Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Eightmile Creek Restoration

Project No.: 1984-021-00

Project Manager: Allan Whiting, EWL-4

Location: Grant County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (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 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to implement a low-tech processed-based stream restoration project in Grant County, Oregon. North Fork John Day Watershed Council, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Ritter Land Management Team are project partners. The project would occur on private land along Eightmile Creek, which is a tributary of the Middle Fork John Day River that is designated critical habitat for Mid-Columbia River (MCR) steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*).

The project would install 19 beaver dam analogs (BDAs) and two post assisted log structures (PALS) within an approximately 0.7-mile length of Eightmile Creek. Approximately 42 pieces of large wood would be placed at 29 locations within the project reach, some of which would coincide with the locations of the BDA and PALS installations. The BDAs would span the creek channel and would be constructed of untreated wooden spikes driven vertically into the creek with willow material woven between them. The PALS would consist of a mix of sizes of wood debris placed along the channel, tangled together with branches, and anchored by wooden spikes driven into the creek bed to prevent them from floating. The large wood placements would be created by tipping or cutting and moving juniper into the stream at desired angles and racking smaller woody material them. The project is intended to increase habitat complexity and improve the stream's connection with the floodplain, benefiting MCR steelhead and their habitat.

A small excavator would be used to place wood at each installation site and to drive the wooden spikes for the BDAs and PALSs into the creek bed. Shovels would be used to seal the base of the structures with stream sediment and rocks, and willow material for the BDAs would be woven between the posts by hand. Juniper trees would be sourced and cut from the project area. A chainsaw would be used to cut juniper trees, and cable pullers may be used to help move cut trees into the stream. Additional materials for the BDAs and PALS including posts and willows would be brought in from off-site. Heavy equipment would be staged along existing roadways, and project access to the stream would make use of an existing landowner access road that is near the stream throughout the project reach.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) 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 1021.102 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. [1]

JOHN VLASTELICIA

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John Vlastelicia
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

KATEY GRANGE

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Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

[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 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 Evaluation

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: Eightmile Creek Restoration

Project Site Description

The project site is located near the small community of Ritter in northern Grant County, Oregon. The site is on privately owned land that is used for limited livestock grazing and is accessed by a private road that extends northward along the creek from Ritter Road. Ritter Road intersects with U.S. Highway 395 approximately eight miles southeast of the project site.

The project area encompasses an approximately 0.7-mile length of Eightmile Creek beginning approximately 250 feet upstream of its confluence with the Middle Fork John Day River. Eightmile Creek in the project area has an incised channel with a streambed dominated by large, embedded cobbles and boulders, with intermittent patches of gravel and sediment in areas where large wood is present. The riparian vegetation in the project area includes native grasses and sedges, hawthorn, cottonwood, water birch, ponderosa pine, and willow, with some encroachment of western juniper from the adjacent hillsides. The project area is within a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-designated 100-year floodplain.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act was met through an investigation and consultation led by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), which is providing financial and technical support to the project through its Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program. USFWS determined that the project would result in no historic properties affected, with conditions for addressing inadvertent discoveries and recognizing an avoidance zone around an identified historic site.

USFWS reached its no historic properties affected determination through background research and a field survey of the project's Area of Potential Effects. USFWS transmitted the archaeological survey report and initiated consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on May 15, 2025 (SHPO Case No. 25-0515). USFWS initiated consultation with the Burns Paiute Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWSRO), and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation on May 13, 2025, providing those parties with a description of the undertaking, APE, and the results of the identification efforts. CTWSRO concurred with the identification efforts on June 12, 2025. No other comments were received.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Installation of the BDAs, PALS, and other wood would involve soil/sediment disturbance in small areas where each feature is placed and where the excavator accesses each location. Access routes and staging areas would utilize existing previously disturbed areas as much as feasible, including the existing landowner access road that runs along

the entirety of the project area. Disturbed and/or compacted soils within the project area would be rehabilitated after each project element is constructed, with slash applied to disturbed surfaces to prevent erosion and retain moisture. Disturbed surfaces would also be seeded and planted with native vegetation in the fall after construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Small areas of riparian vegetation would be disturbed from equipment accessing each of the BDAs, PALS, and other wood placement sites in the creek, and juniper trees for use in the wood installation would be sourced from the project area. The close proximity of the existing private road that parallels the creek through the project area would limit the amount of vegetation disturbance needed, and stream crossing points would be selected to minimize riparian vegetation impacts. Trees and slash would be placed in equipment access paths through sensitive areas and at stream crossings to reduce impacts, and areas of temporary vegetation disturbance would be seeded and planted with native vegetation in the fall after construction. The site is not within the geographic range of any federal ESA-listed plant species, and there are no documented occurrences of state special-status species in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wildlife including deer, elk, coyote, various small mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians may use the general project area. Construction activity could temporarily deter wildlife from using the area, due to noise, visual disturbance, and physical disturbance from equipment operation and human activity. Impacts to nesting birds from juniper removal and other project activity would be minimized by completing the work in late summer, outside of the primary nesting season (April-July).

