

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Foghorn Reach Geotechnical and Groundwater Testing and Aquatic Restoration Project

**Project No.:** 2009-003-00

**Project Manager:** Tori Bohlen, EWU-4

**Location:** Okanogan, Washington

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat; and B3.1 Site characterization and environmental monitoring

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund Yakama Nation Fisheries (YNF) to implement geotechnical and groundwater testing and aquatic habitat restoration actions along the Methow River near Winthrop, Washington. The project area is within property owned by private and public utility district (PUD) landowners and would include the installation of sediment and groundwater test pits and large wood structures, placement of large wood, and onsite planting. The primary goal of the project is to enhance instream habitat complexity and create peripheral and transitional habitats that support the recovery of salmon and steelhead populations in the Foghorn Reach of the Methow River. The project seeks to enhance adult spawning and juvenile rearing habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Upper Columbia River (UCR) spring Chinook salmon, UCR summer steelhead, and Columbia River bull trout.

The proposed project consists of two phases: "Phase 1" would install geotechnical test pits and piezometer wells, and "Phase 2" would install and place aquatic large wood habitat structures along the Methow River and banks of a high-flow side channel.

## **Phase 1: Geotechnical Test Pits and Piezometer Wells**

Phase 1 involves the excavation of three temporary test pits within the floodplain on the south side of the Methow River. The test pits would serve two purposes: allowing for the documentation of subsurface sediment layers and monitoring of the groundwater surface elevations. Sediment and groundwater data gathered from the test pits/wells would be utilized for adaptive management of the restoration project.

A tracked excavator would access the test pit locations, which would travel off-road through the vegetated floodplain in a manner that avoids impacting mature trees. Each test pit would be approximately 8 feet by 8 feet, with a maximum depth of 8 to 12 feet. Excavated materials would be temporarily stored next to the test pits.

Inside the test pits, PVC standpipes equipped with piezometers and data-loggers would be installed, with the standpipes extending three to four feet above ground level. A licensed geologist would be present to collect substrate data during this process. Upon completion, the excavated materials would be used to backfill the test pits, restoring them to their original surface elevations.

On egress, the excavator would follow the same access route through the floodplain. As it exists, the excavator's bucket would be used to push woody debris and brush over the tracked path to camouflage the tracks. A native grass seed mixture would then be spread over the filled pits and along the excavator's route to promote revegetation. These test pit installations would occur July 1-2, 2026, and the groundwater wells would remain in the ground for one to three years following completion of the aquatic restoration activities.

## **Phase 2: Aquatic Large Wood Habitat Structures**

Phase 2 involves the installation of five large wood structures along the Methow River and placement of six single- to three-log large wood structures along a high-flow side channel.

Two large wood structures would be located on the north side of the river among some existing riprap on the riverbank, and three on the south side of the river near the outlet of the high-flow side channel. Each of the structures would be partially buried in the riverbanks and ballasted using large wood piles. Excavated bank material would be used to backfill the large wood structures. During construction, the large wood structures would be isolated from flow in the channel using sheet-pile cofferdams. Fish and aquatic species would be salvaged from these isolated areas and translocated downstream. About 75 large-wood logs with rootwads and 30 wood logs without rootwads (pilings) would be used to construct the structures. An excavator would transport the logs from two staging areas (one on each side of the river) to the construction sites. The large wood structures would be designed with bumper logs oriented to shed debris and alluvial material. This strategy also would provide for improved boater safety by minimizing roughness along the face of structures.

Six single- to three-log large wood structures would be placed along the lower 250 feet of a high-flow side channel on the south side of the river from its confluence with the Methow River. For the placement of the structures, all work would occur along the side channel in dry conditions and outside of wetlands. About 15 large-wood logs with rootwads would be used for the structures. Heavy equipment, including excavators and off-road dump trucks, would be used to place the structures.

All large wood would primarily consist of imported Douglas-fir, 18 to 24 inches in diameter. Pilings would generally be 12 to 16 inches in diameter, allowing for installation with a side-grip vibratory pile driver. Implementation of all structures would occur during the in-water work period of July 1–31, 2026.

Access and staging would utilize existing roads, previously disturbed areas, and short temporary routes through the vegetation. Vegetation removed during construction would be used to supplement the large wood structures. All disturbed areas would be planted with native vegetation, then monitored and replanted or reseeded for up to three years to ensure plant cover and survivability of at least 80%. The project area would be revisited for adaptive management as needed to reposition large wood or add wood to the habitat structures.

Funding the proposed activities would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These activities would also support 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 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.

Brenda Aguirre  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel  
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:** Foghorn Reach Geotechnical and Groundwater Testing and Aquatic Restoration Project

