Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Lolo Watershed Vegetation Management

Project No.: 1996-077-02

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss, EWM-4

Location: Idaho and Clearwater Counties, 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 continue managing vegetation on privately-owned land in central Idaho. Funding for the project would support the conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System while also supporting efforts to mitigate for the effects of the Federal Columbia River 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*.).

The Tribe, in coordination with Idaho and Clearwater County weed management staff and individual private landowners, would continue efforts to control noxious, invasive, and undesirable vegetation across roughly 20 acres of privately-owned land in central Idaho. The proposed treatment sites are located in the Lolo Creek watershed. Undesirable vegetation would be removed with a combination of chemical herbicide spray applied to individual plants with hand applicators and a variety of manual control methods, such as clipping and hand pulling. Removing undesirable vegetation would promote native plant growth to help improve conditions in the watershed for fish and wildlife.

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

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Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Policy Analyst

Concur:

SARAH BIEGEL

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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: Lolo Watershed Vegetation Management

Project Site Description

Lolo Creek is a 47-mile-long tributary of the Clearwater River in central Idaho. The creek is a popular local destination for recreational fishing, rafting, and camping. A large portion of the creek runs through the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest. The proposed treatment sites are located on privately-owned property along lower Lolo Creek and Crocker Creek, one of its tributaries, to the west of the National Forest. These properties are largely rural and undeveloped or cultivated for commercial agriculture.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed actions for potential effects on historic and cultural resources (BPA CR No. ID 2026 041). Because the project does not have associated subsurface ground disturbance, the proposed actions have no potential to affect historic and cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed that would affect geology and soils beyond minor disturbances caused by pulling out individual plants and weeds. These actions would have no significant effects on local geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed plant species are present in the proposed treatment areas (USFWS Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool). No state special-status species are present in these regions of Idaho and Clearwater Counties (Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation).

Some non-listed vegetation would be removed. All plants targeted for removal would be invasive, noxious, and undesirable vegetation that is outcompeting native plant species. Removal of these plants would open potential habitat for native plant species and improve the overall quality of vegetation in the treated areas.

Notes:

- All herbicides would be applied consistently with the conservation measures included in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program Programmatic Biological Opinion (HIP4 BiOp)(HIP PNF#2026068). These measures would reduce the potential for negative effects on non-target vegetation by imposing limits on application times and methods, limiting the types of herbicides which can be used, and other measures. Total herbicide use would be reported to BPA annually.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) can be found in high elevation subalpine forests and tundra in these regions of Idaho and Clearwater counties (USFWS IPaC). No other state special-status species are present in these regions of Idaho and Clearwater counties (Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation). The proposed treatment sites are located in valleys below the elevations at which wolverines typically hunt and den, especially during warm summer months when the actions are proposed. The proposed actions would therefore not affect wolverine.

Non-listed wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by noise and human presence during weed treatments. These effects would be mild and temporary and cause no long-term adverse effects on wildlife. The long-term effects of the proposed actions would be to restore native vegetation to the treated areas, improving habitat conditions for local wildlife.

Notes:

- All herbicides would be applied consistently with the conservation measures included in BPA's HIP4 BiOp. These measures would reduce the potential for negative effects on wildlife, including non-listed wildlife, by imposing limits on application times and methods, limiting the types of herbicides which can be used, and other measures. Total herbicide use would be reported to BPA annually.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are found throughout the Lolo Creek watershed (USFWS IPaC, StreamNet). Idaho state special-status fish species westslope cutthroat trout (*O. clarkii lewisi*) is also present in local waterbodies (Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation). The proposed actions are unlikely to adversely affect these fish species. No herbicide applications or vegetation removal activities are proposed to take place in waterbodies. Most of the proposed treatment areas are in upland regions and all actions would follow the conservation measures included in the HIP4 BiOp to reduce the potential for impacts to fish and waterbodies from herbicides drifting into waterbodies from the locations which they are applied.

Effects on non-listed fish species would be functionally identical.

Notes:

- All herbicides would be applied consistently with the conservation measures included in BPA's HIP4 BiOp. These measures would reduce the potential for negative effects on fish and waterbodies, including non-listed fish, by imposing limits on application times and methods, limiting the types of herbicides which can be used, and other measures. Total herbicide use would be reported to BPA annually.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are mapped wetlands present at one of the proposed treatment areas (USFWS National Wetlands Inventory). While some vegetation would be removed from this wetland, the target species for treatment are non-native, invasive, and undesirable. Removing this vegetation would improve conditions in the wetland for native vegetation.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or goundwater use are proposed. No actions are proposed which would affect local groundwater.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed treatment areas are all located on privately-owned land. No changes in ownership or use of these areas are proposed. The proposed actions would require temporarily limiting access to treated areas, but these would cause no long-term changes to the use of these areas by their respective landowners.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Changes to the aesthetic quality of the treated areas would be minor, limited to removing non-native, noxious, and invasive plants to open more habitat for native plant species. These changes would not appreciably alter the visual quality of the treated areas.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Aside from exhaust from transportation used to travel to and from project sites, there would be no effects on air quality. This exhaust would cause extremely mild effects on local air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be mild increases in local noise levels from human presence during the proposed actions. These effects would be temporary and cause no long-term effects on local noise levels.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best practices to ensure human health and safety. All equipment would be operated solely by trained and licensed (when applicable) personnel. Herbicide applications would adhere to the conservation measures contained in BPA's HIP4 BiOp to reduce the potential for effects on human health and safety from chemical herbicide applications.

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 treatment areas are located on privately-owned land. The Tribe and its partners would coordinate with landowners as necessary. No further outside coordination would be necessary.

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

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