsaws and hand tools. No heavy equipment would be utilized for the access to the site or the proposed felling.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the Operations and Maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also support BPA's ongoing efforts to mitigate for the 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.

Catherine Clark
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
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

The Little Wind River is a tributary to the Wind River in the Washington Cascades Range. The US Forest Service manages approximately 85% of the watershed including most of the project area. The project area begins at approximately river mile (RM) 0.8 mile on the Little Wind River and extends roughly 1.5 miles upstream, to terminate at RM 2.3. Forestry, recreation, and utility corridors are the dominant land uses in the Little Wind watershed. Forest conditions are dominated by early successional species with few conifers located near channel margins. The location of the Phase V project that is on the Little Wind River is upstream of Phases I to IV projects.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist coordinated with the USFS archaeologist, on October 24, 2023, to coordinate the agency responsible for completing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. BPA and the USFS agreed that the USFS would be the lead and utilize Section 106 coverage under Appendix B of the USFS WA State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and Advisory Council Historic Preservation Programmatic Agreement. USFS submitted their Appendix B report on May 16, 2024, to the Tribes for review. A 30-day response period ended June 16, 2024, with no comments received from consulting parties. No additional archaeological investigations are recommended, and neither is monitoring given that the project area is a low probability per the *2002 Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA) Cultural Resource Probability Assessment and Inventory Strategy*.

Notes:

- Pursuant to responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR 800, the USFS-CRGNSA has determined that the proposed action is a Federal undertaking and has the potential to cause effects on historic properties. The project is excluded from case-by-case review per Appendix B (XVII A) of the 2020 Programmatic Agreement with the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary impact to soils and geology may occur during implementation and once structures are functional. However, the disturbance would be minimal during tree felling activities and scouring or accretion near the newly placed wood in the stream would be expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or special-status plant species are known to exist on the site. The work would temporarily disturb some vegetation when felling trees across the creek, but the project would result in improved riparian conditions which should benefit riparian plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) and its designated critical habitat, yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), and northern pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*) have the potential to occur in the project area. Any potential impacts to ESA-listed (or those proposed for listing) species at the Little Wind River project site would be minimized by following the measures outlined in the USFS's ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS for Aquatic Restoration Activities in the states of Oregon, Washington, and portions of California, Idaho, and Nevada (ARBO II). Any impacts to both listed and non-listed wildlife species at the project site would be limited to the immediate project area, where there would be temporary, small decreases in available habitat and temporary elevated noise during implementation.

Notes:

- UCD would adhere to all design features described in the USFS's ESA Section 7 ARBO II consultation to minimize impacts to ESA-listed species.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed fish species of Mid-Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and their designated critical habitat, coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) and their designated critical habitat, bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and their designated critical habitat, and coastal cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkia*) are present in the project area. Any potential impacts to ESA-listed species at the Little Wind River project site would be minimized by following the measures outlined in the USFS's ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS and NMFS for ARBO II. Any impacts to both listed and non-listed fish species at the project site would be limited to the immediate project area, where there would be a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary noise disturbance during implementation.

Notes:

- UCD would adhere to all design features described in the USFS's ESA Section 7 ARBO II consultation to minimize impacts to ESA-listed species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no designated wetlands located in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed activities are not likely to intersect with groundwater and would have no impact on aquifers. Construction BMPs 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: The project is located within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area on US Forest Service and private lands. No changes to land use would occur.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Minor changes to visual quality. The newly felled logs would be visually consistent with naturally occurring beaver dams and fallen trees. UCD would obtain a Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Permit for project activities.

Notes:

- UCD would adhere to all listed restrictions within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Permit.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the site during construction and staging activities.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in ambient noise during staging and construction activities. Any noise emitted from these activities 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: Felling trees would be considered a hazardous activity for human safety. However, 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: All activities would occur on public property owned by the US Forest Service. UCD would coordinate all activities and timing with the US Forest Service.

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

Signed:

Catherine Clark
Environmental Protection Specialist