

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: California Creek Beaver Dam Analogs

Project No.: 1995-057-03

Project Manager: Jennifer Plemons, EWM-4

Location: Elko County, Nevada

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 Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation (Sho-Pai Tribes) to install approximately four beaver dam analogs (BDAs) in California Creek. The BDA installation would occur on the Sho-Pai Tribes-owned Wilson Ranch/101 property located near Mountain City, Nevada. The proposed action is part of ongoing wildlife mitigation activities performed under the Sho-Pai Tribes' Southern Idaho Wildlife Mitigation Project, which covers portions of southern Idaho and northern Nevada.

The BDAs would span California Creek in locations where the creek is approximately 4 to 8 feet wide. They would be constructed of untreated wooden spikes (5 feet long and 5 inches in diameter) driven vertically into the creek bed with cut willows and sage branches woven between them to simulate a beaver dam. Hand tools or heavy machinery (not to exceed 15,000 pounds operating weight) may be used to drive the vertical posts a minimum of 1.5 feet apart from one another. Slash material would be woven between vertical posts. The project includes future BDA adjustments and repairs as needed.

Funding the proposed activities supports 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. (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
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

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 evaluation 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.

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Project Site Description

The Wilson/101 Ranch is a 938-acre property comprised of six parcels near Mountain City, Nevada. The Sho-Pai Tribes purchased the ranch in 2009. The ranch has historically been used for livestock, hay, and crop production. Habitats present on the ranch include sagebrush steppe, deciduous scrub-shrub wetland, riverine, and agriculture/pasture. The Sho-Pai Tribes manage a wildlife mitigation program on the ranch that includes implementing vegetation management plans, addressing erosion issues, and improving irrigation infrastructure.

The proposed BDA project area is within what is known as the ranch's Ratliff Parcel, a 104-acre parcel that is undeveloped in the BDA project area and has a calving barn, feedlot, and holding corrals located about ¼ mile northwest of the project. The BDA project area is along an approximately ¼-mile length of California Creek that flows in a westerly direction through the Ratliff Parcel and into the Owyhee River about 1.5 miles downstream of the project. U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Road No. 016, also known as California Creek Road, runs just north of California Creek in the project area and intersects Nevada State Route 225 about 1.4 miles west of the project. California Creek in the project area is an approximately 4- to 8-foot-wide channel with intermittent flow (dry during portions of summer/fall). Adjacent floodplain vegetation includes willow, sagebrush, bitterbrush, and grasses.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Sho-Pai Tribes and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on August 8, 2025, with the project's Area of Potential Effects (APE) (BPA Project # NV 2025 003; NV SHPO # UT 2025-8816; 36563). The Sho-Pai Tribes Cultural Preservation Department responded on September 5, 2025, that they did not have concerns about impacts to cultural resources. Nevada SHPO concurred with BPA's APE on September 11, 2025. On October 16, 2025, BPA provided consulting parties with a summary of BPA's efforts to identify historic properties and BPA's determination of no adverse effect to historic properties. No responses were received within 30 days.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is encountered during the implementation of the project, BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BDA installation would involve small areas of soil/sediment disturbance from driving the 5-inch diameter spike posts into the stream bed and packing stream sediment on the upstream side of the weaving materials. If heavy equipment is used to drive the posts, then small areas of soil disturbance and compaction for equipment access to the stream at each BDA could be expected. The close proximity of California Creek Road and existing

two-track access routes on the site would limit the extent of off-road access disturbance needed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Small areas of riparian vegetation could be disturbed from equipment access at each of the BDA sites, particularly if machinery is used to drive the BDA posts. Tree removal is not proposed. Willow branches may be cut at the BDA sites for weaving into the BDAs, but no individual plant would be cut back so severely as to risk its full recovery. The BDAs, by raising water levels and improving the stream/floodplain connection, would be expected to widen the riparian corridor and potentially support a higher number and diversity of plant species over time.

No federal or state ESA-listed plant species, or other special status plant species or habitats, are known to be present within the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction activity could temporarily displace wildlife from the work area, due to noise, soil and vegetation disturbance, and visual disturbance from equipment operation and human activity. The BDAs, by improving the stream/floodplain connection and widening the riparian corridor, may support a higher number and diversity of species than the existing condition. Habitat would not be modified to a degree that would permanently displace medium to large resident wildlife, though some small reptiles, amphibians, or mammals (e.g., frogs, mice, gophers) could be displaced or even killed by equipment operation.

No federal ESA-listed wildlife species or critical habitats are present within or near the project site, nor are there documented state or other special-status species or habitats present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BDAs would involve low-level temporary disturbance in California Creek during installation, but long-term effects to streams, floodplains, and fish would be beneficial. By slowing the flow of water, providing in-stream structure, and improving the stream/floodplain connection, the BDAs would expand and improve habitat for fish and other aquatic species.

California Creek has intermittent flow, and BDA installation could occur when the stream is flowing or is dry. If installation occurs when there is flow, native resident fish including redband trout may avoid BDA work areas while BDAs are installed. Turbidity increases from in-stream work would be minor and temporary, based on the nature and small footprints of work at each of the four BDA locations (e.g., driving 5-inch diameter spike posts, weaving branches between the posts, and packing sediment on the upstream side of the BDA). Aquatic invertebrates or amphibians may be displaced or killed by BDA installation, but rapid recolonization of these sites by the same classes of animals following construction is expected. No ESA-listed or other special-status fish or aquatic species are known to be present in the project area.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The installation of the BDAs would occur within the wetted perimeter of California Creek. No fill is proposed that would result in any permanent wetland loss or degradation.

By improving the stream/floodplain connection, the BDAs could expand the riparian wetland area and enhance riparian wetland functions over time.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not involve any groundwater withdrawals or discharges to groundwater. The BDAs would slow the flow of water through the creek and raise water levels behind each of the features, improving the stream/floodplain connection. This could result in improvements to groundwater recharge in the floodplain. No long-term adverse effects to groundwater or aquifers would result from the BDAs.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is located on Sho-Pai Tribes fee-owned land. The BDA installation is consistent with the Tribes' management of the property for wildlife benefit. There would be no land use changes or impacts to specially designated areas resulting from the BDA installation. Public use of California Creek Road (USFS Road No. 016), which runs along the northern edge of the property and provides access to surrounding Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest lands, would not be impacted by the project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually prominent structural, landform, or vegetative changes would be made by the proposed project. The BDAs would mimic natural beaver activity in streams and increase floodplain activation, potentially adding some diversity of vegetation color and texture to the landscape along the creek.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BDAs would not introduce new operational sources of air emissions and would not otherwise affect air quality in the long term. Minor temporary increases in site emissions from gasoline or diesel-powered equipment and vehicles would occur during BDA installation. Dust emissions would be minor based on the very small area of ground disturbance at each BDA and the BDA locations within a creek.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not introduce new permanent sources of noise to the project site and would not otherwise change noise levels in the long term. BDA installation would temporarily elevate noise above background levels during daylight hours while work is occurring, due to human activity and potentially heavy equipment operation. The work area is not adjacent to sensitive noise receptors such as residences, schools, or hospitals.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No public health or safety hazards would be created by the installation of the BDAs. Temporary worker safety hazards typical of construction activities would be expected from the operation of equipment and hand tools.

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 proposed project would be implemented by Sho-Pai Tribes personnel on land owned by the Sho-Pai Tribes. No additional landowner coordination is needed.

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

Signed:

John Vlastelicia
Environmental Protection Specialist