Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Tucannon River Project Area 34.5 (PA-34.5)

Project No.: 1994-018-06

Project Manager: Jenny Lord, EWU-4

Location: Columbia County, WA

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 provide funds to the Columbia Conservation District (CCD) for restoration activities to increase channel complexity and floodplain connectivity along a 1.5-mile-long segment (River Miles 11.4-12.9) of the Tucannon River. These treatments would provide structural diversity/roughness and restore natural habitat forming processes.

Specific Actions for Floodplain Restoration include:

- Instream Wood Placements: Up to 80 wood placements (varying in size from single log placements to 7-member log jams) would be constructed along and/or within the Ordinary High Water (OHW) of the main channel of the Tucannon River. Excavator(s) would be used to excavate channel alluvium to place large wood and backfill the structures with the excavated substrates. Rock would be used to ballast the wood.
- Floodplain Wood Placements: Up to 10 single logs with root wads would be placed throughout the floodplain. Excavator(s) would excavate sufficient floodplain sediments to allow the log to lay flat on the gravel bar or floodplain surface.
- Ford Installation: An existing ford would be improved to reduce sediment introduction into Pataha Creek, a small tributary to the Tucannon within the project area. A base course of larger (12 inch minus) rock would be placed with a 6-inch layer of 6 inch minus streambed cobbles as the surface layer.
- Plantings: Up to 3,400 trees would be interstitially planted throughout the project area to restore a floodplain and upland terrace forest. Native species would be used to revegetate any disturbed areas following completion of constructed project elements.
- Debris Removal: Up to 30 cubic yards of rip rap would be removed from the Tucannon River using an excavator. Materials would be placed in an upland location outside of the 100-year floodplain.
- Adaptive Management: Maintenance to these structures (addition of wood or ballast in previously disturbed areas or additional plantings) would occur on subsequent years in response to unforeseen high flow events.

Construction of project elements below Ordinary High Water (OHW) would be carried out during the summer in-water work window for the Tucannon River, July 15th through August 30th. Project elements above OHW may be completed August through September. Existing gravel access roads and compacted floodplain terrace surfaces would be used for access and staging areas would be located within the overall project footprint away from wetlands and waterbodies. Grass seeding of access routes, staging areas and other disturbed areas would be completed immediately following construction.

The contractor would be required to adhere to the conservation measures and terms and conditions from BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) 4 Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 consultation biological opinion to protect the environment during construction activities, which include a detailed Site Access and Sequencing Plan, Work Area Isolation Plan, Erosion and Pollution Control Plan and Site Reclamation and Restoration Plan.

This project was broadly informed by the Snake River Salmon Recovery Plan for Southeast Washington, and the project location and project design were informed by several basin-wide assessments including The Tucannon Sub-basin Plan and The Tucannon Geomorphic Assessment and Habitat Restoration Study.

The Proposed Action fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion and would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also support 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; 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. [1]

[1] 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.

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Concur:

KATEY GRANGE

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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 Tucannon River in Southeast Washington flows north out of the Blue Mountains into the Snake River and is the ancestral boundary between the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation and the Nez Perce Tribe. The Tucannon watershed supports the only remaining population of spring Chinook (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) in the lower Snake River. Past land use practices and impacts throughout the watershed include logging, livestock grazing, irrigated agriculture and construction of the Tucannon Lakes, in addition to recent large forest fires in the headwaters. Throughout the project area, the mainstem Tucannon river consists of a single-thread channel within privately owned rural residential land. Levees exist along much of the right bank and to a lesser degree along the left bank. These were put in place to limit channel migration and flooding into and on the adjacent agricultural lands. This has resulted in incised channel conditions through much of the project area, with limited channel and habitat diversity. A sparse to moderate stand of riparian trees is located throughout the project area. Some of this vegetation appears to be mature deciduous trees, likely consisting of a mix of alder, cottonwood and to a lesser extent locust trees.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Pursuant to its responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, BPA initiated consultation with the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, and the Nez Perce Tribe on November 28, 2023 (BPA CR Project No.: WA 2023 193).

