

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Pine Creek Conservation Area Wildlife Water Development and Robinson Campground Parking Area

Project No.: 1998-022-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss, EWM - 4

Location: Wheeler County, Oregon

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 Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWSRO) to install two wildlife water troughs and develop a parking area at the Robinson Campground. These actions support Bonneville's commitments to the CTWSRO in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as amended, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) 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.).

Wildlife Water Troughs: Three watering troughs (12 by 2.5 feet) and two collection wells would be installed at the bases of perennial springs near the Rattlesnake Cabin and Cove Creek. At each site, areas 24 inches diameter by 18 inches deep would be hand-excavated to embed the collection wells within the spring. At the Rattlesnake Cabin, one trough would be placed above ground approximately 20 feet from the well. At the Cove Creek site, an existing trough would be replaced with two above ground troughs located end-to-end, approximately 100 feet from the well. Both trough systems would be connected to the collection wells with above ground pipe. The troughs would feature passive overflow systems and escape ramps to prevent entrapment. Native vegetation would be planted around the water troughs to provide shade and habitat.

Robinson Campground Parking Area: A new 300 by 65-foot parking area would be developed adjacent to an existing road in a previously disturbed and graded area; no additional grading would be required. A tractor would spread a 3-to-4-inch layer of delivered "3/4 minus" gravel over the area. Two 4-by 4-inch wooden signposts would be installed at the entrance and exit. Holes (18 inches deep by 10 inches wide) would be dug by hand and backfilled with the excavated dirt. All excavation would use hand tools. No staging areas would be required, and the sites would be accessed via existing backroads.

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.

Lindsey Mills
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: Pine Creek Conservation Area Wildlife Water Development and Robinson Campground Parking Area

Project Site Description

The Pine Creek Conservation Area (PCCA) is a 34,000 acre wildlife and watershed mitigation site in the John Day basin near Fossil, in Wheeler County, OR. The PCCA is fee-owned tribal land owned and managed by the CTWSRO. The property allows mixed-use public access for recreation, hunting, cultural, and educational activities. The PCCA is an arid high desert region of canyons and ridges with sparse vegetation coverage consisting of shrubs, brush, grasses, mixed conifers, and non-native species. The Robinson Campground parking area is adjacent to Robinson Creek, a tributary of Pine Creek. All three project sites would occur adjacent to established roads at elevations of approximately 2,500 feet.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: For the Wildlife Water Development, BPA initiated formal consultation with the CTWSRO, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation (CTUIR), and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on April 24, 2025 (BPA CR Project No.: OR 2025 049). CTWSRO concurred with the Area of Potential Effects (APE) on May 18, 2025, and SHPO requested additional information on May 16, 2025. Following a survey report submitted on April 6, 2026, BPA issued a finding of "No Historic Properties Affected" and addressed SHPO comments on May 6, 2026. SHPO concurred with the determination on May 6, 2026. The 30-day review period concluded on May 7, 2026, with no additional comments received.

For the Robinson Campground Parking Area, BPA issued a finding of "No Historic Properties Affected" and initiated consultation with CTWSRO, CTUIR, and SHPO on May 21, 2026 (OR 2026 102). The SHPO acknowledged the request for consultation and assigned a SHPO case number (26-1339) on May 22, 2026. The 30-day comment period ended June 20, 2026, and no additional comments were received from the consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground-disturbances would be minimal, requiring less than 10 cubic feet of hand-excavation. All activities would be confined to previously compacted and disturbed soil.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing vegetation would be disturbed during the water trough installations and parking area development. Non-native species would be removed, and native vegetation would be planted.

Federal: No ESA-listed plant species are known to be present in the PCCA. No Federal ESA-listed species would be impacted.

Oregon: Although undocumented, arrow-leaf thelypody (Oregon listed threatened) may be present in the PCCA. Presence in the immediate project areas is unlikely because arrow-leaf thelypody does not grow in disturbed areas and all project areas have been previously disturbed. There is no arrow-leaf thelypody in the parking area, as there is no vegetation. Presence is possible in vegetated areas near the water troughs, but those areas would not be directly impacted. The arrow-leaf thelypody is included in the PCCA Habitat Conservation and Management Plan and CTWSRO employees are trained in identification and conservation measures. Project activities are not expected to impact Oregon-listed species.

