

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Tenmile Creek Project Area 64 Habitat Restoration

**Project No.:** 1994-018-05

**Project Manager:** Jennifer Lord, EWU-4

**Location:** Asotin County, Washington

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B 1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Asotin County Conservation District (ACCD) to implement a habitat restoration project along Tenmile Creek to increase instream habitat complexity, off channel habitat, floodplain connection, and riparian function. The proposed project would provide critical rearing habitat with ample cover for juvenile Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and other fish species.

The proposed project would occur over approximately 2,000 feet of Tenmile Creek, starting about 0.6 miles upriver of the confluence of Tenmile Creek and the Snake River. Work would occur in three distinct reaches in the project area with about 100 feet of space between each reach. Work in each reach would be independent of work in the other reaches. Proposed activities would include reconnection or creation of side channels in low lying areas, removal of portions of floodplain barriers (levees and bank armoring), relocation of a cattle ford, placement of large wood structures and boulders in side channels and the floodplain, controlling invasive vegetation, and planting in riparian areas. The project would also move a livestock watering pipeline out of the creek.

About 14,500 cubic yards of material would be excavated along banks and in the floodplain to create side channels in the two downstream reaches (each about 700 feet long). In some areas, excavation would remove portions of levees that cut off access to floodplain areas and do not coincide with human infrastructure. All levees in the project area were created by landowners, and none have received certification or accreditation by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. About 11,500 feet of newly created side channels would be constructed across the two reaches.

Large wood structures and boulders would be placed in the main channel, throughout new side channels, and over the floodplain in the three reaches to improve off-channel aquatic habitat, encourage sediment sorting in the main channel, and connect the floodplain. About 140 boulders (24-inch to 48-inch diameter) would be machine-placed in the channel bed. Large wood structures would include:

- One to four log structures: on the floodplain, logs would be placed on the surface and pinned in place with untreated wooden posts (four posts per log); in the channel, logs would span a portion of the channel with opposite ends partially buried into banks. If

rootwads are used, they would be placed in the channel and may be woven with woody racking material. About 105 structures would be installed.

- Beaver dam analogs (BDA): constructed by pounding a series of untreated wooden posts into the channel bed about 3 feet apart. Posts would be installed in two parallel lines and would span a portion or all of the channel width. Woody racking material would be woven between posts. Six structures would be installed.
- Post-assisted structures: three logs with rootwads would be angled into the channel and opposite ends buried into banks. Twelve untreated wooden posts would be pounded into the channel bed or bank around the logs (about 3 feet apart) and woody racking material would be woven between the posts and rootwads. Three structures would be installed.

Log sizes would range from about 20 feet to 30 feet long and 12 inches to 16 inches in diameter. Woody racking material would include logs that are 6 feet to 15 feet long and 4 inches to 12 inches in diameter. Posts would be 8 feet long, typically driven about 6 feet deep where soil and channel bed material allow. If posts cannot be driven that deep, tops would be cut so about two-thirds of the post is below ground.

An existing ford, used to move livestock from south pastures to a stockyard on the north side, would be relocated about 400 feet upstream. The new ford would be constructed in an area with naturally stable bed material, avoiding the need for imported substrate. Minor grading may be performed to create gradual bank transitions to the south pasture and existing stockyard to the north. No material was added to create the existing ford, so it would be decommissioned by removing in-channel fencing and revegetating the banks. There is existing exclusion fencing in the project area to keep cattle out of riparian areas. The project would install fencing (about 750 feet) at the new ford, route it to the stockyard on the north side of the creek, and connect it to existing fencing (on both sides of the creek). An existing, fenced stackyard for hay storage would be abandoned and fencing would be removed. A new stackyard would be established to the west of the stockyard and fenced to exclude cattle (about 370 feet of fence).

Near the ford, a water pipe runs through the creek and conveys water for cattle to a water tank on the south side. The project would remove the section of pipe in the creek and install an elevated support structure with new pipe that would connect to the existing pipeline on each side of the stream. The support structure would include a steel pipe (3-inch diameter and about 120 feet long) that would hold the water pipe. The steel pipe would be supported by angle iron and each end would be attached to concrete blocks on each side of the stream.

