

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Chiwawa Floodplain Enhancement Project

Project No.: 2009-003-00

Project Manager: Tori Bohlen, EWU-4

Location: Chelan County, Washington

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 Yakama Nation Fisheries (YNF) to implement a floodplain enhancement project along a 0.25-mile-long segment of the Chiwawa River in the Wenatchee River watershed on Federal property. The project seeks to restore adult spawning and juvenile rearing habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Upper Columbia River (UCR) spring Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), UCR summer steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and Columbia River bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*).

The project would excavate a side channel through a low floodplain. The total amount of material anticipated to be excavated is approximately 5,700 cubic yards. The channel would contain two inlet connections to the mainstem Chiwawa River and return flows would exit at a single point. The first inlet would convey perennial flows and engage at projected base flows of about 65 cubic feet per second (cfs). The second inlet would convey seasonally active flows and engage when flows are about 200 cfs. The inlets would connect to the mainstem Chiwawa River adjacent to existing apex large wood structures.

Excavated material would be moved offsite by an off-road dump truck to an upland sorting site. Fine sediments would be distributed in the uplands, and appropriately sized gravels would be retained and placed near the existing apex large wood structures in the mainstem Chiwawa as spawning gravel augmentation. Approximately 47 trees (9-to-24-inch diameter at breast height) would be cleared from the proposed channel corridor and salvaged for use in habitat elements.

The majority of the side channel construction work would be completed in the dry. The excavated side channel would remain separated from the mainstem by a sediment plug at the top of the channel during excavation. Groundwater encountered during side channel excavation would be pumped from the work area to an upland location.

In-water work elements are expected to last less than a total of two weeks and include the addition of spawning-sized gravels from the salvaged alluvium to the lee side of existing large wood structures, construction of an inlet large wood structure, and removal of the inlet sediment

plug to wet the side channel. Turbidity control measures would include isolation of in-water work areas via the use of coffer dams and the installation of turbidity curtains at the side channel outlet. Fish and aquatic species would be salvaged from the isolated work areas and translocated downstream of the in-stream work areas.

Construction of the inlet large wood structure would use approximately 15 pieces of large wood with rootwads and be supported by about 5 vertical piles and sorted alluvium. The side channel banks and bed would also incorporate large wood structures. The location, design, and placement of each structure is suggested in technical drawings, but final design would depend on site physical characteristics and available salvaged material. The project would construct about 10 structures and use approximately 100 pieces of large wood with rootwads for construction. All the side channel large wood structures would rely on burial, self-ballast, and bracing for stability.

All access and staging would occur via existing roads and previously-disturbed areas and short temporary access routes to reach proposed work and large wood structure sites. Vegetation removed during construction would be salvaged and used to supplement the wood structures. All areas disturbed during construction would be planted with native vegetation and monitored and replanted or reseeded the following year to ensure extent of plant cover and success of plant survivability. Project implementation would occur during the summer of 2026 with instream work occurring during the typical in-water work period (July 1 – 31) through August 7. The in-water work period extension for this project was approved by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) biologists.

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

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: Chiwawa Floodplain Enhancement Project

Project Site Description

The project area is located along the Chiwawa River, approximately 30 miles north of Leavenworth, Washington. The project would occur on Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF) managed lands. The OWNF Grouse Creek Campground is approximately 0.75 miles northeast of the project area. Vegetation types and land use in the project area consist of riparian forest stands interspersed with areas of scrub/shrub lands. Adjacent properties are agricultural use (forestry) and recreation (campground). Recreation within the Chiwawa River is classified as low, with occasional fishing. The project area has been heavily manipulated by historical logging, which has depleted the riparian area and river of large wood.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: OWNF conducted a cultural resource survey and consultations with the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YNF), and Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR). DAHP concurred with OWNF's determination that the project would have no adverse effect with a stipulation for monitoring and buffering of identified cultural sites in the project area. No response or comments were received from the YNF or CTCR. Consultation was completed on December 16, 2025.

