

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: YTAHP Wenas Creek at Purdin Ditch Fish Passage and Screening Project

Project No.: 2007-398-00

Project Manager: Jennifer Lord, EWU-4

Location: Yakima 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 North Yakima Conservation District (NYCD) of the Yakima Tributary Access and Habitat Program (YTAHP) to implement the Wenas Creek at Purdin Ditch Fish Passage and Screening Project on private land near Selah, Washington. The project would benefit Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Middle Columbia River steelhead, Chinook and coho salmon, and a suite of resident fishes.

The project proposes to restore fish passage and screen the Purdin Ditch Association's irrigation diversion on Wenas Creek. The diversion is currently unscreened and does not return to Wenas Creek putting fish at direct risk for entrainment into an artificial waterway and mortality. Additionally, the diversion is a full fish passage barrier when in operation. NYCD would remove the existing diversion, install a new diversion with a National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) compliant fish screen, convert 3.2 miles of open ditch to pipeline, and create a 100-foot roughened channel downstream of the diversion. Work would be undertaken with heavy equipment such as an excavator equipped with a thumb.

A coffer dam and stream bypass would be installed during construction, allowing in-stream work to occur in the dry to minimize impacts to aquatic life and water quality. WDFW biologists would perform fish salvage and block nets would be installed to isolate fish from the work area, as needed. Areas disturbed during construction would be revegetated with native plants. All access and staging would occur via existing roads and previously-disturbed areas. NYCD would implement in-water work between October and February, outside the irrigation season, and before February 15 because of steelhead migration and spawning. The overall disturbance area would encompass about 5 acres consisting of mostly open irrigation ditch; grass, shrubs, and trees (mostly non-native or invasive species), and existing roadways. KCCD would implement the project during late Fall 2024 and Winter 2024/2025.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the National Marine Fisheries 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.

Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. 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.

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Project Site Description

The project site is located on Wenas Creek at River Mile (RM) 11 within the Wenas Creek Watershed of the Upper Yakima River Subbasin. Wenas Creek is a tributary to the Yakima River at RM 122. The legal description of the project is Township 15 North, Range 17 East, Sections 24 and 25, and Township 15 North, Range 18 East, Sections 19, 30, and 31. The surrounding area is flat and used for agricultural crop production and grazing.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) on the proposed project on November 14, 2022 (WA 2022 127). Consulting parties included the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Yakama Nation), Natural Resources Conservation District (NRCD), and Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). After fieldwork was completed and the report reviewed, on August 4, 2023, BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed project would result in an adverse effect to historic properties, specifically the historic Purdin Ditch. DAHP concurred with this determination on August 4, 2023. No other responses from consulting parties were received.

BPA invited the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) to participate in the resolution of adverse effects on November 6, 2023. The ACHP declined the invitation to participate. BPA entered into a memorandum of agreement (MOA) to resolve adverse effects to the Purdin Ditch with DAHP. The MOA was signed by BPA and DAHP on March 21, 2024.

Note:

- The MOA stipulates BPA will complete a Level II documentation of the historic Purdin Ditch, including text and images, with a detailed historic context and physical description of the structure.
- The MOA stipulates that BPA will create a story map about the Purdin Ditch, which will be made publicly available and a copy archived with local historical societies and in the BPA library.
- The MOA stipulates that these measures will be completed within five years of the MOA signature date.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would disturb soil during project activities. Sediment control best management practices would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Post construction planting of disturbed areas with native trees and shrubs would minimize long-term erosion potential.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status, including ESA-listed, plant species are known to be present. The project would have an effect on plants due to equipment crushing some plants while accessing work areas and removal of vegetation while removing the existing diversion and canal and constructing the new diversion, fish screen, and piping. Post construction planting would re-establish areas of disturbed vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special status, including ESA-listed, wildlife species or habitats are known to be present. The project would temporarily disturb/displace area wildlife due to increased noise and vehicle traffic, operation of heavy equipment, and human presence during project implementation. Wildlife would likely avoid the area during this time and return once the project work is completed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wenas Creek would be placed in a stream bypass during construction, allowing work to occur in insolation from flowing water during the WDFW-approved fish window minimizing impacts to aquatic life and water quality. The project may generate turbidity while working in Wenas Creek. NYCD would follow all terms and conditions in their Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit and 401 Water Quality Certification coverage under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permit 27 for aquatic habitat restoration activities. There would be no net rise in floodplain elevations from implementation of the project activities. The project would subject fish to short-term elevated noise and turbidity and disturb approximately 0.05 acres of stream habitat. ESA-listed Middle Columbia River steelhead and their designated critical habitat are present in the project area. The general and activity-specific conservation measures from BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinion from NMFS would be followed during project implementation to avoid and minimize impacts to fish. The proposed actions would aid in reestablishing fish passage, preventing fish entrainment, and improving fish habitat.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: None present in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities do not propose new wells or the use of groundwater; spill prevention measures would be present on-site during use of heavy equipment.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities do not propose changes to land use; designated farmlands would not be taken out of production.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be a minor change to visuals from the new diversion, fish screen, and irrigation piping. The new conditions would be visually consistent with the topography of the existing site, surrounding area, and adjacent vegetation. Construction equipment would be visually consistent with area agricultural equipment. The project is not within a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would generate small amounts of dust and vehicle emissions due to construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be short-term construction noise during daylight hours. Construction noise would not be noticeably different than the agricultural production noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project sponsor is required to use best management practices to protect workers' health and safety. Any activities involving hazardous materials would be disposed of at a designated hazardous waste facility.

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: Implementation of project activities would not cause impacts to surrounding landowners. The project sponsor, NYCD, has coordinated with the underlying landowner and irrigation water user and has permission to conduct project activities.

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

Signed:

Brenda Aguirre, ECF-4
Environmental Protection Specialist