

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Walaluks Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

**Project No.:** 1997-056-00

**Project Manager:** Chad Baumler, EWL

**Location:** Klickitat 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 Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN) Fisheries to implement a habitat enhancement project within a one mile segment of Walaluks Creek. The project would be located in the portion of Walaluks Creek upstream from Harrison Creek on off-reservation tribal trust lands in Klickitat County, Washington. This segment is approximately three miles from the nearest road.

The project would consist of the installation of 14 low-tech habitat structures and placement of unanchored smaller wood in three locations. The proposed habitat structures would consist of 4-inch-diameter untreated wooden posts inserted into the stream bed using a hand-held pneumatic post-pounder. Posts would penetrate roughly 2 to 3 feet into the stream bed at each structure. These posts, once installed, would be weaved with wood ranging between four and ten inches in diameter, to create each structure. The project would utilize approximately 200 pieces of wood over two years at all habitat structure locations and unanchored wood locations. The unanchored wood locations were chosen to enhance existing perennial pools, to create new pools via scour, and provide cover within the creek. At these unanchored wood locations, wood would be placed into the channel with the intention of allowing the creek to move the wood downstream into the habitat structures. YN would fell trees, no larger than 10 inches in diameter at breast height (dbh), within the project limits; however, where feasible, YN would utilize dead and downed wood from a previous fire area to supplement the need for cutting live trees from the area.

The project would also include the installation of a spring protection fence to help mitigate cattle use in the area. YN would install the barbed-wire fence around an existing spring. The fence would consist of 16 steel t-posts, four wire corner panels, and three strand barbed-wire (approx. 540 linear feet). Within the fence willow (*Salix spp.*) and dogwood (*Cornus spp.*) stakes would be placed in conjunction with logs and rocks to enhance the springs' existing riparian buffer.

No heavy equipment would be utilized, and all work would be performed with hand tools using trees and woody debris within the project limits. Some hand tools used would include a wheeled hydraulic post pounder, a chainsaw, loppers, and pruners. All access from the existing roads or two-tracks would be on foot.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also support BPA's commitments to the Yakama Nation under the 2020 Columbia River Fish Accord Extension agreement, 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.).

**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; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024), 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.<sup>1</sup>

Catherine Clark  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

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<sup>1</sup> BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to DOE's own regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021, to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

# 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:** Walaluks Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

## **Project Site Description**

Walaluks Creek is a tributary within the Rock Creek subbasin. The project is located on off-reservation tribal trust lands that are currently used for cattle grazing and would continue to be utilized for cattle grazing. The primary forest cover in the project area consists of deciduous woody species including, but not limited to, white oak (*Quercus garryana*), multiple willow species (*Salix spp.*) and black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*).

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) on the proposed project on December 16, 2021 (WA 2021 212a). Consulting parties included the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN) and the Yakama Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO). BPA received response from YN's Cultural Resources Program (CRP) on December 28, 2021, indicating that the area of potential effect (APE) is in a high probability area and should be inventoried. On November 20, 2024, BPA received the final THPO concurrence for the proposed project indicating that the APE had been inventoried, and that no historic properties were encountered during survey. On February 19, 2025, BPA sent a determination letter to the consulting parties, determining that the proposed project would result in no historic properties affected. No responses were received, and the consultation period ended on March 21, 2025.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The felling of trees into and adjacent to the stream channel, and post installation would disturb soil within the project area. Best Management Practices (BMP) have been developed to avoid or minimize temporary fine sediment impacts during construction. All sediment would be stabilized via sediment capture of habitat logs to the stream.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species are known to be present. Existing vegetation could be crushed or killed during hand felling of trees. Post construction crushed vegetation would rebound and planting of stakes would enhance native riparian plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed wildlife species are present in the project area. WDFW special-status wildlife species or habitat in the area would not be negatively impacted in the long term by the installation of the proposed project. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed and displaced by construction noise and human presence during implementation, but wildlife is anticipated to access the abundant adjacent habitat and to return quickly after project completion.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project is covered under the Habitat Improvement Project (HIP) Biological Opinion (BiOp) under Section 7 of the ESA. Listed species present in the project area includes middle Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and their critical habitat. The project plans were reviewed by BPA engineering technical services and a series of conservation measures in accordance with the HIP consultation would be implemented to ensure that the project would benefit ESA-listed fish species and adhere to the HIP consultation. The project work would occur during the in-water work window. Short term negative effects, such as displacement due to project actions, to local fish are expected; However the project is anticipated to result in long term improvement to fish habitat and complexity.

Avoidance and minimization measures identified in the project Sponsor's Clean Water Act Section 404 Nationwide (application number NWS-2024-746) would be applied, further reducing impact to waterways.

Notes:

- Project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP conservation measures.
- Project sponsor would adhere to all avoidance and minimization efforts identified in the Clean Water Act permit issued for this project.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands present in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground-disturbing activities are not likely to intersect groundwater and would have no impact on aquifers. Construction BMPs would be implemented to prevent contamination of groundwater from equipment leaks and spills.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is located on tribal trust lands. Access would remain the same during and after project implementation. The installation of fencing around the spring would limit

livestock access, but there would be sufficient alternate water sources and there would be little change to land use.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is not proposed to occur within a visually sensitive area. All felled wood within the project would not appear visually different than normal forest processes and wood regeneration. New structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and topography.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increased chainsaw emissions from felling actions during implementation would occur. No long term impacts to air quality,

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in noise from hydraulic post pounder, chainsaw, and hand tools during daytime construction actions would be short term and temporary during daylight hours and could cease following project completion.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work may present a small human health and safety risk associated with utilizing a chainsaw for felling trees and a hydraulic post pounder but is not expected to create a hazard to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions. All personnel would use best management practices to protect workers' 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 is within the boundaries of Yakama Nation Tribal Trust lands. Yakama Nation Fisheries would obtain necessary approvals to conduct work on tribal trust property.

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