Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Little Boulder Creek Wood Structure Installation and Riparian Planting

Project No.: 2008-604-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz, EWM-4

Location: Latah 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 Latah Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to address limiting factors and improve spawning and rearing habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss)* through the implementation of low-tech process-based restoration techniques and riparian plantings along 1.5 miles of Little Boulder Creek in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests (Forest).

Restoration techniques would include constructing non-engineered wood structures in the creek, including unanchored large wood structures, and post-assisted log structures (PALS), and beaver dam analogs (BDAs). Riparian areas would be seeded and planted with live stakes or container plants to provide a variety of rooting depths for soil stability, increased ground coverage to prevent weed encroachment, increased shade, and wildlife and pollinator habitat.

About 20 unanchored large wood structures (LWS), consisting of three to six logs about 20 feet in length and over 12 inches in diameter, would be constructed by hand. LWS would span either a portion of the creek and connect to one bank, or span the entire creek and connect to both banks. Logs would be secured between existing trees on the banks. About 40 single logs of a similar size would be placed in the channel and floodplain throughout the project area. Logs would be obtained through direct tree felling near the creek or using downed wood from the floodplain and adjacent hillslopes.

About 40 PALS would be constructed in the creek by placing key logs (up to 12 inches in diameter and 20 feet in length) in the creek (overlapping and at various angles to flow). Untreated wooden posts would be pounded into the creek bed at an angle around the key logs to anchor the logs. Posts would be placed about 2 feet apart on both sides of the key log structure and the spaces between posts and logs would be woven with woody material (a variety of sizes, generally 4-inch-diameter to 12-inch-diameter branches and logs). The amount of materials used in each structure would depend on the type of PALS constructed. Channel spanning PALS would require more key logs, posts, and woody material. Mid-channel and bank-attached PALS would span a portion of the channel and would require less materials. The number and types of PALS constructed would be dependent upon available resources that could be sourced nearby and the ability to successfully drive posts into the substrate to secure wood.

About 30 BDAs would be constructed by hand by layering sediment and woody material (a variety of sizes, generally 4 inches in diameter to 12 inches in diameter branches and logs), both sourced from within the project area. Materials would be placed across most of the channel width. BDAs may be anchored with untreated wood posts pounded into the creek bed depending on site conditions and expected flow volumes.

After construction, disturbed locations would be seeded with a native grass and forb mix. A diverse mix of native trees, shrubs, forbs, grasses, and grass-likes (live stakes or grown in containers) would be planted throughout the project area, mainly in riparian areas. Fencing may be installed around plants to protect from deer and elk browsing. Planting would be throughout the entire project area with a focus near structural elements.

Equipment used for the project would include chainsaws, hydraulic post pounder with power pack, gas-powered post pounder, griphoist, gas-powered augers, water-jet stingers, ATVs and trailers, and a mini-excavator or skidsteer to move logs from the hillslopes and floodplain to the creek. The project area would be accessed using existing U.S. Forest Service (USFS) roads and trails. USFS Road 3306 runs parallel to the lower project area for about 0.2 miles. Upstream of the end of Road 3306, the project would be accessed by an undesignated forest trail (a decommissioned segment of Road 3306) paralleling the creek. Material and equipment staging would occur at the established parking area near the end of USFS Road 3306. No new access roads or trails would be created.

The proposed action would be phased over several years with a subset of structures constructed and plantings in select areas each year over about 5 years. Monitoring and adaptive management would begin in the second year and continue for up to 10 years, following the plan developed by Latah SWCD. The project's adaptive management procedures would be implemented if failures in system function, structure function, or integrity occur; or if there are increased risks to infrastructure, riverscape processes, or fish passage. These procedures may include installation of new structures of the same type originally installed, modification of structures, or more bank stabilization. Adaptive management procedures (replanting, reseeding) may also be implemented over subsequent years if the native plant community is slow to establish or there is low survival in restored areas.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) 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.