BPA was provided with an inventory report prepared by the CCD that did not identify any historic properties within the Area of Potential Effect. Therefore, on July 15, 2024, as per §36 CFR 800.4(d)(1), BPA has determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no historic properties affected. DAHP concurred with BPA's determination that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no adverse effect to historic properties (DAHP Log No.: 2023-11-07677) on July 16, 2024. BPA did not receive any other responses from consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary displacement and compaction to soil from the operation of heavy equipment and an increased erosion potential during construction activities. Temporary erosion and sediment control practices would be implemented to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. All disturbed surfaces would be restored by scraping compacted soils and seeding using native grass seed mix and/or live stakes to facilitate soil recovery. In addition, the design plans include site reclamation and restoration details,

involving planting riparian shrub stakes in backfill near the culvert inlet and outlet, and reseeding of disturbed areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no special status plants, including Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species known to exist on the site, and riparian vegetation throughout the project area is sparse. Areas disturbed from heavy machinery would be seeded with a locally derived and adapted native seed mixture. Any temporary impacts to on-site vegetation that may result from the implementation of this project would be completely restored to diverse, native vegetative communities. The extensive plantings throughout the project area would enhance the riparian overstory.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The property has been used almost exclusively for growing crops or grazing cattle. No ESA-listed wildlife species, including sensitive wildlife species, have been documented in or adjacent to the project area and no designated critical habitat is present. Non-listed resident wildlife species would be temporarily disturbed by noise and human presence during implementation; however this disturbance would be limited and would not permanently displace wildlife in the project area. These effects would be mild, temporary, and localized to the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Project area supports ESA-listed Snake River summer steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Snake River spring and fall Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), and Columbia River bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) as well as other aquatic species. However, lack of floodplain connectivity, diminished channel complexity, and excessive stream power hinders adult holding, spawning and summer/winter rearing for these species. Spring Chinook and bull trout use this area during migration periods, perhaps most importantly during outmigration for juveniles.

Consultation on the effects of this action on these species was completed under programmatic Fish and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) ESA consultation (NMFS# WCRO-2020-00102 and USFWS# 01E0FW00-19Y-F-0710), with the conclusion that the project would likely adversely affect these species and their designated critical habitat but would not likely result in jeopardy to the species or result in destruction or adverse modification of their designated critical habitat. Plans were reviewed by BPA engineering technical services, and a series of design changes and conservation measures were proposed and accepted to ensure that the project would benefit ESA-listed fish species through the HIP review process.

The removal of debris would likely cause a widening of the channel in that area and temporarily increase sedimentation as the river adjusts. However, in the long-term this would restore natural riverine sedimentation, flooding, and vegetation processes, by re-introducing instream natural roughness and increasing floodplain connectivity.

The work area isolation, fish salvage, dewatering, and instream construction activity would displace fish from the work area until the work area is re-watered. Small aquatic organisms that could not be practically salvaged would likely be destroyed. The addition of large wood structures would provide a low velocity refuge for ESA-listed salmonids. Additionally, the structures would promote sediment sorting and deposition which would further increase habitat complexity and habitat forming processes.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impact to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Current land use in the project reach is primarily rural residential with extremely limited recreational use. The project would not change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to project actions and any disturbance would be of limited (days) duration..

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Installed large wood structures would have the appearance of natural wood recruitment in a typical stream or river. Visual quality may improve over time with increased habitat complexity and additional plantings.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary emissions from construction equipment, vehicles and powered hand tools are expected but would be short-lived. No long-term air quality impacts would occur.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some short-term noise generated from vehicles accessing the site, the heavy equipment used for excavation, and powered hand tools, but this type of noise is not inconsistent with that of common ranching and farming operations in the local area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicle and excavator operation and working with power tools have their attendant risks to equipment operators, but there would be no condition created from this action that would introduce new human health or safety hazards or risk into the environment. There are no known hazardous materials in the project area and no condition created by this action would increase the burden on the local health, safety, and emergency-response infrastructure.

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: Landowner outreach was conducted in annual virtual and in -person public meetings in Dayton WA, to showcase and discuss draft restoration actions for the Tucannon River. Local landowners were notified and approve of the proposed project.

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

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