Overall, project activities would have a positive impact on vegetation conditions from the removal of invasive species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wildlife may experience minor and temporary disturbance during the water trough installations and parking area development due to increased noise, human presence, and equipment operations. Project activities would be within the range of regular and on-going human activity within the PCCA.

Federal: The PCCA is within the geographic range of the gray wolf (endangered); two proposed species, the monarch butterfly (threatened) and the Suckley's cuckoo bee (endangered); bald and golden eagles (Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act); and several birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA).

- **Gray Wolf:** While the projects fall within the geographic range of gray wolves, surveillance data from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and CTWSRO indicate no active wolf presence in the area. No impact would be expected.
- **Monarchs and Suckley's Cuckoo Bee:** The project areas lack suitable habitat and vegetation for these species, and no occurrences have been reported. No impact would be expected.
- **Eagles & Migratory Birds:** Bald and golden eagles and migratory birds are known to inhabit the PCCA. Productive bird habitat conditions are limited in the immediate project areas. Birds in surrounding areas may experience minor short-term disturbances, but no lasting impact would be expected.

Oregon: Several species identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need¹ (SGCN) by Oregon's State Wildlife Action Plan are known or expected to be present in the PCCA. SGCN are included in PCCA's Wildlife Habitat Conservation Management Program and PCCA employees are trained in identification and conservation measures if interactions occur. Due to the lack of suitable habitat, no SGCN are expected to inhabit the immediate project areas. Furthermore, because many of the species are nocturnal or crepuscular and all work would occur during the day, the potential of interactions is unlikely. SGCN species in the surrounding area may experience minor short-term disturbances, but no lasting impact is expected.

Baseline habitat conditions would remain largely unaltered, with the exception of the proposed water troughs, which would benefit local wildlife. Overall, the proposed project would have a neutral to beneficial impact on wildlife.

¹ OR Species of Greatest Conservation Need include: California myotis, Canyon Bat, Fringed Myotis, Little Brown Myotis, Long-eared Myotis, Long-legged Myotis, North American Porcupine, Pallid Bat, Pygmy Rabbit, Red Fox, Red Tree Vole, Silver-haired Bat, Townsends Big-eared Bat, Western Small-footed Myotis, White-tailed Jackrabbit, Yuma Myotis, Columbia Spotted Frog, Western Toad, Western Rattlesnake, Flammulated Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Brewer's Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Common Nighthawk, Lewis' Woodpecker, Loggerhead Skrike, Northern Goshawk, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Rufous Hummingbird, Swainson's Hawk, and Western Burrow Owl.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No streams exist near the water trough sites. The Robinson Campground parking area is adjacent to Robinson Creek, a designated critical habitat under ESA for salmon and bull trout; no Oregon special-status species are present. No in-water work would occur, a 50-foot buffer would separate the work from the stream, and ground disturbances would be minimal. Additionally, graveling the compacted dirt lot would reduce run-off and erosion. Therefore, the proposed parking area would have either no impact or potentially improve water conditions for ESA-listed species, and no impact on Oregon special-status species as none are present.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: According to the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), no wetlands are within the proposed project footprints. Wetlands identified near the projects would be bypassed and remain undisturbed. No impact would be expected.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The parking area would be surfaced with permeable gravel which would aid in stormwater infiltration and groundwater recharge. The spring troughs would have passive overflow systems which would allow the water to return to the spring drainage channel. No impact would be expected.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The PCCA is not a Federal "specially-designated area" and existing land use would not change. The additions would improve recreational access and wildlife habitats.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The low-profile water troughs and gravel parking surface would be minor visual changes that blend naturally with the surrounding environment.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, localized vehicle emissions and dust during project activities would be temporary and return to baseline conditions upon completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor noise from vehicles and small machinery would be temporary, restricted to daylight hours, and cease at project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not involve hazardous materials, safety risks, or soil contamination, or work near CERCLA sites.

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: Advisory Committee meetings are held annually to inform and involve landowners of ongoing activities and potential future projects. Adjacent landowners are contacted directly if any proposed activities occur near the property boundaries. An open line of communication is maintained between the PCCA project lead and the surrounding community.

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

Signed:

Lindsey Mills
Environmental Protection Specialist