

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Underwood Conservation District Noxious Weed Treatments

Project No.: 1998-019-00

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser

Location: Skamania County, WA

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 Underwood Conservation District (UCD) to continue treatment of invasive vegetation species on privately-owned property within the Wind River watershed in Skamania County, Washington. Vegetation treatment in riparian areas would contribute to ongoing steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) habitat restoration efforts within the Wind River watershed.

UCD would coordinate with the Skamania County Noxious Weed Department to treat and remove invasive vegetation species such as reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Himalayan blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*), Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), false brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*), and Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) on private property. Treatment would consist of utilizing herbicide by spot treating and backpack spraying of invasive species. Activities would occur in fall and spring and would follow all label listed herbicide restrictions. The sites would be accessed via landowner-approved existing access roads and foot paths.

These actions would support conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 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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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: Underwood Conservation District Noxious Weed Treatments

Project Site Description

The Wind River is located in the Washington Cascades range and discharges into the Columbia River upstream of Bonneville Dam. The treatment locations would be on private residential land in Skamania County, Washington. The region's landscape and habitat are largely influenced by past logging and agricultural practices, resulting in excessive growth of invasive vegetation species and diminished riparian zones and floodplain functions.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed actions for potential effects on historic and cultural resources (WA 2026 197). Because the project does not have associated ground disturbance, the proposed actions would have no potential to cause effect to historic and cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed that would affect geology and soil. Therefore, these actions would have no impact on local geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed plant species are present in the proposed treatment areas (USFWS Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool). State special-status species Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), golden chinquapin (*Chrysolepis chrysophylla* var. *chrysophylla*), and common buttercup (*Githopsis specularioides*) are present in this region of Skamania County (Washington Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Program Data Mapper) and would be avoided and reported to the Washington Department of Natural Resources if species are found within treatment areas.

Some non-listed species would be removed. All plants targeted for removal would be invasive, noxious, and undesirable species that are outcompeting native plant species. Removal of these species would open potential habitat for native plant species and improve the overall quality of vegetation in the treated areas.

Notes:

- All herbicides would be applied consistently with the conservation measures included in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Programmatic Biological Opinion. These measures would reduce the potential for negative effects on non-target vegetation by imposing limits on application times and methods, limiting the types of herbicides which can be used, and other measures. Total herbicide use would be reported to BPA annually.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) and their designated critical habitat, and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) can be found in this region of Skamania County (USFWS IPaC). No other state special-status species are present in this region of Skamania County (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife). The proposed treatment areas are located in valleys below the elevations at which wolverines typically hunt and den, especially during warm summer months when the actions are proposed. The proposed treatment actions would not impact any nests or nesting areas for northern spotted owl or yellow-billed cuckoo. The proposed treatments could temporarily relocate wolves from treatment areas during human presence, but wolves would have access to miles of adjacent habitat during implementation. The proposed actions would therefore not likely adversely affect ESA-listed species or their designated critical habitat in this region of Skamania County.

Non-listed wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by noise and human presence during herbicide treatments. These effects would be mild and temporary and cause no long-term adverse effects on wildlife. The long-term effects of the proposed actions would be to restore native vegetation to the treated areas, improving habitat conditions for local wildlife.

Notes:

- All herbicides would be applied consistently with the conservation measures included in BPA's HIP Programmatic Biological Opinion. These measures would reduce the potential for negative effects on non-target vegetation by imposing limits on application times and methods, limiting the types of herbicides which can be used, and other measures. Total herbicide use would be reported to BPA annually.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed steelhead, Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are found throughout the Wind River watershed (USFWS IPaC, StreamNet). No other state special-status species are present in local waterbodies (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife). The proposed actions are unlikely to adversely affect these fish species. No herbicide applications activities are proposed to take place in waterbodies. Most of the proposed treatment areas are in upland regions and all actions would follow the conservation measures included in the HIP biological opinions to reduce the potential for impacts to fish and waterbodies from herbicides drifting into waterbodies from the locations which they are applied.

Non-listed fish species would have functionally identical effects.

Notes:

- All herbicides would be applied consistently with the conservation measures included in BPA's HIP Programmatic Biological Opinion. These measures would reduce the potential for negative effects on non-target vegetation by imposing limits on application times and methods, limiting the types of herbicides which can be used, and other measures. Total herbicide use would be reported to BPA annually.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are mapped wetlands present throughout the wind river watershed (USFWS National Wetland Inventory). While some vegetation would potentially be removed from designated wetlands, the targeted species for treatment are noxious, invasive, and

undesirable. Removing this vegetation would improve conditions in wetlands by promoting native vegetation growth.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or groundwater use are proposed. No actions are proposed which would affect local groundwater.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed treatment areas are all located on privately-owned land. No changes to ownership or use of these areas are proposed. The proposed actions would require temporarily limiting access to treated areas, but these would cause no long-term changes to the use of these areas by their respective landowners.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Changes to the aesthetic quality of the treated areas would be minor, limited to removing noxious, invasive, and undesirable plants to open more habitat for native plant species. These changes would not appreciably alter the visual quality of the treated areas.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Aside from exhaust from transportation used to travel to and from project sites, there would be no effects on air quality. This exhaust would cause extremely mild effects on local air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be mild increases in local noise levels from human presence during the proposed actions. These effects would be temporary and cause no long-term effects on local noise levels.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best practices to ensure human health and safety. All equipment would be operated solely by trained and licensed (when applicable) personnel. Herbicide applications would adhere to the conservation measures contained in BPA's HIP biological opinions to reduce the potential for effects on human health and safety from chemical herbicide applications.

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 proposed treatment areas are located on privately-owned land. UCD and Skamania County Noxious Weed Department staff would coordinate with landowners as necessary. No further outside coordination would be necessary.

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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