

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Yakama Nation's Brush Creek Low-tech Process-based Restoration Project, Phase I

Project No.: 1997-056-00

Project Manager: Daniel Newberry, EWL

Location: Yakima 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 Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN) Fisheries to implement a low-tech process-based habitat restoration project along an about 1.8-mile-long segment of Brush Creek within the Yakama Nation Reservation, in Yakima County, Washington. Low-tech process-based restoration activities would include two types of hand-built structures, beaver dam analogs (BDA) and post assisted log structures (PALS), and direct tree felling.

The proposed project would include in-stream placement of small hand-built BDAs and PALS, and direct tree felling to improve stream processes in a degraded reach of Brush Creek. BDAs are temporary, channel-spanning permeable structures constructed by using small posts and locally available small wood material and sediment. BDAs would encourage ponding, increase floodplain connectivity and groundwater recharge, and expand wetland and riparian zones. PALS installation would include placement of wood posts into the stream bed by hand or with the use of a hydraulic post pounder. PALS would encourage debris and sediment recruitment, promote scour pools, and widen channels. PALS would be a mix of channel spanning, attached to the streambanks, or placed mid-channel. Direct hand felling of trees into the channel or onto the floodplain would provide roughness within the project area. For trees that cannot be felled directly into the stream, YN would utilize a grip hoist to relocate trees from the adjacent hillslopes. Trees would be anchored into existing vegetation to limit their movement in the channel or on the floodplain. These additions would provide additional source material to recruit into natural wood jams and PALS. Approximately 50 PALS, 25 BDAs, and 50 felled trees would be installed across the extent of the project area. The structures would accumulate wood debris and amplify natural hydrologic, geomorphic, and biological stream processes over time.

Site access and travel within the project area would be limited to on foot or via small machinery (such as ATVs). There are no roads directly in the valley bottom, but a maintained road runs parallel with the valley and provides access to the project area. Several access pathways, staging areas, and fueling/equipment storage locations have been identified for use during implementation. Vehicle staging and refueling would occur at least 150 feet from Brush Creek. Prior to the construction of instream structures, wood and posts would be transported from designated staging areas and placed near structure locations by hand and small machinery. All in-channel work would occur during the approved in-water work window (typically July-October 15),

or in the dry and with approval from Yakama Nations biologists. Following construction, all work areas would be returned to pre-construction conditions or better conditions. Riparian plantings or native seed mix would be used to reestablish areas disturbed during construction and to improve Brush Creek riparian area and floodplain.

To help facilitate adaptive management, YN staff would utilize an adaptive management framework to support future decisions based on requirements outlined in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Handbook. Common maintenance or phased restoration actions would occur at the scale of individual structures within the project area and would include lateral extension of structures, increase in structure height, and plugging gaps through additional wood. Additional adaptive management actions may include the addition of posts to existing structures; repair of minor breaches; building new structures (up to 20% of original structures); and removing structures if causing harm. Project implementation and adaptive management work would occur in multiple phases and for up to 10 years as restoration targets are met and self-sustaining natural processes are established.

These actions would support the conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, while also supporting 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.

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Environmental Protection Specialist

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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: Yakama Nation's Brush Creek Low-tech Process-based Restoration Project, Phase I

Project Site Description

The project is located on Yakama Nation Reservation land in south central Washington. Brush Creek is a tributary to the Klickitat River. Since the 1950s, the project area has been used for commercial timber harvest and cattle grazing. Brush Creek is typically dry from July to October each year.

Plant communities in the vicinity of the project generally consist of mature forest containing willow (*Salix spp.*), black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), and ground cover such as spirea (*Spirea douglassii*) and snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*).

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) on the proposed project on April 1, 2025 (WA 2022 043). Consulting parties included the YN and the Yakama Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office (YN THPO). No responses were received. On August 3, 2026, BPA received and reviewed a letter from the YN THPO describing the archaeological review for the Project and referencing a signed Yakama Nation Cultural Committee Action dated June 22, 2026 that allowed the Project to proceed. No cultural resources were identified during the survey work, and the YN THPO determined that the undertaking would result in no historic properties affected. BPA reviewed this information and, as per §36 CFR 800.4(d)(1), determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no historic properties affected in a letter to consulting parties dated August 6, 2026.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary impacts to soil would occur from increased erosion potential during BDA and PALS installation and the use of staging areas. Work would occur during the dry season to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Post construction seeding and planting would minimize long term erosion potential.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species are known to be present. Existing vegetation could be crushed or killed during hand installation on BDAs and PALS, as well as tree felling and staging. Post construction seeding and planting would re-establish native riparian plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wildlife including deer, elk, coyote, various small mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians may use the project area. Construction activities could temporarily deter wildlife from using the project area, due to increased noise and visual disturbance from equipment operation and human activity. Some aquatic invertebrates or amphibians may be displaced or killed during construction, but rapid reoccupation of these stream areas by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following the project would be likely. It is unlikely the stream restoration activities would result in long-term displacement of wildlife.

The project area is within the geographic range of the ESA-listed gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). However, there are no documented occurrences of these species in the project area, and there is no designated or proposed critical habitat for listed wildlife species in the project area. The project would have no effect on cuckoo and gray wolf effects were reviewed and consulted on under BPA's ESA Section 7 Habitat Improvement Project (HIP) biological opinion. YN would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures, terms, and conditions. The project would result in long-term wildlife habitat in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Equipment access and construction activities would take place during the dry season when flows are not present. Avoidance and minimization measures identified in the project Sponsor's Clean Water Act Section 404 Nationwide (NWS-2026-0487) would be applied, further reducing impact to waterways.

ESA-listed fish including middle Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) are present below the project area and could reasonably be expected to utilize the project area. The project is covered under BPA's ESA Section 7 HIP biological opinion. The project would result in long-term improvement to fish habitat.

Notes:

- Project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP conservation measures.
- Project sponsor would adhere to all avoidance and minimization efforts identified in the Clean Water Act permit issued for this project.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are identified in the project area. Therefore, no wetlands would be impacted by the proposed project actions.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Stream bed is likely to be dry during construction. Long term improvement to groundwater recharge potential is expected as natural stream processes improve over time.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is in a remote part of the Yakama Nation Reservation that is minimally utilized. Temporary, negligible disruption to road access and use during construction would occur. No long-term changes to land use are proposed.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is not proposed to occur within a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in vehicle emissions and dust from small number of vehicles accessing the site during construction and use of gas-powered hand tools would occur. There would be no long-term impact to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in noise from hydraulic post pounder, chainsaws, hand tools, and vehicles during daytime construction activities would occur over short periods of time during the day. There would be no long-term impact to noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work may present a small human health and safety risk to the operator associated with utilizing a hydraulic post pounder and chainsaws but is not expected to create a hazard to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions. All personnel would use best management practices to protect workers' health and safety.

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 within the boundaries of the Yakama Nation Reservation. Yakama Nation Fisheries would obtain necessary approvals to conduct work on tribal property.

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

Signed: **CATHERINE CLARK**
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