

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Echo Lake Pond Leveler

PP&A No.: 7152

Project Manager: Jonnel Deacon – EPR-4

Location: King County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): Appendix B1.3 Routine Maintenance.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to install a pond leveler device in Lake Creek along the access road to the BPA Echo Lake Substation in King County, Washington. At moderate to high seasonal flows, an existing about 90-foot-long beaver dam impounds water that floods the access road and adjacent bridge crossing, impeding critical substation truck traffic. A pond leveler would provide continuous hydrological relief to alleviate roadway flooding while maintaining adequate water depth.

A small crew (3 to 5 personnel) would install the pond leveler manually using hand tools only, no heavy equipment would enter the stream channel or wetland. Construction activities include manually notching an approximate 14-inch-wide gap in the beaver dam down to the target water surface elevation, laying a pipe, and immediately rebuilding the dam structure around the pipe using the native displaced sticks, mud, and organic material. Device components would be floated or carried into Lake Creek to avoid dragging stream bed substrate and the system would be sunk to grade. The pond leveler would be secured with masonry blocks and steel T-posts. BPA would conducting visual inspections and install a non-invasive game camera pre- and post-installation to document beaver activity and system functionality.

40 to 60 feet of 12-inch-diameter flexible, corrugated High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) pipe with smooth interior vents drilled off-site to prevent pressurization would be installed for the project. Approximately three, 12-inch-diameter HDPE couplers, 12 steel T-posts, 4 to 6 masonry blocks, and tie-wire fasteners would also be installed. To prevent damage, BPA would install a protective exclusion cage around the upstream intake. To prevent animal entrapment and reduce false attraction through the elimination of rushing water cues, a submerged, unidirectional duckbill valve, flapper, or rodent gate would be installed at the downstream outlet.

The 12-inch smooth-interior pipe, reduced hydraulic head, and one-way exit gate would allow safe, injury-free downstream fish passage without entrainment or entrapment. The outlet would remain fully submerged. The in-water work would be performed during approved work windows by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. No machinery would access the channel; in-water walking and substrate disturbance would be kept to the minimum necessary to place and anchor the pipe. All pipe perforations, cutting, and customization would be completed off-site at a BPA facility to eliminate plastic shavings and construction debris at the creek. All packaging, excess materials, and trash would be packed out daily.

The Federal Columbia River Transmission System Act directs BPA to construct, acquire, operate, maintain, repair, relocate, and replace the transmission system, including facilities and structures

appurtenant thereto. (16 United States Code [U.S.C] § 838i(b)). The Administrator is further charged with maintaining electrical stability and reliability, selling transmission and interconnection services, and providing service to BPA's customers. (16 U.S.C § 838b(b-d)). The Administrator is also authorized to conduct electrical research, development, experimentation, tests, and investigation related to construction, operation, and maintenance of transmission systems and facilities. (16 U.S.C § 838i(b)(3)).

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.

/s/ Brenna Bettis

Brenna Bettis

Biological Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey C. Grange

Date: October 21, 2026

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: Echo Lake Pond Leveler

Project Site Description

The project site is situated on Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest land in King County, Washington, along the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) Echo Lake substation access road near the junction of State Route 18 and SE 104th Street (47.50400°N, 121.88340°W). The legal description of the project is Township 23 North, Range 07 East, Section 02. The work area is located in Lake Creek, a tributary to the Raging River. Specifically, the proposed pond leveler installation site lies approximately 120 feet from the access road at an existing beaver dam that measures approximately 90 feet in length. Lake creek is Designated Freshwater Critical Habitat for steelhead and is Essential Fish Habitat for coho salmon.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Pursuant to its responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR 800, BPA initiated consultation with the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe, the United States Forest Service Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, and the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). To evaluate potential impacts to historic and cultural resources, Bonneville Power Administration developed an area of potential effects (APE) and conducted background research.

On August 13, 2026, consultation was initiated with the listed consulting parties. On August 13, 2026, the SHPO concurred with BPA's delineation of the Area of Potential Effects and concurred with the determination of No Historic Properties Affected. On August 13, 2026, the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe requested to be notified before ground disturbing activities so that they could be present during activities related to the project. On September 12, 2026, the 30-day response period expired, and no other comments were received from consulting parties.

Notes:

- Notify the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe before ground disturbing activities.
- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA will 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. Utilize BPA's Post-Review Discovery Procedure.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would have no effect on geological features, slopes, or soil stability. Work is limited to installing a pond leveler within an existing beaver dam structure on Lake Creek approximately 120 feet from the access road. No large-scale ground disturbing activities would occur. Hand tools would be used to notch the dam, and dam materials (organic matter and sticks) would be set to the side and then used to cover the 12-inch-diameter HDPE pipe. No true ground disturbance would occur from the proposed project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would have no effect on upland or riparian vegetation. Proposed activities are localized to the beaver dam and immediately adjacent waters of Lake Creek. While the water surface upstream is expected to decrease during moderate to high rain events, the pond leveler is designed to maintain standing water depth and preserve the existing wetland/riparian plant community. Standard weed-wash protocols would be enforced to prevent the spread of noxious weeds from personnel equipment.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) BPA obtained an official species list from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on September 28, 2026. No ESA-protected plants are listed in the project area; therefore, the project would have “No Effect” to ESA-listed plants.

