Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Yakama Nation Lower Wenatchee River Reach 3 Habitat Restoration Project

Project No.: 2009-003-00

Project Manager: Victoria Bohlen, EWU-4

Location: Chelan County, Washington

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 provide funding to support implementation of the Yakama Nation Fisheries (YNF) Lower Wenatchee River Reach 3 Habitat Restoration Project along the Lower Wenatchee River near Wenatchee, Washington. The project area is within privately-owned property, building upon YNF's previous restoration projects. The primary goal of the project is to enhance aquatic habitats while accommodating natural rates of channel migration towards the northern floodplain. The project seeks to enhance adult spawning and juvenile rearing habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Upper Columbia River (UCR) spring Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), UCR summer steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and Columbia River bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*).

The timing of construction would be associated with the permitted in-water work period of July 15 – September 30, during daytime hours. Heavy equipment used for this project may include (but is not limited to) excavators, dump trucks, skid steers, vibratory pile driver, water truck, loaders, chainsaws, and miscellaneous hand and power tools.

The project would involve a number of restoration actions, including the expansion of an existing alcove at the downstream end of the mid-channel island and regrading of the over-steepened river left main stem riverbank, as well as installation of a variety of large wood structures along about 0.2 mile of the mainstem channel and 0.3 mile of the side channel, summarized below:

- 7 bank buried logjam structures along the right bank of the alcove habitat area
- 4 bank buried logjam structures along the north river-left bank of the mainstem channel
- 2 bank buried logjam structures at an outlet of a natural side channel
- 54 individual logs with rootwads in pools of an existing, previously-constructed side channel

For the logjam structures, the installation would entail excavation at each location, construction of the structures, and then backfilling with stockpiled material until existing contours and elevations are restored. Log rootwads and slash would be placed extending from the bank in order to encourage scour pools and provide complex habitat at all flows. For the individual logs, which

were selected to minimize wetland impacts, logs would be ballasted by bolting to two piles per log. Rods would be used to pin the top layer of logs to the vertically driven timber piles; the fasteners resist buoyancy and shear forces, improving the longevity of the wood structures at these locations.

For the alcove habitat, which is a low-flow backwater and cover habitat that is connected to the main channel only at the outlet, a total of about 100 cubic yards of material below the ordinary high water mark would be excavated to increase the availability of high-quality, off-channel habitat. The excavated material would be disposed of off-site or outside the delineated floodplain.

Project construction disturbance would include excavation and temporary access routes used to install the large wood structures, enhance the island alcove and install vegetation. The total disturbance area for clearing and grubbing would be no more than 5.9 acres. Access routes would follow bare areas to the extent possible and would include a temporary bridge crossing of the existing constructed side channel and up to 25 wet crossings to access the island. For the temporary bridge, installation and removal would require no more than four equipment crossings through the channel. Disturbance during construction and to large trees would be minimized, and all disturbed areas would be back-filled with salvaged boulder, cobble, and gravel material, and then re-vegetated with native riparian species, including salvaged and transplanted vegetation from disturbed areas and willow live cuttings at the north river-left bank.

Structures would be installed in the dry while sheet pile or bulk bag cofferdams are in place. Prior to reintroducing water to the side channel, turbid water would be consistently pumped to upland or riparian containment areas. In order to minimize turbidity during cofferdam removal, a staged rewatering sequence would be completed, in which fine sediment remaining after pumping is flushed out in pulses by removing and then replacing sections of the cofferdam. Cofferdams would be used to isolate work areas that are below the water surface elevation during construction. Fish salvage would be completed by professional biologists using electrofishing, hand dip nets and/or seining within each cofferdam that isolates surface water.

The Proposed Action fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion and also supports the 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. Additionally, these actions also support BPA's commitments to the Yakama Nation in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as amended, 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 1021.102 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]

DAPHNE DAY

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Daphne Day
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 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: Yakama Nation Lower Wenatchee River Reach 3 Habitat Restoration Project

Project Site Description

The project area is on privately-owned land, around 600 feet in elevation, near River Mile 2.2. The surrounding landscape is a mix of rural farmland and open space, with more development to the north of the river than to the south. The lower Wenatchee River is a large cobble bedded river with bare gravel bars. The project reach contains a mixture of low gradient pool, riffle, and glide habitat with relatively abundant side channels and off-channel habitat, some of which is the result of previous restoration actions. Its valley is broad with low stepped terraces, with a channel pattern that is irregular, sinuous, and relatively uniform. Near the immediate project area, bank armoring at bridge crossings, orchard and residential development on the north side of the river, the BNSF railroad on the south side, and riparian clearing have led to a more simplified channel, narrow riparian zone, and reduced floodplain connectivity.

