

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Latah SWCD Planting at Big Meadow Creek Culvert Site

**Project No.:** 2008-604-00

**Project Manager:** Matthew Schwartz – EWU -4

**Location:** Latah County, Idaho

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 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 Latah Soil and Water Conservation District (Latah SWCD) to plant riparian vegetation as part of site restoration efforts after a culvert replacement project, a separate project not funded by BPA, has been completed along Big Meadow Creek. Under the proposed action, with BPA funding, Latah SWCD would seed and plant native plants in approximately 1 acre of land disturbed by construction to improve soil stability and shade, provide increased ground coverage to prevent weed encroachment, and increase wildlife and pollinator habitat. These actions would improve the quality and quantity of habitat and address several factors limiting Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*).

All plants and materials would be transported to the site via 4x4 truck. Areas disturbed during the culvert replacement would be seeded and mulched with a native grass and forb mix. A diverse mix of native trees, shrubs, forbs, grasses, and grass-like plants would be planted throughout the project site to provide a variety of rooting depths. Planting would be conducted by Latah SWCD field crews and would utilize hand tools such as shovels, gas-powered augers, and water-jet stingers for installation of vegetation cuttings. Temporary protective fencing would be installed around plants as needed. Riparian plantings would be focused in the stream channel to the top of the bank. Some additional caged plantings would be offset from the stream bank but would remain within the riparian corridor.

Planting efforts would occur over multiple years. The site would be revisited annually to ensure plant survival and to control weeds. If necessary, vegetation maintenance would include selective replanting to replace mortalities in previously planted areas to support a robust, native riparian plant community. Existing plants would be maintained with mulch additions, repair or replacement of temporary protective fencing, and weed control activities to assure survival. Weed control would be limited to removal by hand or with weed eaters.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These actions also support BPA's commitments to the State of Idaho in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as amended, 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. 839 *et seq.*).

**Findings:** In accordance with Section 1021.102 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; 90 FR 29676, July 3, 2025 [Interim Final Rule]) and *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures* (dated June 30, 2025), BPA has determined the following:

- 1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021;
- 2) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion; and
- 3) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal (see attached Environmental Evaluation).

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.<sup>1</sup>

Jacquelyn Schei  
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 the interim final rule to revise DOE NEPA regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021 and NEPA Implementing Procedures (dated June 30, 2025), 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:** Latah SWCD Planting at Big Meadow Creek Culvert Site

## **Project Site Description**

Proposed activities would occur on private land in the Potlatch River watershed in Latah County, Idaho. The project site is approximately 0.5 miles north of the City of Troy and located between Big Meadow Road and Big Meadow Creek, a tributary to the West Fork Little Bear Creek in the Big Bear Creek subwatershed. The site is on land that has been previously disturbed and includes a private driveway where an undersized culvert exists and limits fish passage. The property is surrounded by agricultural lands, with riparian areas along Big Meadow Creek. Riparian conditions along streams in the Potlatch River watershed have been affected by extensive logging, agriculture, and grazing land uses.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) assumed Lead Agency responsibilities for Section 106 review. In 2025, USACE completed a consultation on the associated culvert replacement project. A cultural survey was completed for that project and no cultural resources were identified. USACE made a determination of no historic properties affected. The Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with the determination on May 14, 2025 (SHPO number 2025-446). The cultural survey area of potential effect (APE) is identical to the APE being proposed for site revegetation. BPA has reviewed the decisions and documentation, which remain valid. No further consultation is required for the current proposed actions having BPA funding related to plantings and revegetation work that would occur in this same area (BPA cultural resources number ID 2025 018).

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Planting tools would be limited to shovels or mechanized hand tools. No heavy equipment operations (e.g., bulldozers, excavators) would be used for planting, so there would be no large-scale soil displacement, soil mixing, or other mechanical soil disturbance. Minor and temporary ground disturbances would occur as part of the proposed actions but would not impact the geology and soils. Proposed treatment areas have been previously disturbed by work during implementation of original restoration activities. The proposed actions would be intended to improve habitat conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no federal or state special-status plant species known to exist in the project area. The USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), ESA-listed as Threatened, as having the potential to be in

project areas. There is proposed critical habitat for this species, but none in the project area. None of the proposed activities would have new soil disturbance and existing routes would be used to access sites, so there would be no impact to ESA- or state-listed special-status plant species. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects from planting native plants in and around the riparian area of Big Meadow Creek.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no federal or state special-status wildlife species or their habitats known to exist in the project area. The IPaC tool lists the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), ESA-proposed Threatened, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), ESA-proposed Endangered, as having the potential to be present in project areas. Proposed critical habitat for the monarch butterfly does not overlap with the project area and there is no designated critical habitat for the bumble bee. Due to current agricultural/grazing land use practices surrounding the project area, nearby residences, and nearby county roads, it is unlikely these species would be present in project areas. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no impact to ESA-proposed or state-listed special-status wildlife species.

Proposed actions may deter non-listed wildlife from the area when work is occurring due to noise and human presence. These impacts would be minor and temporary in nature and conditions would return to normal when crews leave. The proposed actions would improve habitat conditions over the long term by increasing riparian plant density, diversity, and habitat structure.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project's potential impacts to federally-listed species would be covered under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion. Relevant HIP conservation measures pertaining to project activities would be applied. Federally-listed Snake River Basin steelhead and designated critical habitat are present in the Potlatch River watershed. There are no other federally-listed or state special-status species in the project area.

The proposed actions would take place near, but not in, any water bodies. No changes to the existing conditions of streams would occur. Short term impacts on listed and non-listed fish in the project area would be disturbance from human presence, noise, and possible minimal sediment runoff into the creek from planting activities. Conservation measures would be implemented to minimize potential effects. Proposed actions would help restore native riparian vegetation for the benefit of aquatic species. Activities would not impact or change waterbodies or floodplains.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands in the project area per the National Wetlands Inventory. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur and there would be no impacts to wetlands.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater are proposed. No herbicide use is proposed. The proposed actions would have no impacts to groundwater or aquifers.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change and there would be no impact to specially-designated areas. The property is under private ownership and would remain so after the project.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have minor beneficial effects on visual quality. Proposed plantings would help return the project area to more natural vegetative conditions in the long term.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects on air quality from dust and exhaust due to vehicle use for site access because of this project. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from crews or vehicles would be short-term and minor, would occur during daylight hours, and would cease following project completion. Noise created during proposed activities is not expected to be louder than traffic on the adjacent Big Meadow Road or agricultural operations in the area.

## **12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions. All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety during implementation of proposed actions.

### **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: Latah SWCD has coordinated with the private landowner to develop plans and a timeline for the culvert replacement project (not funded by BPA) and the subsequent seeding and planting for post-construction site restoration (the proposed action funded by BPA).

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

Signed:

Jacquelyn Schei  
Environmental Protection Specialist