Planned restoration activities for a third reach (about 400 feet long) would be delayed until soil testing can be conducted. Initial surface soil testing found high levels of nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) in an abandoned lagoon in the floodplain near the inlet of Beckman Gulch to Tenmile Creek. Soil testing would follow Washington Department of Ecology-approved methods for soil sampling. Samples would be taken at about a depth of 4 feet. If high nutrient levels are present at the newly excavated depth, habitat restoration work in this reach would be abandoned. If nutrient levels are not elevated, the entire lagoon would be excavated to a depth of 4 feet and soil would be taken off site and disposed of following Washington Department of Ecology protocols before implementation of any proposed habitat restoration actions. Proposed habitat restoration actions would be similar to those in the other two reaches. The project would excavate a new route for the end of Beckman Gulch through the lagoon and floodplain before reconnecting to Tenmile Creek downstream of the current inlet. This would add about 500 feet to the length of Beckman Gulch. About 4,300 cubic yards of soil would be removed for soil testing and restoration actions. Large wood structures (about 21 log structures, one BDA, one post-assisted structure) and about 40

boulders would be installed in the reach. About 200 feet of fencing would be installed and connected to existing fencing that excludes livestock from the riparian area.

The project would impact about 0.5 acres of land at each reach (1.5 acres total). Excess excavated materials would be spread over about 1 acre in the upland area, including over the abandoned stackyard, and graded to match existing land. Four equipment and material staging areas (0.7 acres) would be established. Access routes would be on existing farm roads or temporary access routes (about 300 feet) created for construction. Temporary access routes would not require any road construction but would be created by clearing vegetation and driving on existing ground. Equipment for the project would include tracked excavators or skid steers, loaders, service vehicles, and hydraulic or gas-powered post pounders.

The project would occur in phases over several years, depending on funding and soil testing results. In-water work would occur during the in-water work period (July 15 to September 15). Work outside the channel may take place before or after. Disturbed areas not intended for use in future phases would be decompacted, seeded with native seed mixes, and mulched. Areas used for excess excavated materials would also be seeded and mulched. Live stakes or container plants would be planted in riparian areas where there are gaps in the existing riparian canopy and areas disturbed during construction. After each construction phase, willows would be planted in the winter and other trees and shrubs would be planted in the spring.

The site would be monitored for several years after construction is complete and would include photo point monitoring. If failures in system function, structure function, or integrity occur or if there are increased risks to infrastructure, riverscape processes, or fish passage the project's adaptive management procedures would be implemented. These procedures may include installation of new structures of the same type originally installed or modification of structures. Adaptive management procedures (replanting, reseeding) may also be implemented if the native plant community is slow to establish or there is low survival in restored areas. If needed, herbicide applications would be applied in subsequent years if monitoring shows encroachment by invasive species.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion and supports conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Columbia River System Biological Opinion. These actions also support 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. (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.

Jacquelyn Schei  
Environmental Protection Specialist

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:** Tenmile Creek Project Area 64 Habitat Restoration

## **Project Site Description**

The proposed site is along Weissenfels Ridge Road in Asotin County, Washington, about 4 miles southeast of the city of Asotin. The site is about 0.6 miles from the creek's confluence with the Snake River and drops approximately 3,300 feet from its headwaters within the Blue Mountains (about 16 miles upstream from the project) to the confluence. The creek flows through steep, rocky canyons with a shrub-steppe grassland ecosystem along hillsides and riparian habitat limited to canyon bottoms. Intensive logging in the headwaters, grazing across the watershed, conversion of mature riparian forests to agricultural use, and numerous upstream diversion dams for irrigation have resulted in poor fish habitat in the creek. Extensive levees and riprap were constructed along the creek to protect private infrastructure and ranching operations, limiting its function and flows. Within the project area, the creek has become incised and disconnected from the adjacent floodplains, leading to high flows and reduced retention time of sediment and large wood. The watershed is groundwater dominated, often leading to intermittent flows during the summer. Low flows and a disconnected floodplain result in high water temperatures in summer that are detrimental to steelhead and bull trout. High flows in winter and a lack of suitable habitat are also detrimental. Riparian vegetation is predominantly composed of cottonwood, alders, and willows, but large, stable wood is absent from the creek. Most wood is small and temporarily accumulates on bar surfaces and channel margins. While mature trees provide some shade to the creek in some areas, the riparian area is generally a thin and discontinuous strip.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On April 3, 2025, BPA initiated consultation on the project with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN), the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation (Colville), the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT), and the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). BPA received a response from DAHP on April 3, 2025, concurring with the proposed Area of Potential Effect (APE) for the project.

On April 17, 2026, BPA sent a letter to consulting parties with a summary of efforts made to identify historic properties. A cultural resource survey identified a previously recorded resource within the APE that is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This site would be avoided during construction; therefore, BPA determined that the project would have no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA Cultural Resources Project No.: WA 2024 259). BPA received concurrence from NPT (April 17, 2026), DAHP (April 20, 2026), and Colville (May 12, 2026). No response was received from the YN.

#### Notes:

- The project would establish an avoidance area of 30 meters around the site that would be avoided by all construction activities.
- Vehicles would not be permitted to drive or park on the side of Weissenfels Ridge Road within the avoidance area.
- Material and equipment staging would not occur near the avoidance area.