## **Project Site Description**

The project area is located along the Methow River, 0.5 miles west of Winthrop, Washington. It encompasses lands owned by Doulgas County PUD, Methow Conservancy, and private residential landowners. The area is situated in Township 34N, Range 21E, Section 3, at an elevation of approximately 1,750 feet. Dominant vegetation includes riparian forest and scrub/shrub lands. Adjacent land uses consist of rural residential properties, agricultural areas, the Douglas County PUD Methow Salmon Hatchery, the Foghorn Irrigation Company ditch, and the Winthrop Town Trail. Recreational activities in and near the project area are moderate, with intermittent hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, fishing, and boating. Historically, agricultural practices have heavily manipulated the project area, leading to the depletion of riparian areas and large wood in the Methow River.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CCR), Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN), and Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) on May 13, 2025. CCR concurred with the Area of Potential Effects (APE) on May 13, 2025, and DAHP concurred on May 14, 2025. BPA submitted a survey report and finding of "No Historic Properties Affected" on January 28, 2026, and DAHP concurred on the same day. The 30-day review period concluded on February 27, 2026, with no additional comments received.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation, 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: Soil would be displaced during construction of temporary access roads, installation of cofferdams, placement of large wood, excavation of bank materials, and excavation of test pits. Erosion control Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Any spoils generated for this project would be used for backfilling partially buried large wood structures or hauled offsite to an approved repository. Post-construction site revegetation restoration measures would further minimize erosion potential and provide long-term stability to soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA- or state-listed plant species have been recorded in or near the project area. Existing plants would be impacted by project activities, such as ground disturbance by excavators and potential trampling by humans. BMPs would be employed during entry and exit by the excavators to avoid damage to native trees whenever possible, and during all excavation to salvage native vegetation for replanting after disturbance. All areas disturbed by project activities would be seeded with native grass species to stabilize topsoil, prevent introduction of invasive species, and improve habitat quality. Overall, this project is expected to have a positive long-term impact on the vegetation conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Local wildlife within the area could be disturbed by project activities. State-listed species known to occur in the vicinity of the project area include western gray squirrel (*Sciurus griseus*), golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), and Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*). Suitable nesting habitat for golden eagles is not present in the project area. Disturbance from the proposed actions would be temporary, and the surrounding landscape provides ample habitat and cover for displaced individuals. No habitats would be modified to any degree that might permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from equipment noise and human presence. Wildlife would likely reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed activities. The proposed project is expected to improve aquatic and riparian habitat, which would have a beneficial effect for wildlife species in the long term.

ESA-listed species such as Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), Mt. Rainier white-tailed ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucura rainierensis*), and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) have the potential to occur in the project area. Any potential impacts to Canada lynx, gray wolf, wolverine, and yellow-billed cuckoo would be minimized by following measures outlined in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP4) Programmatic ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS. The white-tailed ptarmigan is a high-elevation species with no known occurrences in or near the project area. Thus, white-tailed ptarmigan are unlikely to occur near the project area and the proposed actions are unlikely to have any effect. Impacts to listed and non-listed wildlife species at the project site would be limited to the immediate project area, resulting in a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary elevated noise disturbance.

Notes:

- The YNF and its contractor would adhere to all design features described in BPA's ESA Section 7 HIP4 consultation to minimize impacts to ESA-listed species and habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and steelhead (*O. mykiss*), along with their designated critical habitats, are present within the Foghorn Reach of the Methow River. No separately listed state fish species have been recorded in the project area. Any potential impacts to ESA-listed species would be minimized by following measures outlined in BPA's HIP4 Programmatic ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS and NMFS. Impacts to listed and non-listed fish species at the project site would be limited to the immediate project area, resulting in a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary elevated noise disturbance. The proposed restoration actions would aid in floodplain re-connection, increase local water table, and improve instream complexity for fish habitat. Despite the short-term effects on fish in the area, the long-term effects of the project on fish, floodplains, and water bodies would be positive.

Notes:

- The YNF and its contractor would adhere to all design features described in BPA's ESA Section 7 HIP4 consultation to minimize impacts to ESA-listed species and habitats.

## 6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would not occur in wetlands. There would be no impact on wetlands.

## 7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The installation of large wood structures in the channel and placement of wood along the side channel may result in minor impacts to groundwater by encouraging greater amounts of water onto the floodplain during high flows. The long-term increase in floodplain access would benefit groundwater recharge and function.

Notes:

- Spill prevention measures would be present on site to prevent groundwater contamination.

## 8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No long-term change in land use would occur. No specially-designated areas are present within the project footprint.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in both temporary and permanent changes to the landscape. During implementation, impacts from material staging, excavation equipment, vegetation disturbances, and human presence would be minor and short-term. Upon project completion, the new large wood structures and wood placements would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation, test pits would be recontoured to pre-project conditions, and work would not be located in a visually sensitive area. Overall, the project is expected to improve visual quality as the area returns to a more natural condition.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor increases in local air pollution during project activities due to exhaust from machinery and equipment. BMPs would be used to limit the amount of dust created by equipment. Conditions would be expected to return to normal immediately after the project is completed. There would be no long-term effects on air quality.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor increases in noise generated by machinery and equipment used during project activities. This noise would be of short duration and during daylight hours only. This noise would be temporary and cause no long-term impacts.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project implementation, all personnel would use BMPs to ensure human health and safety; solely licensed and trained professionals would operate all machinery. Temporary signage denoting “no public access” and “danger construction zone” would be used to deter people from entering the project site. While working in the river, lookouts with

handheld two-way radios would be posted to ensure public safety for river recreationalists. Additionally, large wood structures installed along the Methow River were designed to reduce safety hazards, such as including bumper logs to deflect any recreational users who encounter the structures. Following implementation, project stability analyses show there is a low likelihood that instream structures would affect hydraulics, sediment transportation, and/or wood transport to the degree to which nearby public safety would be at risk.

### **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 would occur on private and publicly owned lands with full cooperation from the landowners. No coordination or outreach would be required.

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

Signed:

Brenda Aguirre  
Environmental Protection Specialist