

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Blue Slate Ranch Property Acquisition

Project No.: 2011-018-00; BPA-012043

Project Manager: Elizabeth Santana, EWM-4

Location: Pend Oreille, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.25 Real property transfers for cultural resources protection, habitat preservation, and wildlife management

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to fund the Kalispel Tribe of Indians (Kalispel Tribe) to purchase the Blue Slate Ranch which is a 425-acre parcel of land located approximately seven miles northwest from the center of Newport in Pend Oreille, Washington. BPA would hold a conservation easement to permanently protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitat.

Funding the proposed acquisition supports the conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. Additionally, funding supports BPA's 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. 839 et seq.)). This land purchase would specifically satisfy some of BPA's commitments made in the 2024 "Memorandum of Agreement between the Kalispel Tribe of Indians and Bonneville Power Administration, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Reclamation."

The property possesses natural, scenic, open space, and habitat values. Protection would prevent conversion to residential, single-family development and would benefit ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), as well as cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii*), and various wildlife. The Kalispel Tribe would develop a land management plan to guide the protection and enhancement of habitat and other resources on the property. The land management plan would be drafted within 18 months of closing. The management plan would be reviewed by BPA for consistency with the conservation easement and the purpose of the acquisition. If BPA proposes to fund any additional activities on the property, further environmental review may be conducted. Land use would include native wildlife habitat enhancement activities as well as light human recreation, such as hiking, hunting, gathering, and/or wildlife viewing.

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
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 parcel lies in the Pend Oreille River Valley just southeast of the Kalispel Tribes' reservation, with access through existing Kalispel property. Federally owned lands managed by the USDA Forest Service and privately-owned parcels also border the property. The current land use is designated forest land and has been managed for private timber harvest and ranching. Approximately 15 acres in the northwest corner of the property is encumbered by a Washington Department of Natural Resources 40-year Forestry Riparian Easement. Site elevations range from 3,040 feet at a point on the north boundary to 2,200 feet in the southwest corner. The southern half of the property is gently sloped with large flat sections, and a steep rocky butte rises 600 feet to the northern boundary. There is approximately 600 feet of barbed wire fence along the eastern boundary, as well as approximately 3 miles of unmaintained roads throughout. The roads are comprised of native material with no grading/surfacing.

Slopes and upland areas are mixed conifer and include ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), grand fir (*Abies grandis*), western larch (*Larix occidentalis*), western white pine (*Pinus monticola*), western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*), and lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*). Lower areas transition to mixed conifer/deciduous forest and contain western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*), paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*), and cottonwood/aspen species (*Populus* spp). There are four small seasonal streams that drain southeast across the site, with no documented wetlands. Observed wildlife species present include white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), elk (*Cervus canadensis*), moose (*Alces alces*), black bear (*Ursus americanus*), mountain lion (*Puma concolor*), turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), grouse (family Phasianidae), and various songbirds (order Passeriformes). The site is not within any designated recovery areas, and no ESA-listed plant or animal species are known to occur on the property.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no effect due to the land acquisition which includes transfer of title and the creation of a conservation easement. To the extent that future activities on the property may have an effect, it is expected that the Kalispel Tribe would comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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: Prior to closing, notice of the acquisition would be mailed to nearby landowners and interested parties. Additionally, BPA would run advertisements in local area newspapers for at least two weeks to inform the public of the pending acquisition.

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

Signed:

Daphne Day, ECF-4
Environmental Protection Specialist