- A cultural resource monitor would be required for any work occurring adjacent to the avoidance area.
- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would require that work be halted near the material 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: There would be temporary impacts to geology and soils due to displacement and compaction of soil from the operation of heavy equipment to excavate soils to create side channels, grade banks and the floodplain (including removing portions of levees), install anchored wood structures, and plant vegetation in the riparian area. Erosion and sediment control best management practices, including instream work area isolation with coffer dams and erosion control fencing across the project area, would be implemented prior to work to minimize potential for instream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Excavation in the abandoned lagoon would be isolated from other ongoing construction work. Equipment would be cleaned after excavation is complete and before being used in other project areas.

Work areas would be contoured to match the surrounding grade after construction, including the upland area where excavated material is placed. Disturbed areas would be seeded with native, riparian plant species to facilitate soil recovery. Live stakes and container plants would be planted in riparian areas after construction and would help provide bank stability and limit erosion over the long term. Impacts to biological components of soils from future herbicide application would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels and compliance with the conservation measures in BPA's Fish and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program ESA Section 7 programmatic consultations (HIP BiOps).

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed plant species or state special-status plants are known to be present in the project area. The USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists the Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), ESA-listed Threatened, as having the potential to be in the project area. There is no critical habitat for Spalding's catchfly in the project area. The project area has been used for decades for livestock production so there is very little native vegetation. Riparian areas currently have fencing to exclude livestock and allow vegetation to grow, but these areas are not suitable habitat for Spalding's catchfly, which prefers bunchgrass grasslands, sagebrush-steppe ecosystems, or open-canopy pine forests. It is highly unlikely Spalding's catchfly would be present in the project area. Therefore, there would be no impact to ESA-listed plant species from the project.

There would be temporary impacts to existing vegetation including crushing and removal by heavy equipment, excavation, and trampling from work crews. Mature trees and shrubs in the project area would be avoided. Impacts would be minimized by using existing access routes where practicable as well as seeding disturbed areas and planting native vegetation after construction to help establish native plant communities. Minor and temporary vegetation disturbances would occur as part of future herbicide application. Impacts of herbicide applications would be minimized by implementation of proposed actions according to BPA's HIP BiOps. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects from native planting and seeding and removal of competitive invasive plants, allowing native plant communities to grow after construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or state special-status wildlife species or habitats are within the project site. IPaC lists the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), ESA-listed Threatened, as having the potential to be in the project area. In addition, IPaC lists the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), ESA-proposed Threatened, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), ESA-proposed Endangered, as having the potential to be present in the project area. There is no designated critical habitat for these species in the project area. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife indicates that the yellow-billed cuckoo probably nested in Washington until at least the early 1940s but is now considered functionally extirpated in the state and thus, unlikely to be present in the project area. Cattle grazing has limited the plant species available in the project area, including those needed by the monarch butterfly and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee, making it unlikely either species would be present. Therefore, the project would have no effects to ESA-listed or ESA-proposed wildlife species.

IPaC information indicates that bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) may be present in or near the project area during the time of year when proposed activities would occur. There is no confirmed presence of nests or previously used nest sites for either species in the project area. If a nest is observed in the project area, ACCD would employ protection measures (e.g., timing, distance) as necessary to ensure eagles would not be harmed by the project. Bald and golden eagles could benefit from the project in the long-term from an increased source of food coming from improved fish and wildlife habitats in the area. Therefore, the project would have no adverse impacts to bald and golden eagles.

Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by crews accessing sites during daylight hours and from the noise of construction activities. It is expected that wildlife would return to the area after construction is complete; there would be no long-term displacement of wildlife. Some aquatic invertebrates or amphibians may be displaced or killed during installation of instream structures, but rapid reoccupation of these areas by the same or other members of the same classes of animals after the project is complete would be likely. The wood structures and riparian plantings, as well as the habitat they are designed to create, would increase habitat for these species over the long term. Future herbicide application would have short-term impacts to wildlife that would be minimized by following the conservation measures in BPA's HIP BiOps, such as not applying herbicides during migratory bird nesting season and minimizing overspray and drifting. In the long term, the project would reestablish native, riparian vegetation that would provide more habitat for wildlife than exists now.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed Snake River steelhead and their critical habitat are present in the project area. Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), fall and spring/summer Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), sockeye salmon (*O. nerka*), and Pacific lamprey (*Entosphenus tridentatus*) are present in the Snake River (about 0.6 miles downstream). Most of these species use the Snake River as a migration route and do not enter tributaries. However, bull trout have been found in tributaries in the Asotin area and may be present in the project area. There are no other ESA-listed or state special-status fish species in the project area.