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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: Little Boulder Creek Wood Structure Installation and Riparian Planting

Project Site Description

The project area is on USFS-managed land in the Palouse Ranger District of the Nez-Perce Clearwater National Forests (Forest), about 2 miles southeast of Helmer in Latah County, Idaho. Little Boulder Creek, a small tributary to the Potlatch River, has intermittent water levels but supports relatively high densities of juvenile steelhead when stream flows are suitable. However, the construction and maintenance of USFS system roads and historical management practices have impacted the creek, including limiting wood recruitment. The creek currently has moderate to high levels of embeddedness, flashy peak flows, bed and bank erosion, reduced floodplain access and storage, a dropped water table, impaired riparian vegetation, a lack of stream complexity, and a scarcity of spawning habitat due to poor substrate conditions.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Forest's Palouse Ranger District completed Section 106 consultation for the project. BPA reviewed the consultation package and determined the USFS consultation met BPA's needs, so tiered a review to the USFS consultation (BPA Cultural Resources No. ID 2026 045). On July 10, 2019, USFS reviewed the project and determined it had little potential to cause effects on historic properties, assuming such properties were present. On July 26, 2019, USFS sent letters to the Nez Perce and Coeur d'Alene Tribes inviting comments for 14 days as part of the public scoping period for the project. On August 28, 2019, USFS issued a Decision Memo for the project, noting that the Forest used the North Idaho Programmatic Agreement between the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Forest to determine that no archaeological or historic property would be adversely affected by the project. On January 15, 2026, BPA reviewed SHPO's records for the project area and found that no previously recorded resources are present in the project area.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary ground disturbances would occur as part of the proposed action. Felling trees across the creek and moving already downed logs with a mini-excavator or skidsteer to the creek or floodplain would cause minor compaction of soils and soil disturbance. Equipment would stay on existing roads and trails and logs would be moved by hand between the equipment and creek or floodplain. No heavy equipment would be used for planting. Tools would be limited to shovels or mechanized hand tools and there would be no large-scale soil displacement, soil mixing, or other mechanical soil disturbance. Posts would be driven into the streambed using a hydraulic or gas-powered post driver. No excavation would be required but posts driven into the streambed may result in small areas of sediment displacement and compaction. The proposed action would be intended to improve fish and wildlife habitat conditions.

Erosion and sediment control best management practices would be implemented prior to work to minimize potential for instream turbidity. Work areas would be seeded and planted with native plant species after implementation to facilitate soil recovery.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: USFS has assumed Lead Federal Agency (LFA) responsibilities for ESA and would exercise full ESA oversight of the actions within their authority. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists the Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) as having the potential to be in the project area. There are three known populations of Spalding's catchfly in the Forest and all exist within the canyon grasslands region of the Salmon River Ranger District. There are no known occurrences of the species in the project area or the Palouse Ranger District (about 100 miles north of the Salmon River Ranger District). The project area does not contain suitable habitat for Spalding's catchfly. Therefore, the project would have no effect on ESA-listed plant species.

There are several plant species identified as species of conservation concern by the USFS in the Forest. The following may occur in the Palouse Ranger District (2025 Land Management Plan, Nez-Perce Clearwater National Forests): broadfruit mariposa lily (*Calochortus nitidus*), least moonwart (*Botrychium simplex*), sticky goldenweed (*Pyrrocoma hirta* var. *sonchifolia*), Douglas clover (*Trifolium douglasii*), lanceleaf moonwort (*Botrychium lanceolatum* var. *lanceolatum*), Mingan moonwart (*Botrychium minganense*), clustered lady's slipper (*Cypripedium fasciculatum*), deer fern (*Struthiopteris spicant*), Columbian onion (*Allium columbianum*), nail lichen (*Pilophorus acicularis*), Daubenmire's dasynotus (*Dasynotus daubenmirei)*, Jessica's aster (*Symphyotrichum jessicae*), and crested wood fern (*Dryopteris cristata*). There are relatively few occurrences of these species in the Forest and no known occurrences within the project area. Therefore, the project would have no effect on USFS species of conservation concern or their habitats.

The use of ATVs with trailers and a mini-excavator or skidsteer would crush or destroy existing vegetation along roads and trails. Crews removing logs from hillsides and walking along the creek to install wood structures and plant in riparian areas would trample existing vegetation. These areas would be revegetated with native seed mixes and native plants to improve the native plant communities in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: USFS has assumed LFA responsibilities for ESA and would exercise full ESA oversight of the actions within their authority.

No ESA-listed or state special-status wildlife species or habitats are known to be within the project area. The USFWS IPaC tool lists the North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), ESA-listed Threatened, monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), ESA -proposed Threatened, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), ESA-proposed Endangered, as having the potential to be in the project area. There are no designated critical habitats for ESA-listed or proposed species in the project area and no confirmed presence of any of the species in the project area. Due to lack of native vegetation in the project area and proximity to USFS roads and trails, it is highly unlikely these species would be present. Therefore, there would be no impact to ESA-listed or proposed wildlife species from the project.

Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) may be present in or near the project area for several months of the year, including 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 an active nest is observed in the project area, Latah SWCD would employ protection measures (*e.g.,* timing, distance) as necessary to ensure eagles would not be harmed as a result of the project. Therefore, the project would have no adverse impacts to bald and golden eagles.

There is one USFS wildlife species of conservation concern that may occur in the Palouse Ranger District of the Forest—fisher (*Pekania pennanti*). This species occurs at very low densities (about one female per 20 square miles). Their preferred habitat is in forests with a thick canopy and underbrush and they avoid open spaces. The project area is forested but does not have a thick canopy and has a number of open spaces nearby, such as the road, trail, and creek/floodplain area. It is unlikely fishers would be present in the project area during construction hours. They avoid human contact and are mainly active during twilight or night. Therefore, the project may have minor impacts to fishers during construction, but this would be temporary and would not impact their habitat in the long term.

No wildlife habitat would be modified to a degree that would permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from proposed activities and human presence. These impacts would be minor and temporary in nature and conditions would return to normal when crews leave. The proposed action would improve habitat conditions over the long term by increasing riparian plant density, diversity, and habitat structure.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: USFS has assumed LFA responsibilities for ESA and would exercise full ESA oversight of the actions within their authority. USFS would adhere to the 2019 Idaho Habitat Restoration Programmatic (NMFS tracking no.: WCR-2018-9898).

ESA-listed steelhead are found in the project area. There are two USFS aquatic species of conservation concern that may occur in the Palouse Ranger District of the Forest—Pacific lamprey (*Entosphenus tridentatus*) and spring/summer Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*) from reintroduced stocks and considered native by the Forest.

Project activities would temporarily disturb nearby fish due to crew presence in and near the creek. It is expected that fish would avoid the area when crews are present but would reoccupy the area immediately after crews leave. Sediment in the creek would be disturbed during the installation of wood structures and planting would cause soil disturbance that may enter the creek. Impacts would be limited to the time of implementation and would not be expected to last more than several hours. The project would adhere to all applicable conservation measures included in the programmatic agreement, including implementing erosion control measures before work starts, turbidity monitoring requirements, and approved work timing.

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 Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. The project would adhere to all requirements and prescriptions set forth in the permit and certification. Overall, the proposed action would improve long-term conditions for fish by providing habitat (wood structures) and cover for the creek (riparian plantings).

Notes:

- Prior to in-water work, the project 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 wetlands present in the project area according to the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory; thus, the proposed action does not have the potential to impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or uses of groundwater are proposed. Restoration activities would result in an increase in groundwater storage as the structures and plantings would improve floodplain function.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change as a result of the project. The project is not in a specially-designated area. There may be increased traffic from work vehicles on USFS Road 3306 and the undesignated trail. The road and trail would remain open during implementation of the project. Little Boulder Creek is a small, non-navigable stream with low, disconnected, or no flow during average summers, making in-water recreational activities (*e.g.,* boating, swimming) impractical. Therefore, project implementation would not impact in-water recreational activities, nor would any changes in stream flow or water inundation from the wood structures result in impacts over time.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during implementation of proposed activities, such as work zone conditions, work crews, and vehicles. No work would occur in visually sensitive areas. Removal of trees from nearby hillslopes and the floodplain would be minimal and would focus on already downed trees. Removal of live trees would be consistent with the 2025 Land Management Plan. In the long term, the wood structures and riparian plantings would have a visual quality similar to other stream segments with active wood recruitment and adjacent riparian vegetation.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to the air quality of the environment from exhaust from equipment and vehicles used for the project. 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 crews and equipment would be short-term and temporary, occur during daylight hours, and would cease following 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 risks to the general public. Operating vehicles and equipment and tree felling inherently carries potential safety risks to operators and people in the vicinity. Work would occur on land between the USFS road/trail and the creek or on the other side of the creek and is not expected to impact the road or trail. Crew training and implementation of best management practices, such as daily on-site safety precautions, signage indicating ongoing construction activities, and temporary cordoning off of immediate work areas would minimize risks during construction activities.

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: All activities would occur in coordination with the Forest's Palouse Ranger District and on lands managed by the USFS. The USFS sent details of the proposed action to the Nez Perce and Coeur d'Alene Tribes and made project information available online for other interested parties as part of the environmental evaluation efforts. On August 28, 2019, USFS issued a Decision Memo to implement the project.

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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