No state-listed of special status plants are documented in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In accordance with the ESA BPA obtained an official species list from the USFWS on September 28, 2026. The project area is within the geographic range of northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, yellow-billed cuckoo and North American wolverine. No tree removal, canopy alteration, or modification of suitable nesting/roosting habitat would occur. Work involves low-impact manual installation of a pond leveler device within Lake Creek. Noise levels from hand tools and crew presence would be minor, localized, and well below disturbance thresholds, particularly given the elevated baseline sound levels from the nearby highway. The site also lacks the high-elevation habitat required for wolverine. Therefore, the proposed action would have “No Effect” to ESA-listed wildlife species.

The proposed installation of a non-lethal pond leveler device would not result in substantial individual or cumulative impacts to local wildlife, aquatic resources, or the resident beaver (*Castor canadensis*) population. Instead of breaching the dam or lethally removing wildlife, the proposed device would maintain stable wetland hydrology and core open-water habitat to preserve critical breeding, foraging, and sheltering functions for native fish, amphibians, and waterfowl. The pond would be lowered slowly at peak low flows, and the intake pipe would be designed to be fish and wildlife friendly to prevent stranding of aquatic organisms, avoid inducing stress on beavers, and ensure sufficient depths remain to protect beavers from terrestrial predation and maintain access to food caches.

No impacts to state or federally sensitive species are anticipated because no state or federally sensitive species were identified 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: Pursuant to its obligations under the ESA, BPA made the determination that the project's activities would have “No Effect” to bull trout. The project area is not located in USFWS designated bull trout habitat or critical habitat.

Any effects to anadromous ESA-listed fish are covered by BPA's programmatic biological opinion with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Endangered Species Act Section 7 Programmatic Conference and Biological Opinion and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act Essential Fish Habitat Consultation for

Standard Local Operating Procedures for Endangered Species to Administer Maintenance or Rebuild Projects for Transmission Line and Road Access Actions Authorized or Carried Out by the Bonneville Power Administration in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho (WCR-2014-1600, September 22, 2016). The project is located in Essential Fish Habitat for steelhead in the Puget Sound recovery domain, and Essential Fish Habitat for coho salmon.

The proposed project would have no substantial individual or cumulative impacts on waterbodies (lake creek), floodplain function, or native fishes. The device stabilizes water levels, allows permanent ponding, and preserves wetland and floodplain connectively while mitigating backwater flooding. The device would be designed to ensure safe fish passage, protecting all species within the system. BPA has met with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to ensure the project maintains fish passage standards for the state of Washington.

Notes:

- Maintain any best management practices/project design criteria as outlined by the SLOPES programmatic following project review with the National Marine Fisheries Society (NMFS).

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Work is limited to low-impact manual installation of a pond leveler in Lake Creek and the existing beaver dam. The device is designed to stabilize pond elevation and protect the BPA access road without draining or filling adjacent wetland habitat. The U.S Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) reviewed the project and issued a No Permit Required (NPR) letter on September 1, 2026 (Tracking Number: 64679), confirming the activity does not require a Section 404/Section 10 permit. Standard sediment and turbidity control BMPs would be implemented; no adverse impacts to wetlands or waters of the U.S would occur.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No use of groundwater is proposed.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur. No specially-designated areas are present in the work areas. No disruption to the designated use of Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest managed lands would occur.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Visual impacts would be minimal. The majority of the pond leveler pipe and intake apparatus would be submerged underwater or embedded directly within the existing beaver dam structure. Located roughly 120 feet from the access road and obscured by natural vegetation, the device will not be visibly prominent or degrade the quality of the surrounding environment.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Little impact to air quality as hand equipment and vehicles would generate minimal emissions.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary noise from vehicles and hand equipment that would occur intermittently and last a few hours. Noise generated would be consistent and less than that generated by the nearby highway.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed activities do not pose a threat to the health and safety of workers or the public. Standard safety practices (use of PPE, water safety measures such as the use of personal floatation devices, etc.) would be observed during the short manual installation. Over the long term, the project would enhance human health and safety by preventing Lake Creek from overtopping and eroding the BPA substation access road; therefore, providing safe, reliable, and unobstructed emergency and maintenance access.

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 Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest was notified on September 3, 2026, and no additional measures were requested.

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

Signed: /s/ Brenna Bettis Date: October 21, 2026
Brenna Bettis
Biological Scientist (Environmental)