

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: McCoy Meadows Site Monitoring and Characterization

Project No.: 1992-026-01

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser, EWL-4

Location: Union County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.1 Site characterization and environmental monitoring

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) to conduct geotechnical tests and install monitoring equipment on the McCoy Meadows conservation property in Union County, Oregon, to monitor environmental conditions on the site and inform the designs of future habitat restoration actions. 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 ongoing efforts to mitigate for the effects of the 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 McCoy Meadows property is subject to a National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Wetland Reserve Program conservation easement. BPA is leading the environmental review of the proposed actions and coordinated with NRCS to ensure that all proposed activities on the property are consistent with the terms of the easement.

CTUIR staff would install a network of shallow groundwater monitoring wells and stream flow gauges at strategic points throughout the property to collect data on water levels and flow to better inform stream restoration actions that are currently in development. Installing the groundwater monitoring wells would involve drilling holes into the ground roughly six inches in diameter in which to install the monitoring equipment. Stream gauges would be installed by hand and attached to either instream or bankside immobile structural components (e.g., boulders, channel spanning logs). CTUIR would also repair existing monitoring equipment that was previously installed on the property when possible.

Additionally, CTUIR would conduct geotechnical testing throughout the McCoy Meadows property to characterize local soil and water conditions and inform restoration project designs. Test pits would be dug using equipment like an excavator. The conditions of soil would be examined, groundwater levels would be recorded, and then the soil excavated would be used to refill the holes which are dug.

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
Environmental Policy Analyst

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: McCoy Meadows Site Monitoring and Characterization

Project Site Description

The McCoy Meadows conservation property is located in western Union County, Oregon, roughly 15 miles southwest of the city of La Grande. The property is a valley formed by the confluence of three streams – McCoy Creek, Meadow Creek, and Starkey Creek. The combined Meadow Creek flows into the Grande Ronde River less than a mile to the east. Restoration efforts on the property have been ongoing since the 1990s, with mixed success at re-establishing a vibrant in-stream and riparian ecosystem for fish and wildlife habitat. The property is owned in full by CTUIR.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed actions to determine their potential for effects on historic and cultural resources (BPA CR No. OR 2022 088). On June 3, 2026, BPA determined that the proposed actions would have no adverse effect on historic properties, subject to the stipulations below. Consulting parties were the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Nez Perce Tribe, and CTUIR. On June 3, 2026, BPA received an automated response from SHPO confirming receipt of the determination. No other responses were received. The consultation period ended on July 3, 2026.

Notes:

- To reduce the potential impacts to historic and cultural resources, CTUIR would adhere to stipulations including limiting all work to dry periods when the ground is not saturated, using only vehicles with rubber tires or tracks, having an archaeological monitor on-site during all excavation, avoiding sites flagged by the archaeological monitor, limiting machinery crossing near cultural sites, and halting work in the event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during excavation until the finds can be evaluated by BPA and consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Installing stream gauges would require no earthmoving or excavation. Geotechnical test pits and groundwater monitoring would involve digging in limited areas. While these actions would disturb soil, the effects would be highly localized and would not significantly degrade the overall conditions of the McCoy Meadows property. All soil excavated for geotechnical testing would be used to refill the holes after monitoring is complete.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed plant species are present on the McCoy Meadows restoration property (USFWS Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool). Oregon state special-

status species Oregon semaphore grass (*Pleuropogon oregonus*) has been documented in Union County (Oregon Department of Agriculture). There are no known populations of semaphore grass on the McCoy Meadows property, and as a result there would be no effect on Oregon semaphore grass.

There would be adverse effects on plants at the locations of test pits and wells that would be removed during excavation. However, these effects would only affect a small number of plants and would not significantly degrade the overall condition of vegetation on the McCoy Meadows property.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) may potentially be present in Union County (USFWS IPaC). Wolverine habitat is typically found in cool areas with snowpack that persists late into spring and early summer. In Union County, this generally limits suitable wolverine habitat to high elevation areas in the Blue Mountains. As the McCoy Meadows property is a relatively low elevation valley floor, it is highly unlikely that there would be wolverine present, and as a result there would be no effect on wolverine.

Oregon state special-status species grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) is present and regularly documented in Union County (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)). Wolves typically avoid areas with human presence and noise and would likely avoid the area during the proposed actions. Any disturbance would be short term, and wolves would be expected to use adjacent habitat. These effects would be mild and would not persist beyond implementation of the proposed actions.

Non-listed wildlife would be temporarily disturbed by human presence and noise. Any disturbance would be short term, and wildlife would be expected to use adjacent habitat. These effects would be mild and would not persist beyond implementation of the proposed action.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are present in Meadow Creek, McCoy Creek, and Starkey Creek (StreamNet, IPaC). Human presence and noise, especially while installing stream monitors, may disturb these fish. However, the effects would be mild, short-term, and would not persist beyond implementation of the proposed actions. Effects on ESA-listed fish would therefore be consistent with the not likely to adversely affect determination of BPA's Habitat Improvement Program programmatic biological opinion (HIP4 BiOp).

There are no separate Oregon state special-status fish species in Union County (ODFW). Effects on non-listed fish would be functionally identical.

There would be mild effects on local waterbodies from the proposed actions. Minor disturbance of water bodies during stream gauge installation would be short term and would not appreciably affect water quality.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are mapped wetlands present throughout the McCoy Meadows property (USFWS National Wetlands Inventory). There would be mild impacts on these wetlands from the proposed action, including human presence during implementation. Small areas of these wetlands would be disturbed by excavation for the geotechnical test pits and monitoring wells. These effects would be highly localized and would not significantly affect the overall condition of wetlands on the property.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new diversions or water use are proposed. Monitoring wells and geotechnical test pits would be deep enough to interact with groundwater, but this interaction would be limited to recording and monitoring groundwater levels and would not significantly affect or degrade the condition of groundwater in the area.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The McCoy Meadows property has been the site of multiple habitat restoration actions since the late 1990s and is subject to an NRCS Wetland Reserve Program conservation easement. The proposed actions would help inform planning for future fish and wildlife habitat restoration actions and would be consistent with this conservation easement.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Stream gauges and groundwater wells would be small and have virtually no effects on the local aesthetic quality of the McCoy Meadows property. Geotechnical test pits would be notable but would be backfilled after surveys are complete, representing only minor short-term effects on local visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Equipment and machinery used for construction would produce exhaust that would affect local air quality. These effects would be temporary, localized, and mild. There would be no long-term effects on local air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Equipment and machinery used for construction would produce noise that would increase local ambient noise levels. These effects would be temporary, localized, and mild. There would be 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 machinery would be used solely by trained and licensed (when applicable) personnel.

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 McCoy Meadows property is tribally owned. BPA and CTUIR have coordinated with NRCS to ensure that the proposed action is consistent with the NRCS Wetland Reserve Program conservation easement. No further outside coordination is required.

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

Signed:

Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Policy Analyst