Water diversions are located on the Wenatchee River upstream from the project area, affecting annual water flows, but are not present within the project vicinity. Riparian areas, where present, are comprised of deciduous trees and woody shrubs, including such species as black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa*) red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), and willows (*Salix spp.*). Island and gravel bars in the area are actively revegetating with willows and other shrubs. The north riverbank is primarily riparian forest, while the south bank abuts to a steep valley wall created through bedrock and riprap along the BNSF road embankment, discouraging riparian vegetation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA identified an Area of Potential Effects and reviewed the project area for cultural and historic resources (BPA EH Project No. WA 2022 089). BPA initiated consultation on July 25, 2024, with the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR), and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation. On September 3, 2024, CTCR requested additional information, which was provided by BPA on September 7, 2024. BPA sent a cultural resources survey report that was completed for the project and a letter with BPA's determination that the project would result in no historic properties affected to consulting parties on December 30, 2024. On January 2, 2025, DAHP concurred with BPA's determination. No other responses were received from consulting parties. The consultation period ended January 30, 2025.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by a professional archaeologist.
- Sponsor to have a copy of the post-review discovery protocol on site during project implementation.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Restoration activities would disturb soils on the project site. Best Management Practices (BMP), including dewatering and staged rewatering methods, have been developed to avoid or minimize temporary fine sediment impacts, increased turbidity downstream, and erosion during construction. All ground disturbance would be stabilized and monitored throughout the length of implementation. All disturbed areas would be stabilized after construction by seeding and planting.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA obtained an up-to-date official species list from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on April 17, 2025. The list of threatened or endangered species includes showy stickseed (*Hackelia venusta*) and Wenatchee Mountains checker-mallow (*Sidalcea oregana var. calva*).Both species are higher elevation species and neither species is likely to occur in the project area and thus, the project would have no effect. Non-listed plants in the project area would be impacted by project activities, such as ground disturbance and potential trampling from human presence. BMPs would be employed to avoid damage to native trees whenever possible and to salvage native vegetation and replant or use as instream wood after construction. All areas disturbed by construction activity would be replanted or seeded with native species to stabilize topsoil, prevent introduction of invasive species, and improve habitat quality. Overall, this project would have a positive impact on vegetation conditions in the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Local wildlife present within the area could be disturbed by project activities. State-listed species known to occur in the vicinity of the project area include mountain quail (*Oreortyx pictus*) and great-blue heron (*Ardea herodias*). Disturbance from the proposed actions would be temporary, and the surrounding landscape provides ample habitat and cover for displaced individuals. No habitats would be modified to any degree that might permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from equipment noise and human presence. Wildlife would likely reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed activities, and no tree removal would occur during the nesting season for great-blue heron. The proposed project is expected to improve aquatic and riparian habitat, which would have a beneficial effect for wildlife species in the long term.

In accordance with the ESA, BPA obtained an up-to-date official species list from USFWS on April 17, 2025. The list of threatened or endangered species includes gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). The closest documented gray wolf occurrences are over five miles away, and the yellow-billed cuckoo is functionally extinct in the state of Washington, with no known occurrences near the project area. Thus, these species are unlikely to occur near the project area and the proposed actions are unlikely to have any effect. Two proposed species, the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), also have the potential to occur and may be affected by proposed actions through removal of individuals or host plants, if present; however, the project is unlikely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Proposed actions would alter portions of the waterway and would temporarily disrupt aquatic life. ESA-listed fish species known to utilize the project reach is limited to Upper Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). Both Upper Columbia spring Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are present in the Lower Wenatchee River but have not been documented in the project vicinity. State-listed species with the potential to occur include Pacific lamprey (*Entosphenus tridentatus*). Non-listed fish species known to occur in the Lower Wenatchee River include summer/fall Chinook salmon. Although not documented, other species with the potential to occur include sockeye salmon (*O. nerka*), coho salmon (*O. kisutch*), resident rainbow trout, resident cutthroat trout (*O. clarkia*), mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*). While project activities are scheduled to take place during the in-water work window, there is the potential that some listed fish would be present in the stream reach during the proposed construction period. The proposed restoration actions would aid in floodplain re-connection, increase local water table, and improve instream complexity for fish habitat. Despite the short-term effects on fish in the area, the long-term effects of the project on fish, floodplains, and water bodies would be positive.

Notes:

- All actions that would have the potential to impact ESA-listed fish species would conform to the procedures and conservation measures in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP4) programmatic biological opinions (HIP PNF 2025 084).

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are wetlands present in the project area, but there would be no permanent impacts. Conservation measures would be employed to minimize any temporary impacts to wetlands. YNF obtained a Clean Water Act Nationwide 27 (Aquatic Habitat Restoration, Enhancement, and Establishment Activities) programmatic permit (NWS-2025-509). Overall, wetland quality would improve due to the restoration of natural flow patterns.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The placement of the log structure and logs with roots in the channels may result in minor impacts to groundwater by encouraging greater amounts of water onto the floodplain during high flows. The long-term increase in floodplain access would benefit groundwater recharge and function.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No long-term change in land use would occur. No specially-designated areas are present. The Wenatchee River is used recreationally. Although a river-user study has not been completed for this site, frequent recreational use has been observed upstream of the project. The majority of recreation users use the other side of the main channel around the island (river right) and would not be affected during construction. By maintaining recreational access on river right, the project would result in a low impact on recreational access.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in temporary and permanent changes to the landscape. During implementation, impacts from material staging, excavation equipment, vegetation disturbances, and human presence would be minor and short-term. Upon

project completion, the new wood structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and would not be located in a visually sensitive area. Overall, the project would improve visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor increases in local air pollution during project activities due to exhaust from machinery and equipment. BMPs would be used to limit the amount of dust created by equipment. Conditions would be expected to return to normal immediately after the project is completed. There would be no long-term effects to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor increases in noise generated by machinery and equipment used during project activities. The noise would be of short duration and during daylight hours only. This noise would be temporary and cause no long-term impacts.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project implementation, all personnel would use BMPs to ensure human health and safety; solely licensed and trained professionals would operate all machinery. For recreational users of the Wenatchee River, safety measures include sight lines of about 1,000 feet, combined with available egress onto gravel bars, island and evasion via multiple channels. All wood structures installed in the Wenatchee River would include bumper logs, which are designed to safely deflect any recreational users who did come into contact with them.

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 would occur on privately owned land with full cooperation of the landowner. No coordination or outreach would be required.

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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