Notes:

- An archaeological monitor would be onsite during construction near cultural sites within the project area and cultural sites would be buffered.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Installation of the sediment plug, large wood structures, and excavation of side channel materials would disturb soils. 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. All excavated soils would remain onsite and be spread on upland areas, used as spawning gravels, and to backfill large wood structures. Post construction site 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 Federal or state special-status plant species or habitats are known to be present in the project area. No OWNF-sensitive plant species are known to be present in the project area. Existing vegetation would be selectively removed during project construction. All

areas disturbed because of construction would be planted with native vegetation suitable for the project area, resulting in long-term benefit to the riparian vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) and its designated critical habitat are present in the project area. No separately listed state- or OWNF-sensitive wildlife species are known to be present in the project area. Potential impacts from noise and human presence to the northern spotted owl, or their habitat, during project activities would be minimized by following the measures outlined in the USFWS programmatic biological opinion for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) aquatic restoration activities in the States of Oregon, Washington and portions of California, Idaho, and Nevada (ARBO II). Any impacts to non-listed wildlife species in the project area would be limited to the immediate project area where there would be a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary elevated noise disturbance. Disturbed wildlife would be anticipated to use adjacent habitat during the temporary periods of noise disturbance.

Notes:

- YNF and its contractor would adhere to all conservation measures described in ARBO II to minimize impacts to northern spotted owl and its designated critical habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Instream work would temporarily impact fish present in the river due to fish handling and temporary elevated turbidity levels. ESA-listed UCR spring Chinook salmon, UCR summer steelhead and Columbia River bull trout are present within the project stream reach. No separately listed state- or OWNF-sensitive fish species have been recorded in the project area. While project activities are scheduled to take place during the in-water work window (July 1 – 31) through August 7 as approved by the WDFW, USFWS, and NMFS, there is the potential that some listed fish would be present in the stream reach during the proposed construction period. Potential impacts to ESA-listed fish species during project activities would be minimized by following the measures outlined in the USFWS and NMFS ARBO II biological opinions, and a USFWS biological opinion that addresses effects to bull trout and its designated critical habitat (June 17, 2026). The proposed enhancement actions would aid in floodplain development and reconnections, increases in local water table elevations, and improvements to 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:

- YNF and its contractor would adhere to all conservation measures described in USFWS and NMFS ARBO II biological opinions and the USFWS biological opinion of June 17, 2026, to minimize impacts to ESA-listed fish species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would not occur within wetlands. Therefore, there would be no impact to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Pumping groundwater encountered during side channel excavation may result in minor and temporary impacts to the water table due to the removal of groundwater. Any

impacts would be localized and expected to recover to pre-project levels immediately following completion of the pumping. Construction of large wood structures at the inlet and 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.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in temporary impacts to recreational users due to access limitations during construction in the immediate project area, sharing the local road (USFS Road 62) with construction vehicles, transporting workers and equipment to and from the project area, and closure of the nearby Grouse Creek Campground for about 5 weeks, which is the length of the entire approved in-water work window. YNF would coordinate with the OWNF to notify recreational users as appropriate. Recreation within this area of the Chiwawa River is classified as low by the OWNF, with occasional fishing via wading in stream. There are other recreational opportunities in the area to serve as alternatives during the temporary impacts. No long-term change in land use or recreation would occur. No specially-designated areas are present.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have little effect to visual quality. The new side channel and large wood structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and the river and would not be located in a visually sensitive area.

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. These effects would be limited in scope and duration and cause no long-term impacts to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in temporary increases in noise generated by machinery and equipment used during project activities. To avoid potential impacts to recreational campers, Grouse Creek Campground would be closed for about 5 weeks. These effects would be limited in scope and duration and cause no long-term impacts to the area's level of noise quality.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: 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.

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 site and staging areas are located on OWNF-managed lands. OWNF participated with the YNF in the project development.

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