

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Harkens Lake Floodplain Forest Enhancement

Project No.: 2009-012-00

Project Manager: Allan Whiting, EWL-4

Location: Benton 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 Greenbelt Land Trust (GBLT) to plant native vegetation at the privately owned Harkens Lake site in Benton County, Oregon. The purpose of the planting is to improve and expand the existing floodplain forest habitat and diversity, structural heterogeneity, and function to benefit fish and wildlife.

The Harkens Lake planting area covers approximately 71 acres adjacent to the Willamette River. This includes 50 acres dedicated to plug planting and 21 acres of tree and shrub plantings. Equipment staging/unloading areas would occur along the existing farm road that runs through the site. The goal of the project is to reach a target density of approximately 200 mature trees per acre.

The proposed planting activities are as follows:

Tree/Shrub Planting Area, 7 acres: Tree rows would be marked running east to west at 12-foot spacing using a tractor with a disk attachment to create shallow trenches approximately 2–3 inches deep.

Tree/Shrub Planting Area, 7 acres: Approximately 8,400 native bare-root trees and shrubs would be planted along the marked rows at 3-foot spacing at a rate of about 1,200 stems per acre. Planting will be completed using hand shovels, creating a slit in the soil (no deeper than 12 inches), inserting the roots, and closing the soil around the root system.

Plug Planting Area, 50 acres: Approximately 24,500 native plugs would be planted across areas opened through thinning/mastication completed in February 2025. Plugs spaced approximately 3 feet apart would be installed using dibbles or planting shovels to a depth of approximately 4 inches at a rate of 1,100 plugs per acre.

Tree Interplanting Area, 14 acres: Approximately 2,700 native bare-root trees would be interplanted between existing rows in an area originally planted in 2018. Trees would be spaced at 20-foot intervals (approximately 192 trees per acre) to increase structural heterogeneity and improve habitat conditions in areas with low tree density. Trees would be planted using hand shovels, creating a slit in the soil no deeper than 12 inches, placing the roots, and closing the soil around the root system.

This restoration project would specifically satisfy some of BPA's commitments made in the 2010 Willamette River Basin Memorandum of Agreement Regarding Wildlife Habitat Protection and Enhancement between the State of Oregon and the Bonneville Power Administration and the 2024 National Marine Fisheries Service Biological Opinion for the Continued Operation and Maintenance of the Willamette Valley System (2024 NMFS WVS BiOp). Also, the project would 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.

Thomas Sentner
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
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: Harkens Lake Floodplain Forest Enhancement

Project Site Description

The proposed project is located at the permanently protected Harkens Lake property in the Willamette Valley in Benton County, Oregon. This property was brought into the Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program by BPA, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for its strategic location and outsized potential to contribute to salmonid recovery efforts. Greenbelt Land Trust (GBLT) has converted well over 500 acres of agriculture land in the area into diverse floodplain forests, wetlands and prairies that are now actively managed to increase the ecological value for multiple Oregon Conservation Strategy Species (salmonids, birds and wildlife). The proposed planting project footprint is 71 acres consisting of floodplain forest habitat adjacent to the Willamette River.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation on March 18, 2026 (OR 2026 071). BPA consulted with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Chinook Indian Tribe, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). BPA made a determination of No Historic Properties Affected on July 6, 2026. SHPO acknowledged receipt of letter on July 7, 2026. BPA did not receive further comments from SHPO or other consulting parties within 30 days.

Notes:

- Protocols would be in place requiring that, in the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of the project, work would be stopped in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would have limited effect on soil and geologic resources. Track and tire disturbance would occur throughout the project area from vehicles and equipment used to install the plantings, but disturbance would generally be only a few inches in depth. The establishment of a native forest plant community would support soil stability in the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no known Federal/state special-status plant species in the project area. Ground disturbance for the project would largely impact areas overgrown with non-native plants. There would be a long-term benefit by restoring the project area to a more natural condition through the establishment of a native floodplain forest plant community.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term disturbance to wildlife may occur from noise associated with planting. Noise and human disturbance would only last a few days, and any wildlife displaced by the planting activity are expected to return to treatment areas quickly upon completion. The goal of the work is to improve riparian and floodplain habitat for the benefit of terrestrial and aquatic species. Western pond turtles, an Oregon-listed sensitive species, may occur on the site, but the temporary, minor potential disturbance would not have a substantial effect on the population in the area. There are no other known Federal/state special-status wildlife species in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not involve any in-water work or have an impact on water bodies. The planting and associated temporary disturbance would take place in the floodplain, but long-term effects on floodplain functions from restoring more natural floodplain forest conditions would be beneficial.

The goal of the work is to improve riparian and floodplain habitat for the benefit of terrestrial and aquatic species, including ESA-listed Upper Willamette River Chinook salmon and steelhead, which use the Willamette River in the project area. Riparian and floodplain planting is an activity covered under BPA's programmatic Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinion with NMFS.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not be changing the hydrology within the project area, only planting native floodplain vegetation.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed planting of native vegetation would have no long-term impact on groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not impact or change the existing use of the land as a conservation area managed for fish and wildlife habitat benefit.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some changes in vegetation and the associated visual quality would occur in the immediate project area, but the changes would be returning the area to a more natural state and would be consistent with the visual quality of the surrounding area and/or native plant habitat. There would be a long-term improvement in the visual quality of the area due to the restoration of a more native plant and animal habitat condition.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There may be minor short-term and localized impacts to air quality due to vehicle emissions. Benton County, Oregon is in attainment for all National Ambient Air Quality criteria pollutants.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would only be minor, short-term increase in daytime ambient noise during use of vehicles and equipment.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed plantings would not create any long-term public health or safety hazards. Temporary safety hazards typical of planting activities would be expected from worker operation of equipment, tools, and vehicles. Applicable safety regulations would be followed during work 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 is on privately owned land, but GBLT holds a conservation easement for the property. GBLT would coordinate with landowners prior to any project actions.

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

Signed:

Thomas Sentner
Environmental Protection Specialist