

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Snag Boat Bend Channel Reconnection

Project No.: 2009-012-00

Project Manager: Allan Whiting, EWL-4

Location: Linn 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 provide funding for Long Tom Watershed Council to implement the Snag Boat Bend Channel Reconnection project. The project would include modifying a section of the Porter embankment in order to restore river flow to a 1.1-mile-long historic channel at Snag Boat Bend. Reconnection of the historic channel to the Willamette River would help restore fluvial processes and improve rearing habitat for juvenile salmonids.

Grading for an embankment notch would occur over approximately 360 feet in length by 90 feet in width. The embankment notch would have a 60-foot flat bottom width, with gradual side slopes that approximately matches shape of the reconnected historic channel. Site access would be maintained through the installation of a low water crossing ford measuring approximately 14 feet in width centered within the flat bottom channel notch. The bottom of the notch would be excavated to an elevation that produces year-round flow into the historic channel. The current embankment berms will be compacted, graded to stable slopes and vegetation cleared. All disturbed areas will be seeded with erosion control native seed mix post project completion. Spoils will be stored on the USFWS refuge grounds out of the 100-year flood plain. No additional access or project staging is needed.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2008 National Marine Fisheries Service Willamette River Biological Opinion, 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

Nicholas Johnson
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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: Snag Boat Bend Channel Reconnection

Project Site Description

The project is located at Willamette River mile 144 south of Peoria at Snag Boat Bend, a unit of William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The Porter Spoil Embankment and Porter Right Bank revetment was installed on the property in 1964 as part of the Willamette Valley flood control project. The embankment disconnected the river from off-channel habitat and disrupted fluvial processes by completely cutting off the upstream end of a 1.25-mile-long segment of historic mainstem Willamette River channel.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA, USFWS and US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) agreed in 2023 that BPA is to be the lead agency for Section 106 compliance for the Snag Boat Bend project. Consultation initiated on February 8, 2023, with the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, USFW, and Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (OR SHPO). OR SHPO confirmed receipt of correspondence on February 28, 2023, case number 23-0434. A preliminary No Effect on Historic Properties determination was made and the supporting report sent to consulting parties for review on July 28, 2023. USFWS concurred with the findings and recommendation that the Porter Embankment not eligible for listing on the National Registrar of Historic Properties (NRHP) on July 31, 2023. BPA submitted the final report and Determination letter to all consulting parties on August 10, 2023. OR SHPO responded with receipt of correspondence on August 28, 2023. BPA did not receive any further correspondence within 30 days.

Notes:

- In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, work would be stopped immediately and a BPA Archaeologist and Historian would be notified, as well as consulting parties

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary, minor impacts to soil from increased erosion potential during construction and grading activities. Sediment control best management practices (BMPs) would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Excavated sediments would be loaded into dump trucks to an upland spoil area or disposed of at an appropriate facility as needed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no known Federal/state special-status plant species in the project area. Temporary impacts to existing vegetation during construction activities would occur. Post-

construction plantings and long-term monitoring would re-establish native upland and riparian plant communities along the new stream embankments post levee removal.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no known Federal/state special-status wildlife species in the project area. Minor, short-term disturbance would occur to wildlife species in the area from noise associated with construction. Disturbed wildlife are anticipated to access other portions of the wildlife area during construction. The goal of the work is to improve riparian and floodplain habitat for the benefit of terrestrial and aquatic species.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project would remove a portion of the existing Porter Embankment that blocked the channel's historic flow route. Impacts to ESA-listed species (Upper Willamette River Chinook Salmon and Steelhead) would be covered under BPA's programmatic Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinion with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). A turbidity curtain would be placed in the primary channel during construction to limit turbidity. The new low water crossing to provide access to the lowlands west of the project area would not be utilized during high flow periods, as to not impede/impact fish passage. The project would result in long-term net benefits to fish species within the project reach from increased fish access to spawning and rearing habitat that would match historic conditions before the installation of the Porter Embankment.

Notes:

- The project sponsor would be responsible for acquiring all applicable Clean Water Act permitting from the USACE and coordinate with Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL) including all compensatory mitigation requirements.
- Project Sponsor would be responsible for developing and implementing BMPs on-site to address erosion and water quality measures during construction

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project is located near riparian wetland areas that are both natural and manmade. The project would remove a portion of the existing embankment that filled the channel's historic hydrophilic soil bed and install a low water crossing ford. The resulting conditions post construction would both restore and increase the overall wetland area within the project site and improve associated water quality and habitat to a more natural state. The current project proposal would not include permanent fill to historic wetland areas.

Notes:

- The project sponsor shall be responsible for acquiring all applicable Clean Water Act permitting from USACE and coordinate with DSL including all compensatory mitigation requirements.
- Project Sponsor shall be responsible for developing and implementing BMPs on-site to address erosion and water quality measures during construction
- The notice to proceed with construction would be predicated on the successful permitting approvals from USACE and DSL.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would have no long-term impact to groundwater or aquifers. If excavation intercepts groundwater, a straw bale filter dam would be placed at the downstream end of the project area.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is managed by USFWS as part of the National Wildlife Refuge system. The embankment previously served as an access route but was abandoned when the parcel was previously converted from agriculture to conservation. Areas that were serviced by the access route on the current embankment could be still accessed during low water periods via the planned ford in the channel reconstruction. The project would restore the area to a more natural condition, which is consistent with the refuge's management plan. Members of the public using the property for hiking and bird watching may have periods of temporary restricted use during construction activities; public access would be restored post project completion and users would have other portions of the refuge available for use during construction.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction equipment would be visible during project activities, which would be a maximum of 20-30 days. Bare soil areas would be revegetated and there would be a long-term improvement in the visual quality of the area due to the restoration of a more natural condition.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some dust would be generated during the 30-day construction period for the embankment removal activities. These short-term effects of vehicle and equipment generating dust are not inconsistent with the past agricultural practices and present restoration management of these lands. No other impacts to air quality would occur as a result from the proposed project.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The noise quality impacts would be intermittent at a maximum of 20-30 days during construction periods. These effects of vehicle and equipment noise would short term and the resulting conditions post construction would not exceed noise levels of ongoing restoration management activities of these lands.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work activities. Local access to the project site would be restricted during the construction period and would return to normal conditions post project completion. The proposed removal of the embankment and the flood control measures impacting the former agriculture lands to the west of the levee would be reviewed and approved by USACE under Section 408 of the Rivers and Harbors Act. No other impacts to human health and safety would occur as a result of the proposed actions.

Notes:

- The project sponsor would be responsible for acquiring all applicable 408 permitting and authorizations from the USACE.
- The project sponsor would proceed with project actions upon the successful 408 permit and authorization issuance to remove the embankment and existing flood control measures.

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: All work is on USFWS-managed public lands and would be accessed on existing roads and adjacent public lands. Visitors to the project site would be warned of project activities by signs in the parking areas. Project sponsor would notify any adjacent property owners as needed.

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

Signed:

Nicholas Johnson
Environmental Protection Specialist