

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: North Fork Rock Creek Mowing and Planting Project

Project No.: 2001-032-00

Project Manager: Elizabeth Santana, EWM-4

Location: Kootenai 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 Coeur d'Alene Tribe (CDAT) to conduct mowing and planting activities along about 1.2 miles of the North Fork (NF) Rock Creek. The project would improve floodplain and instream habitat to support fish and wildlife species.

CDAT staff would mow dense areas of reed canary grass in the 79-acre project area, including the floodplain of the NF Rock Creek. Mowing would be completed using a bobcat with mower attachment. Willows would be planted in mowed areas as well as other locations across the site. CDAT staff would harvest approximately 20,000 willow cuttings from the CDAT Hepton Nursery using hand shears. Willow cuttings would be planted in 1-foot-deep trenches using an excavator with a modified bucket. The project area would be monitored for several years after initial work. If needed, additional mowing to reduce reed canary grass would occur, as would additional plantings to replace any mortalities or to increase willow plantings.

The site would be accessed using existing roadways and existing parking areas would be used to stage equipment. Work would take place in late summer and fall (starting in August).

Funding the proposed actions would support 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:

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.

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Project Site Description

The project is on two tribal properties (A485 and F1139) within the exterior boundaries of the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation in Kootenai County, Idaho. The properties are about 0.25 miles north of Highway 95, just outside the Worley city limits. The surrounding area is mainly used for agricultural crops. There is a small riparian buffer along NF Rock Creek in the project area, mainly from prior planting efforts on the properties by CDAT from 2015 to 2018. The segment of NF Rock Creek through A485 was created by the Idaho Department of Transportation (IDT) in 2002 as mitigation for wetlands lost in the construction of Highway 95 from Coeur d'Alene to Worley. About 29 floodplain acres of A485 are enrolled in the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) through 2033, which requires control of noxious weeds and planting of native deciduous shrub and tree species. About 15 acres of F1139 are enrolled in CCRP with NRCS through 2033 that requires management practices be implemented, which may include seeding, tree thinning and/or pruning, light disking, and burning. NF Rock Creek has been identified as having the potential to support steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and native redband trout (*O. mykiss gairdnerii*), which have been reported in the creek downstream of the Reservation boundary.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On May 28, 2026, BPA sent a letter to the CDAT Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) to initiate Section 106 consultation, provide a summary of efforts made to identify historic properties, and indicate BPA's finding of No Adverse Effect to historic properties/ No Historic Properties Affected (BPA Cultural Resources No. ID 2026 035). No response was received from THPO by the end of the 30-day consultation period.

Notes:

- CDAT staff shall coordinate with the THPO for cultural training and monitoring prior to implementation of the project. In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by THPO staff and BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary ground disturbances would occur as part of mowing and digging trenches for planting, but no large-scale soil displacement would occur. The project area has been extensively disturbed from prior agricultural activities, during the creation of the new channel by IDT, and in more recent years with planting activities. Reducing the amount of reed canary grass and planting willows would support establishment and improvement of native plant communities, which would facilitate soil recovery.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status plant species or those listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) are known to be present in the project area. Site access would be on existing roads. Some minor and short-term impacts to vegetation would occur, including crushing and removal by equipment and trampling from work crews. Reed canary grass would be intentionally cut down to clear space for willow plantings. Existing native vegetation along the creek would be avoided. Willows would be planted in the project area and would improve native vegetation in the project area in the long term.

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 present within the project site. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool 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 are no designated critical habitats for either species in the project area and no confirmed presence in the project area. The site is close to a state highway, was extensively disturbed and cultivated in the past, and is surrounded by agricultural fields. It is highly unlikely plants and habitat needed for either species would be present in or near the project. Therefore, there would be no effect to ESA-proposed wildlife species from the project.

IPaC information indicates that bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) may be present year-round in Kootenai County. There is no confirmed presence of nests or previously used nest sites in the project area and there are few mature trees that would support a nest. If an active nest is observed in the project area, the project 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 eagles.

Resident wildlife species may experience temporary disturbance or displacement during mowing and planting. Some small, individual mammals may be killed during mowing if they are not able to move away from mowing equipment. However, impacts would be limited and would not permanently displace wildlife in the project area. Since the project is close to Highway 95 (about 0.25 miles), wildlife in the area are acclimated to regular traffic and should return quickly to the area upon completion of mowing and planting activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed fish species occupy the project area, which is currently blocked to the passage of anadromous fish species due to downstream dams. Activities would take place near but not in the creek. Mowing would cause noise and movement that may deter fish from sections of the creek, but this would be limited to when the mowing occurs, and fish would be expected to return to the area when it is complete. Mowing and excavating trenches for willow plantings would disturb areas in the floodplain in the short term and may result in minimal sediment runoff into the creek during the first rainfall after planting. Overall, removing weeds and planting more native trees in the floodplain would support improved connection with the creek and keep water in the floodplain longer.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area contains a freshwater emergent wetland around NF Rock Creek (as identified in the USFWS National Wetland Inventory) that would be temporarily disturbed during mowing and planting. However, this area is dry for several months of the year and would be dry during proposed activities. Activities would have minimal ground disturbance. No fill material would be added or removed and the hydrology within the project area would

not change. Effects on wetlands would be temporary and limited to mowing and planting to improve conditions for native wetland species. This would have the long-term effect of improving the wetland quality.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No groundwater withdrawals would occur. Potential groundwater contamination from fuel, fluid drips, or spills from the mower and excavator would be minor. Best management practices such as onsite spill containment kits would minimize the potential for such drips or spills. The proposed activities would have no impact to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change and there would be no impact to specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during work, such as increased vehicles and equipment. The proposed work would have little to no effect on long-term visual quality. Observers may notice reduced vegetation from mowing activities but the willow plantings would help return the project areas to more natural vegetative conditions.

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. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, short-term noise impacts from mowing equipment and excavation. Noise emitted from equipment would be temporary and 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 or safety risks to the public. Operating mowing equipment and an excavator inherently carries potential safety risks to operators; staff training and implementing best management practices, such as daily on-site safety precautions, would minimize that risk 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: The project has CDAT and landowner agreements to access and implement proposed activities on the two tribal properties, in addition to signed CRP and CCRP agreements with NRCS for portions of the properties. Access to sites would be coordinated with individual owners as needed.

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