

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Fish Creek Habitat Structure Installation

Project No.: 2010-003-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss, EWM-4

Location: Idaho County, ID

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 (the Tribe) to construct post-assisted log structures (PALS) and beaver dam analogs (BDAs) along a portion of Fish Creek on U.S. Forest Service (USFS) managed land in central Idaho. 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.).

Installation of PALS and BDAs would help restore hydraulic connectivity and increase habitat complexity in the Fish Creek watershed. Structures would be installed along a 1.1-mile-long stretch of the stream that is currently highly incised, lacks instream complexity, and has limited interaction with its riparian corridor. These structures would simulate natural stream processes to create scour pools and backwaters, provide cover and habitat for fish, and improve the interaction between the stream and its floodplain.

Materials for the PALS and BDAs would be locally sourced from vegetation in the area. Structures would be constructed using poles and posts with diameters of less than six inches driven into the floor of the stream roughly two feet apart. Smaller branches and willow would then be woven in-between these posts to form a porous mesh that would gradually collect debris floating downstream and impound water. The structures would be sized individually to be appropriate for each area, but would generally measure 10 to 15 feet long, one foot wide, and rise up to two feet above the channel bed surface. Roughly a dozen total habitat structures would be constructed through the project area each year. Native riparian plant species would be planted in areas where materials are harvested and the surrounding meadow following construction to restore and improve local vegetation.

All instream construction would be completed between July 15 and August 15, the local in-water work window, and out of stream planting would continue through the autumn. Trees and shrubs planted would include nursery-grown thinleaf alder (*Alnus incana*), redosier dogwood (*Cornus*

sericea), Douglas hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*), and native willow species (*Salix spp.*). The Tribe would continue to monitor the area and adaptively manage it in future years as necessary to ensure that local conditions improve and project goals are being met.

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.

Proposed Action: Fish Creek Habitat Structure Installation

Project Site Description

Fish Creek is a small stream that is part of the larger White Bird Creek watershed in central Idaho. Fish Creek is characterized by a degraded riparian corridor with an incised channel and sparse stream-side riparian vegetation for much of its length. The stream runs parallel to a nearby private road, Free Use Road, for the length of the project area. The project is situated in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest at an elevation of roughly 4,900 feet above sea level and is surrounded by a mixed-forest environment with areas of dry meadow and grassland and a small number of private residences on inholdings.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: USFS was the lead federal agency for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act. USFS determined that the proposed actions do not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties and that the proposed actions fit within the scope of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest's Programmatic Section 106 Agreement between the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the Nez Perce Tribal Historic Preservation Office. A BPA archeologist reviewed the USFS determination.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor disturbances to local geology and soils during the installation of the PALS and BDAs. Holes for posts would be relatively small (less than six inches in diameter) and would not require extensive excavation. Other ground disturbance would be limited to minor disturbances from human presence. The long-term effects of the proposed actions on local geology and soils would be positive, with reduced stream velocity and increased floodplain interaction from the structures helping to improve the condition of soils in the area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) is the only ESA-listed or special-status plant species documented in this area of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest (U.S. Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC)). As whitebark pine is only found at very high elevations, it would not be present at the Fish Creek project site, which is nearly 1,000 feet below the typical elevation at which whitebark pine is found in the area. As a result, no ESA-listed, state special-status, or USFS sensitive plant species that would be impacted by the proposed actions in Fish Creek.

Non-listed plants would suffer short-term adverse effects from the proposed installation of PALS and BDAs in Fish Creek. Individual plants would be harvested for use as posts and racking material in the structures. Additional plants may be trampled or otherwise disturbed during construction. These adverse effects would be outweighed by the long-term positive impacts from improving conditions in Fish Creek. The Tribe would also plant areas to regrow harvested vegetation and further enhance the quality of local vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) and Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) are potentially present in this area of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest (USFWS IPaC). No state special-status species are present in this area of Idaho County (Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation). The Fish Creek project site is far below the typical elevations of denning habitat of both wolverine and Canada lynx. Both species are typically found in high elevation tundra and subalpine forests, biomes starkly different than the medium-altitude riparian meadow system surrounding the project site. The proposed actions would further be conducted during the summer and early autumn, when wolverine and lynx are even less likely to be found in the area. As a result, the proposed actions would have no effect on wolverine or lynx.

Non-listed wildlife would be temporarily disturbed by noise and human presence during the installation of the PALS and BDAs. Any disturbance would be short term, and wildlife would be expected to use adjacent habitat. These effects would be mild and would not persist beyond implementation of the proposed actions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ESA-listed fish species in Fish Creek, though listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) have been documented in the wider White Bird Creek watershed (StreamNet). Additionally, Idaho special-status species westslope cutthroat trout (*O. clarkii lewisi*) has been documented in Fish Creek (StreamNet). There would be temporary disturbance of fish while installing PALS and BDAs, particularly from noise and human presence in and around the stream. These effects would be minor and temporary, and outweighed by the long-term improvement in conditions to local habitat quality from the proposed actions. Habitat improvements in Fish Creek from the new structures would create new higher-quality spawning and rearing habitat for ESA-listed species and potentially induce these fish to venture further into Fish Creek than they are currently found. Effects on non-listed fish would be functionally identical.

There would be mild short-term effects on local water quality during implementation of the proposed actions, such as turbidity caused by installation of the habitat structures, but these effects would be minor and temporary. The long-term effects of the proposed actions would be beneficial to local water quality by reducing stream velocity and retaining water behind the new structures.

Notes:

- All project actions would adhere to the procedures and conservation measures contained in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program programmatic biological opinion (HIP4 BiOp) for the proposed activity types (HIP4 PNF#2026036). These measures would further reduce the potential for adverse effects on ESA-listed and non-listed fish, as well as local water quality, in the area during project implementation.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are mapped wetlands present along Fish Creek (USFWS National Wetlands Inventory). There would be mild short-term adverse effects on these wetlands during construction, such as individual plants being harvested for use in the PALS and BDAs and vegetation trampling disturbance caused by human presence. These effects would be temporary and outweighed by long-term positive effects on local wetlands from increased floodplain interaction and reduced channel velocity, while further outweighed by replanting of vegetation that is harvested for project actions.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or groundwater use is proposed. Habitat structures would reduce the velocity of Fish Creek and retain more water in the local floodplain, which would have mild beneficial effects on local groundwater.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No temporary or permanent changes in land use or ownership are proposed. The project site is fully located on land which is owned and managed by USFS and the proposed actions would be consistent with habitat restoration programs implemented by USFS.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Changes to local visual quality would be mild. Habitat structures would be constructed from plants harvested from the local area and would not significantly differ from the appearance of naturally forming beaver dams and wood jams once fully established. Disturbed areas would be revegetated after the BDAs are constructed, restoring their current aesthetic conditions.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Installation of PALS and BDAs would not require large machinery or equipment that would significantly impact local air quality. Vehicles used to access the project site would generate exhaust, but these effects would be mild and temporary.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Installation of PALS and BDAs would not require any large machinery or equipment that would significantly increase local noise levels. Vehicles used to access the project site and general human presence would increase local noise levels, but these effects would be mild and temporary.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best practices to ensure human health and safety. All vehicles and equipment would be operated solely by trained and licensed (when applicable) personnel.

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 location is fully located on USFS managed land. The Tribe would coordinate with USFS as necessary. No further outside coordination is required.

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