

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Native Riparian Planting Along the Little Salmon River

**Project No.:** 2007-127-00

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

**Location:** Adams 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 Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) to plant riparian vegetation along Little Salmon Creek in the Little Salmon River watershed in Idaho. The Little Salmon River watershed has poor water quality from excess sediment and high water temperatures, stemming from degraded riparian conditions. Planting riparian vegetation along the banks of the Little Salmon River would stabilize banks, provide shade, and improve water quality in the Little Salmon River to support Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*).

NPT would plant native plants over approximately 12 acres along both banks of a 2.5-mile-long stretch of the Little Salmon River. NPT may also seed with native grasses and forbs in the project area. Five-gallon container plants would be buried 3 to 4 feet to reach the water table. Methods for digging holes would include the use of hand tools, mechanical augers, and a mini excavator with an auger attachment.

NPT would use existing roads, private driveways, and farm roads to access the project area, including routes through pastures previously used to install fencing along the project area to exclude cattle from the planting locations. Planting efforts would occur over multiple years. The site would be revisited in subsequent years to monitor the establishment of plants and selectively replant to replace mortalities in previously planted areas to support a robust, native riparian plant community. Existing plants may be maintained with mulch additions, protective fencing, and weed control activities to assure survival.

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 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.<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:** Native Riparian Planting Along the Little Salmon River

## **Project Site Description**

Proposed activities would occur on private land, approximately 4 miles north of the community of New Meadows in Adams County, Idaho. The land along both sides of the Little Salmon River in the project area has been developed for residential areas or converted to agricultural production, mainly cattle grazing, so there is little to no existing riparian area and what remains is degraded. There is forested land to the west of the project area, but there are few trees and shrubs along the river. NPT owns the property just downstream of the project area and has planted over 1,500 shrubs and trees along the Little Salmon River in prior years.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no adverse effect on August 18, 2025 (BPA Cultural Resources Project No.: ID 2025 020). Consulting parties included the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). BPA received concurrence from NPT and SHPO on August 18, 2025.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary ground disturbance would occur as part of the proposed actions due to digging holes or trenches up to 4 feet deep. These would be refilled with the same soil once plants were planted. There would be increased erosion potential for activities near the banks of the Little Salmon River, but sediment control best management practices would be put in place prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff. The proposed actions would be intended to improve habitat and soil conditions throughout the riparian area.

### **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. Minor and temporary vegetation disturbances associated with site access and ground disturbance would occur as part of the proposed activities but would have short-term effects on vegetation. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects from restored or improved riparian vegetation.

### **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 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists the Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), North American

wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), and the northern Idaho ground squirrel (*Urocitellus brunneus*), all ESA-listed as Threatened, as having the potential to be present in project areas. Proposed critical habitat for the Canada lynx does not overlap with the project area and there is no designated critical habitat for the North American wolverine or northern Idaho ground squirrel. In addition, IPaC 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 ESA-listed or proposed species would be present in project areas. There is confirmed presence of northern Idaho ground squirrels in Adams County, but occurrences are over 0.5 miles away from the project area and in meadows surrounded by forested areas. The project area does not contain these features and would not be suitable habitat for the squirrels. In addition, squirrels hibernate for 8 months of the year, starting in August, and planting activities are planned to start in late September. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no impact to ESA-listed, ESA-proposed, or state 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: ESA-listed Chinook salmon and steelhead are downstream of the project area in the Little Salmon River. No state special-status species occupy the project area. The project was reviewed and consulted on under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) programmatic biological opinion and would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures, including turbidity monitoring requirements.

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 river 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. Planting would occur in fall when the project area is dry and there would be no filling or destruction of wetlands. Planting activities would support improved wetland and riparian structure in the long term.

## **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 and temporary effects to the air quality from dust and exhaust due to equipment and vehicle use for site access. 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 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: NPT has coordinated with the two private landowners to develop an agreement for work to be conducted, outline plans, including access routes through the properties, and identify a timeline for the work.

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