

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Fry Creek Headwaters Planting Project

Project No.: 2008-604-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz, EWM-4

Location: Latah 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 Latah Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to implement a planting effort near the headwaters of Fry Creek. Planting would occur after site restoration efforts that are a separate project not funded by BPA. The multi-phased project is expected to be implemented during summer for several years, starting in 2026. With BPA funding, Latah SWCD would seed and plant native plants across land disturbed by construction each year to improve soil stability and shade, provide increased ground coverage to prevent weed encroachment, and increase wildlife and pollinator habitat. Overall, planting efforts would occur over about 20 acres. These actions would improve the quality and quantity of habitat and address several factors limiting Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*).

Planting would occur immediately after construction on each phase of the restoration project, typically in early fall, with supplemental plantings occurring the following spring. Areas disturbed by construction would be seeded with a native mix of forbs and grasses and covered with weed-free straw mulch. Containerized native riparian plants would be planted along the creek banks in the riparian zone. Native woody cuttings and containerized plants would be planted in areas between the creek bed and the top of the bank or in and around wood structures. Where weed infestations are heavy, non-chemical control methods such as hand-pulling, weed-whacking, and smothering may be used. Newly planted vegetation would be watered as needed using totes filled by a water truck. Watering would occur several times a week immediately following planting and taper off as the plants become established or go dormant. Water would be sourced from the municipal well in Deary, Idaho. Temporary protective fencing would be installed around select species of plants that are targets for deer and elk, such as aspen and cottonwood, or in heavily excavated areas where plants may need more time to establish. Planting and weed control would be conducted by Latah SWCD field crews and hand tools such as shovels, weed eaters, gas-powered augers, and water-jet stingers would be used.

The site would be revisited annually for several years after the multi-phased stream restoration project is complete for vegetation maintenance and weed control. Vegetation maintenance would include selective replanting if necessary to replace mortalities in previously planted areas to support a robust, native riparian plant community. Existing plants would be maintained with mulch additions and crews would repair, replace, or remove temporary protective fencing as needed. Non-chemical weed control activities would continue to address infestations of weeds.

Funding for this project would fulfill commitments in the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion. These actions also 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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Environmental Protection Specialist

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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: Fry Creek Headwaters Planting Project

Project Site Description

Proposed activities would occur on state-managed (Idaho Department of Lands) and privately-owned (timber company) lands along Fry Creek, a tributary of the East Fork Potlatch River, approximately three miles northeast of Bovill in Latah County, Idaho. Fry Creek is intermittent and runs dry for several months of the year. The project area includes about 2.2 miles of the creek and sits at just over 3,000 feet in elevation. Throughout the project area, Fry Creek is sinuous with areas of braided channels, good riparian habitat, evidence of past beaver use, and year-round pools. It is also incised with pockets of degraded open meadows, limited floodplain access, and high sediment loading. The project area has previously been disturbed by logging, grazing, and road construction. There is a BPA transmission line that is adjacent to the planting area, but no BPA-funded planting work would occur in the transmission line right-of-way. There is a 400-foot-long section of the creek that goes subsurface in the project area, likely due to historic logging practices. The first year of construction for a multi-phased stream habitat restoration project (not funded by BPA) began in 2026, which is addressing the subsurface portion by removing any log landings or obstructions that are diverting water underground. The restoration project also includes installation of low-tech wood structures. The project area includes both native and introduced vegetation, including invasive weeds. Vegetation includes mature trees in the riparian area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) assumed Lead Agency responsibilities for Section 106 review and completed a consultation on the stream habitat restoration project and post-construction planting and weed control. On June 24, 2026, USFWS sent a letter to the consulting parties (Coeur d' Alene Tribe, Nez Perce Tribe, and Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)) with a summary of efforts made to identify historic properties and their finding of No Historic Properties Affected. SHPO concurred with the determination on the same day. No additional comments were received by the end of the 30-day response period. BPA has reviewed the decisions and documentation, which remain valid, and no further consultation is required for the current proposed actions having BPA funding related to plantings and weed control (BPA Cultural Resources No.: ID 2026 048).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Planting and weed control tools would be limited to shovels or mechanized hand tools. No heavy equipment operations would be used for planting, so there would be no large-scale soil displacement, soil mixing, or other mechanical soil disturbance. There would be no chemical weed control. Minor and temporary ground disturbances would occur as part of the proposed actions but would not impact the geology and soils. Proposed treatment areas have been previously disturbed by work during implementation of the original stream habitat restoration activities. The proposed actions would be intended to improve habitat conditions and plantings would reduce erosion of exposed soils from the restoration project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no federal or state special-status plant species known to exist in the project area. Minor and temporary vegetation disturbances associated with site access, such as trampling from work crews, would occur as part of the proposed planting activities but would have short-term effects on vegetation. Site access by vehicles would be on established roads. Areas accessed by crews for planting would have been recently disturbed by a stream habitat restoration project and are within an area used for state and private timber harvest. Weed control activities would intentionally remove weeds in the project area. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects from increasing the native plant community in and around the riparian area and controlling weeds.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists the North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), ESA-listed Threatened, monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), ESA-proposed Threatened, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), ESA-proposed Endangered as having the potential to be in the project area; however, there is no known presence and no critical habitat for any of these species in the project area. Therefore, the project would have no effect on ESA-listed or proposed species.

Proposed actions may deter non-listed wildlife from the area when work is occurring due to noise and human presence. These impacts would be minor and temporary in nature and conditions would return to normal when crews leave. The proposed actions would improve habitat conditions over the long term by increasing native riparian plant density, diversity, and habitat structure.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: While ESA-listed steelhead are known to regularly occur near the mouth of Fry Creek, there have been no observations in the project area since 2019, and only occasional presence immediately downstream in 2023. There is no designated critical habitat for steelhead in Fry Creek. Therefore, the project would have no effect on ESA-listed fish species. There are no other state special-status species known to be in the project areas.

It is expected that work in the fall would take place when Fry Creek is fully dry. There would be short-term impacts on ESA-listed and non-listed fish in the project area during spring work, such as disturbance from human presence, noise, and possible minimal sediment runoff at planting sites. No changes to the existing conditions of streams would occur. Proposed actions would help restore native riparian vegetation for the benefit of aquatic species, including ESA-listed fish species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Planting and weed control would not change the hydrology within the project area, and activities would be limited to methods with little to no ground disturbance. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur. Effects on wetlands would be temporary and limited to plantings and weed removal to improve conditions for native wetland plant species. This would have the long-term effect of improving the quality of wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater are proposed. No herbicide use is proposed. Establishing a native riparian plant community would improve groundwater recharge and benefit the aquifer in the long term.

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. No planting activities would occur in the BPA transmission right-of-way.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during work, such as increased vehicles and crews. The proposed work would have little to no effect on long-term visual quality. Plantings and weed control 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 accessing the site and hand-held gas-powered tools. These effects would be limited in scope and duration and cause no long-term impacts to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, short-term noise impacts from gas-powered tools and crew presence. Increases in ambient noise 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. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions. All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker 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 design, implementation timing, and access have been coordinated with the Idaho Department of Lands and the private timber company.

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

Signed: **JACQUELYN SCHEI**
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