

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: O'Hara Rock Pit Sediment Reduction

Project No.: 1996-077-02

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss, EWM-4

Location: Idaho 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 of Idaho to construct sediment reduction features at the O'Hara Rock Pit in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest. The project is a partnership between the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Nez Perce Tribe. Funding for the proposed actions would support the conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for the 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.*).

Work would include culvert installation and replacement, sediment basin construction, ditch improvement, and other drainage features to reduce erosion and sediment input into O'Hara Creek, a tributary to the Selway River. A series of channels approximately 300 to 500 feet in length would be constructed to capture water from several small streams that flow into the pit. The new ditches would be designed to divert flow into two excavated sediment settlement basins. In addition to two existing culverts that run underneath the road, a new culvert would be installed under O'Hara Creek Road (FS Road 651) to direct outflow from the settlement basins through a vegetative buffer before it reaches O'Hara Creek to further reduce sediment input to the stream. Construction would be carried out by four to six workers using one backhoe and one dump truck in the summer of 2026.

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 the current *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures*, 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.

Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Policy Analyst

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

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 project site is located within in the Moose Creek Ranger District of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests (46° 4'51.52"N, 115°31'7.37"W) and features primarily coniferous forests, shrubby understory, and riparian plant communities around O'Hara Creek, a tributary of the Selway River. The Selway River confluence with O'Hara Creek is about a half mile downstream of the project site. The project area is near USFS maintained campsites, hiking trails, and fishing ponds located along the Selway River, some of which are accessible via FS Road 651, which passes next to the O'Hara Rock Pit. USFS uses the O'Hara Rock Pit to stockpile aggregate material used for road maintenance in this region of the forest.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Through agreement with USFS, BPA and USFS determined that USFS would be the lead federal agency for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (7/2/25 email). USFS utilized Exemption #1 of the *Programmatic Agreement for Compliance with Section 106 on the Nex Perce-Clearwater National Forest; Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest, Region 1, Idaho (ACHP Project Number 019205)*, and determined that the project had no potential to affect Historic Properties (USFS memo dated 3/11/24). A BPA archeologist reviewed the USFS documentation.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would require ground disturbance for installing the new culvert and constructing the sediment basins and ditches, which may result in temporary adverse effects to soil structure from breaking apart and crushing soils. The installation of new drainage features and sediment basins is designed to manage sediment flow and would reduce erosion and sediment input into O'Hara Creek on a longer-term basis. Conservation measures in USFS's 2019 Idaho Habitat Restoration Programmatic Biological Opinion (Consultation No.: WCR-2018-9898) would ensure protection of soil resources through erosion-control best management practices.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: USFS was the lead federal agency for ESA compliance. There are no ESA-listed plant species present in the project area (USFWS Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool) and as a result there would be no effect on ESA-listed plant species. USFS conducted botanical surveys and determined that any sensitive plant species that could be impacted at the individual level would not be affected in a manner that could trend that

species toward a federal ESA listing. The proposed actions would largely be confined to previously disturbed areas and would have only mild effects on non-listed plant species, such as temporary disruption from human presence and noise from machinery.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: USFS was the lead federal agency for ESA compliance. ESA-listed Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), and North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) may be present near the project area (USFWS IPaC). USFS determined that the proposed actions would have no effect on these species. Because there would be a limited project footprint, little removal of habitat, and a short duration for construction, effects on non-listed wildlife would be mild, limited to temporary disruption from human presence and noise during construction. USFS conducted wildlife surveys and prepared a Biological Evaluation (BE) to support this determination.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: USFS was the lead federal agency for ESA compliance. ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and steelhead (*O. mykiss*) may be present in O'Hara Creek and the Selway River (USFWS IPaC, StreamNet Mapper). USFS submitted the proposed actions to NMFS and USFWS, which determined that the proposed project is consistent with USFS's 2019 Idaho Habitat Restoration Programmatic Biological Opinion (Consultation No.: WCR-2018-9898). Short-term adverse effects on fish species would be mitigated using prescribed conservation measures in the Programmatic Biological Opinion and outweighed by long-term positive improvements in conditions from restoration actions undertaken by USFS. No actions are proposed that would take place in O'Hara Creek or its immediate vicinity, and adverse effects would be limited to temporary disruption from human presence and noise during construction. The long-term effects of the proposed actions would be to reduce sediment runoff into the creek, improving conditions for fish.

Impacts on state special-status and non-listed fish species would be functionally identical to those on listed species.

All required water quality permits (e.g., Clean Water Act Section 404, Idaho Department of Water Resources Stream Channel Alteration) have been obtained. Adhering to all permit conditions would minimize any potential short-term effect on waterbodies resulting from possible sedimentation during and shortly after construction. The construction of new ditches, a new culvert, and two new sediment basins would collect and settle more sediment before directing flow through a riparian buffer, substantially reducing the amount of sediment suspended in the water which flows into O'Hara Creek. These actions would improve water quality in the creek, which would have long-term beneficial effects on waterbodies and fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no mapped wetlands in the project area (USFWS National Wetlands Inventory). As a result, there would be no effects on wetlands from the proposed actions.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impacts to groundwater and aquifers due to the surface nature of the work and minimizing the potential for adverse effects through use of sediment-control measures.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No long-term changes to land use are proposed. The O'Hara Rock Pit is currently used by USFS for stockpiling gravel for road maintenance. This use would continue after construction of the proposed sediment control features. The site is not within a wilderness, roadless area, or other specially designated area, and has been approved by the USFS under the applicable land-use plans and regulations. Access to areas above the project site along FS Road 651 would be temporarily impacted while the new culvert is being installed. USFS would notify the public of these impacts via public notice and signage. Access to these areas would not be fully blocked, as they would remain accessible via Iron Mountain Rd to the south. Impacts on access would only persist through construction and the proposed actions would not affect the public's long-term access to FS Road 651.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minimal effects on the local visual quality because the project is generally consistent with current land uses and the visual character of O'Hara Creek and the O'Hara Rock Pit. The addition of sediment pools, ditches, and a new culvert would affect a small area and not affect the public's aesthetic enjoyment of the overall forest.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Operating the small number of construction vehicles and equipment to implement the project would lead to low levels of air emissions and dust. The project would not have any long-term emission sources.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction equipment would elevate noise levels, but because the project is in a rural setting and with a short project duration, it would be unlikely to be heard by neighbors or other passersby. There would be no long-term source of noise resulting from the project.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best practices to ensure human health and safety. Workers would adhere to safety protocols and public signage would be used to prevent traffic impacts or hinder the flow of traffic, including emergency vehicles, along FS Road 651 during construction.

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 sponsor Nez Perce Tribe has closely coordinated all proposed project activities with USFS. The USFS Moose Creek District issued a public decision notice on March 11, 2025.

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

Signed:

Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Policy Analyst