The project site is within the geographic range of the federal ESA-listed Endangered gray wolf (*Canis lupus*). However, the project site is not within an area of documented gray wolf occurrences; a known or estimated gray wolf use area, as identified by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife; or a designated critical habitat for gray wolf. The proposed project would have no effect on gray wolf. No other special status species are located in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Eightmile Creek is designated critical habitat for federal ESA-listed Threatened MCR steelhead trout and is used by steelhead for spawning and rearing. It is also identified as rearing habitat for Chinook salmon and is used year-round by redband trout.

The BDAs, PALS, and other wood features would involve low-level temporary disturbance in Eightmile Creek during installation. Fish present in areas of wood installation, including MCR steelhead, could be displaced from those sections of creek while in-water work is occurring. The project would not involve dewatering the stream or fish capture; instead, flow in the creek would be maintained through the work areas in order to allow fish present to remain in the stream and move upstream or downstream away from active work areas. Aquatic invertebrates or amphibians may also be displaced or killed by aquatic construction activity, but rapid re-occupation of these sites by the same classes of animals following construction is expected.

Despite short-term adverse impacts from in-stream construction, the overall impacts of the project would be beneficial to ESA-listed steelhead and other aquatic species. Project activities would be in accordance with a programmatic biological opinion issued by NMFS

through the Programmatic Restoration Opinion for Joint Ecosystem Conservation by the Services (PROJECTS) program for aquatic restoration actions.

Construction best management practices (BMPs), including keeping equipment staging and fueling areas at least 150 feet from the creek and cleaning equipment prior to in-stream work, would be used to minimize the potential for water quality impacts. Stream turbidity would be monitored during in-water work, and the contractor would be required to respond to project-generated exceedances of turbidity criteria per permit requirements. In-water construction would be performed under a Nationwide Permit 27 (Aquatic Habitat Restoration) issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, as required by Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act.

The project would restore a more natural stream/floodplain connection in the project reach of Eightmile Creek. No permanent adverse impacts to floodplains are anticipated.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction of the project would involve temporary disturbance at BDA, PALS, and other wood placement sits within Eightmile Creek but would not involve excavation, fill placement, or other long-term adverse effects to wetlands outside of the creek. National Wetland Inventory mapping identifies no wetlands outside of Eightmile Creek in the project area, and the creek in the project area is incised and largely disconnected from its floodplain. By improving the stream/floodplain connection, the project would enhance and potentially expand the riparian wetland area over time.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not involve groundwater withdrawals or discharges to groundwater. The BDAs, PALS, and other wood installations are intended to improve the stream/floodplain connection and thus could result in improvements to groundwater recharge in the floodplain. No long-term adverse impacts to groundwater or aquifers would result from the installed project elements once they are in place.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the existing uses of the site or surrounding area, and the site is not within any specially designated area that would prohibit the proposed activity. No project actions would change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to project actions. As part of a land use compatibility statement for use in Sponsor's state permitting processes, the Grant County Planning Department determined that the proposed restoration project is not regulated by the local comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not substantially change the visual character of the area. The BDAs, PALS, and other wood installations would mimic natural beaver activity in streams and increase floodplain activation, potentially adding some diversity of vegetation color and texture to the landscape. Travelers on Ritter Road south of the project may be able to see construction equipment and human activity along Eightmile Creek while work is occurring.

The project is located within 1/4 mile of the Middle Fork John Day River, which is identified by the state of Oregon as a State Scenic Waterway. In accordance with Oregon's State Scenic Waterway Rules, notification of the proposed project was sent to Oregon DSL, which issued a State Scenic Waterway Removal/Fill Permit (65589-RF), and to the Oregon

Parks and Recreation Department, which issued a letter that documented their determination of project consistency with the policies of the Scenic Waterway Act.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not introduce new operational sources of air emissions or otherwise affect air quality in the long term. Minor temporary increases in site emissions from gasoline- and/or diesel-powered construction equipment and vehicles would occur during installation of the BDAs, PALS, and other wood features. Dust emissions from construction activities would be minor, based on the fact that there would be very little ground disturbance from the project and the main project features would be installed within the creek. The project site is not located in an area designated by the Oregon DEQ as a Non-Attainment or Maintenance Area with current or historic issues meeting air quality standards.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not introduce new permanent sources of noise and would not otherwise change noise levels in the area in the long term. BDA, PALS, and other wood installations would temporarily elevate noise above background levels while work is occurring. Noise-generating construction equipment could include a mini-excavator, chainsaw, and pickup trucks. Noise-generating activities would occur on a large private property in a rural area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No permanent public health or safety hazards would be created by the installation of the BDAs, PALs, or other wood features. Temporary safety hazards typical of construction activities would be expected from the operation of equipment and hand tools on the project site.

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 landowner is aware of the proposed activities through involvement in project planning and permitting efforts. Construction activities and schedule would be coordinated with the landowner prior to on-the-ground work.

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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