The project was reviewed and consulted on under BPA's HIP BiOps and would adhere to all applicable conservation measures, including monitoring turbidity, using erosion control measures throughout the project area for the duration of construction, following approved work timing, and isolating instream work areas. The project would obtain a required permit issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and a Section 401 water quality certification from the Washington Department of Ecology. The project would adhere to all requirements and prescriptions set forth in the permit and certification. Soil sampling in the abandoned lagoon and removal of soils with elevated nutrient levels would follow Washington Department of Ecology-approved methods to limit potential impacts to water quality.

Boulder placement, planting, excavation for soil testing, creating side channels, installing wood structures, and grading the ford approaches would have temporary negative impacts to fish and fish habitat, specifically sediment transport and delivery and displacement of individuals. Instream work areas would be isolated and aquatic organisms would be salvaged prior to construction. Some aquatic invertebrates may be displaced or killed by mechanical activities, but quick re-occupation of the area by the same or other members of the same classes of animals after construction is anticipated. Ground-disturbing activities would increase the risk of erosion and sedimentation during and immediately after excavation activities. This increase would be limited to the time of construction, primarily during excavation, would not be expected to last more than several hours, and would be mitigated by the use of erosion control measures throughout project construction. Future herbicide application may have effects for ESA-listed species in the project area. However, the project would follow the conservation measures in BPA's HIP BiOps to minimize impacts, including adhering to buffer requirements and approved application methods. No herbicide would be applied in-water. Herbicide application over larger areas would occur in upland areas only. Overall, the proposed actions would improve long-term conditions for fish by reducing fine sediment, increasing access to quality habitat in the main and side channels, and providing more native riparian cover.

Notes:

- Prior to in-water construction, ACCD would obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit and Section 401 certification and adhere to all terms and conditions.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no jurisdictional wetlands within the project area. Creation of side channels, installation of wood structures, and riparian planting would help reconnect the floodplain and create wetland habitat.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or uses of groundwater are proposed. There would be potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid spills from heavy equipment used, but spills with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater are unlikely. Onsite spill kits would also minimize the potential for spills to contaminate groundwater. Impacts to groundwater and aquifers from future herbicide application would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label. Actions would result in a minor increase in groundwater storage from enhanced floodplain connection and increased native, riparian plants in the project area.

## **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor changes to the underlying land use (cattle grazing). Most of the project area already has exclusion fencing to keep cattle out of the riparian area. A small area around the abandoned lagoon (about 0.5 acres) would be converted from agricultural use to a wetland complex and riparian floodplain habitat. Cattle would be temporarily excluded from some pastures in or around the project area during construction. Normal use would resume after construction is complete. The project is not in a specially designated area or Wild and Scenic River. There are no public recreational opportunities in the project area.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary and permanent changes to visual quality would occur during project implementation. Minor, short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as work zone conditions, vehicles, and equipment. Long-term changes resulting from creating new side channels, adding wood structures to the river and floodplain, and planting native vegetation would be seen by property owners and users of the county road running along the north side of the project area (Weissenfels Ridge Road). These changes would return this section of Tenmile Creek to a more natural condition.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to air quality from exhaust and dust from vehicles and equipment and from future herbicide application. Effects of herbicide application would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label. Dust and emissions from vehicles and equipment would be similar to those occurring during normal agricultural operations and from public use of the gravel county road. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short-term and temporary, occur during daylight hours, and cease after project completion.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. Operating construction vehicles and equipment inherently carries potential safety risks to operators, however, staff training and implementing best management practices, such as daily on-site safety precautions, would minimize that risk during construction activities. Soil testing would be completed consistently with Washington Department of Ecology requirements to prevent the potential release of nutrients from the sampled lagoon. Herbicide application poses a slight risk of skin and eye irritations, cuts, and bruises. Herbicide applications would be by a licensed applicator who would develop an herbicide transportation and safety plan before transporting or applying any herbicides, thus making the risk from herbicides insignificant.

### 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: Surface soil testing found high levels of nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) in an abandoned lagoon. Additional soil testing would be conducted, to a depth of about 4 feet, prior to any work in the reach. Soil samples and testing would follow Washington Department of Ecology-approved methods. If high nutrient levels are present at a depth of 4 feet, habitat restoration work in this reach would be abandoned. If nutrient levels are not elevated, the entire lagoon would be excavated to a depth of 4 feet before implementation of any proposed habitat restoration actions. Excavated soil would be taken off site and disposed of following Washington Department of Ecology protocols to prevent uncontrolled or unpermitted releases.

**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: ACCD has agreements in place with two private landowners and has been coordinating with both during design of the project. ACCD would be in communication with the landowners regarding work timing before work starts and throughout construction.

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

Signed:

Jacquelyn Schei  
Environmental Protection Specialist