

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Middle Fork Teanaway River (RM 3.2 to 5.4) Geotechnical Investigation

Project No.: 1997-051-00

Project Manager: Daniel Newberry, EWU

Location: Kittitas County, Washington

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 and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN) to conduct a geotechnical investigation of public lands managed by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in Kittitas County, Washington as part of the Teanaway Community Forest. The purpose of the geotechnical work would be to help inform the design for the future Middle Fork Teanaway River, River Mile (RM) 3.2 to 5.4, Floodplain Restoration project. The Middle Fork Teanaway River is a tributary to the Yakima River in Eastern Washington and is designated critical habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Mid-Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) while also historically used by Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*).

The future floodplain restoration project would address historical human impacts causing channel incision into the sandstone bedrock, creating floodplain terraces and reducing the active floodplain width along the Middle Fork Teanaway River. Geotechnical investigation is needed to understand the physical and hydrological properties of the site's terraces, as these are critical factors in developing effective restoration treatments. The proposed geotechnical investigation would involve the excavation of 81 test pits to determine substrate type, substrate size, and soil type within the proposed project area. The proposed work would utilize a rubber-tracked mini-excavator to access the test pit locations while minimizing the removal of vegetation to the greatest extent possible. Test pits would be dug to a depth not exceeding 12 feet or until bedrock is encountered and would not exceed 36 sq. feet of surface area disturbance (per pit); no excavation of bedrock is proposed.

By informing the design process for the future habitat restoration project, these actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with both the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These 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.

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Concur:

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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: Middle Fork Teanaway River (RM 3.2 to 5.4) Geotechnical Investigation

Project Site Description

The proposed project would occur in the Teanaway Community Forest, a 50,272-acre piece of public land owned by the Washington DNR. The Teanaway Community Forest Recreation Plan identifies the project area as a Road and River Corridor, which is used for scenic driving and river restoration that coincides with river access for fishing, swimming, and day use. The roadway adjacent to the northern portion of the project area has been temporarily closed off to motorized vehicles due to a bridge failure and would likely continue to be closed to motorized access moving forward.

The project area is within a section of the Middle Fork Teanaway that has been historically degraded, and hydrologically altered, by logging activities. Over time, the lack of old growth wood inputs, as well as splash dams constructed to move logs downstream, have contributed toward substantial alterations to hydrological processes, including reduced floodplain function and roughness, a weakened riparian corridor, and scour of naturally accumulated fine sediments and cobbles down to the native bedrock. Vegetation is dominated by Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) in addition to other evergreen species. Riparian and riverine wetland areas within the Teanaway watershed are vegetated by cottonwood forest, scrub shrub thickets, and obligate and facultative wetland species.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) on the proposed project on March 6, 2026 (WA 2025 219). Consulting parties included YN, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). DAHP responded on March 9, 2026, concurring with the area of potential effect (APE) as proposed. On August 11, 2026, BPA determined, as per §36 CFR 800.4(d)(1), that the undertaking would result in no historic properties affected, provided site 45KT4929 is marked and avoided by all project activities. DAHP concurred with BPA's determination of eligibility and effect on August 12, 2026. WDFW concurred with BPA's determinations of eligibility and effect on August 25, 2026. No additional comments were received from consulting parties within the 30-day comment period.

Notes:

- 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 BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Soil would be displaced during test pit excavation. The depth of soil disturbance would not exceed 12 feet or until bedrock is encountered and would not exceed 36 sq. feet of surface area disturbance per test pit. All excavation would be backfilled following geotechnical investigation. Therefore, the proposed actions would have minimal impact to soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed or state special-status plant species in the project areas. Plants in the immediate vicinity of each test pit location would be subject to short-term impacts as a result of trampling by equipment used for excavation and to reach each test pit locations. Vegetation within the project sites would be excavated, this would not be expected to have long-term impacts to plant communities. To reduce impacts to plant species, large mats of existing topsoil would be set aside during excavation, these mats would then be placed on top of the backfilled material following completion of implementation. Those efforts are expected to result in revegetation of the disturbed areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The geotechnical investigation could temporarily deter wildlife from using the project area due to noise, ground disturbance, and visual disturbance associated with human presence and heavy equipment operation. Such impacts would be temporary. The proposed actions would not involve permanent alterations to wildlife habitat.

ESA-listed species, such as North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), Mt. Rainer white-tailed ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucura rainierensis*), northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) have the potential to occur in the project area. Potential impacts to American wolverine, gray wolf, Canada lynx, northern spotted owl, and yellow-billed cuckoo would be minimized by following conservation measures outlined in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) programmatic consultation with the USFWS. White-tailed ptarmigan is a high-elevation species with no known occurrences in the project area and is unlikely to be affected. Impacts to listed and non-listed wildlife species at the project site would be limited to the immediate project area, resulting in a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary elevated noise disturbance. No designated critical habitat is within the project area.

Notes:

- Loud equipment use of excavator would occur outside of the northern spotted owl critical nesting period of March 1st to July 15th. No helicopter use is proposed.
- YN would adhere to all conservation measures outlined in BPA's ESA Section 7 HIP Programmatic Consultation with USFWS to minimize impacts to ESA-listed species and habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The Middle Fork Teanaway River contains ESA-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and their designated critical habitat. Potential impacts to ESA-listed fish would be minimized by following conservation measures outlined in BPA's ESA Section 7 HIP programmatic consultation with NMFS.

Notes:

- YN would adhere to all conservation measures outlined in BPA's ESA Section 7 HIP Programmatic Consultation with NMFS to minimize impacts to ESA-listed species and designated critical habitats.
- YN would coordinate crossings with WDFW to ensure proposed crossings would meet their Hydraulic Project Approval.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: National Wetland Inventory mapping identifies wetlands in the project area that include Middle Fork Teanaway Creek (a riverine wetland) and freshwater forest/shrub wetlands. The proposed project does not involve implementation of test pits within wetlands areas; therefore, there would be no impact to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Geotechnical test pits would have the potential to intersect with groundwater; however, test pits would not withdraw or divert water from the groundwater system. Spill prevention measures would be present to prevent the potential for groundwater contamination.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary impact to recreation users due to access limitations during use of heavy equipment in the project area. The project would align with the Washington DNR Teanaway Community Forest recreation designation by maintaining access to fishing and dispersed recreation at the completion of implementation.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The presence of an excavator and personnel vehicles would be visible while the geotechnical investigation is occurring. The activity would not change the visual character of the area over the long term, however, as the test pits would be refilled with the excavated material at the completion of the investigation.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed geotechnical investigation would not introduce new operational sources of air emissions or otherwise affect air quality in the long term. Minor temporary increases in site emissions from gasoline- and/or diesel-powered equipment and vehicles would occur during implementation. Dust emissions from site activity would be minor based on the nature of the project activity. There would be no long-term impacts to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The operation of excavator and personnel vehicles would temporarily elevate noise above background levels while the geotechnical investigation is occurring. The work would occur during daylight hours. The project would not introduce any new operational noise sources that would increase noise in the area over the long term.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed geotechnical investigation would present no long-term risks to human health and safety. Temporary worker safety hazards associated with operation of excavator would be minimized through adherence to applicable safety regulations.

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: Yakama Nation would work with Washington Department of Natural Resources for access to all site locations.

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

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