Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Baldy Mountain Property Acquisition

Project No.: 2028-002-00

Project Manager: Victoria Bohlen – EWU-4

Location: Stevens County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.25 Real property transfers for cultural resources protection, habitat preservation, and wildlife management

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to fund the Spokane Tribe of Indians (Spokane Tribe) to purchase the Baldy Mountain property, which is a 121-acre parcel of land located approximately 30 miles southwest of Chewelah, WA in Enterprise, WA. BPA would hold a conservation easement to permanently protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitat.

Funding the proposed property acquisition fulfills ongoing commitments under a 10-year Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between BPA and the Spokane Tribe, which was signed in 2024 and formalizes a long-standing collaborative partnership that provides a dedicated funding mechanism for projects that purchase lands for conservation and habitat restoration, among other activities in the upper Columbia River Basin. In addition, this action also supports ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the FCRPS 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. 839 et seq.) and goals of restoring and maintaining the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of waters regulated under the Clean Water Act.

The property consists of mid-elevation pine forest, montane meadow, and pond/stream habitat. The Spokane Tribe would develop a land management plan to guide the protection and enhancement of habitat and other resources on the property. The land management plan would be drafted within 18 months of closing. The management plan would be reviewed by BPA for consistency with the conservation easement and the purpose of the acquisition. If BPA proposes to fund any additional activities on the property, further environmental review may be conducted.

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.

DAPHNE DAY

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Daphne Day
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

SARAH BIEGEL

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Sarah T. Biegel
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: Baldy Mountain Property Acquisition

Project Site Description

The 121-acre parcel is located in Stevens County, Washington within the McCoy Creek Watershed. The area serves as important habitat for various wildlife species and the Spokane people use this area for subsistence hunting and gathering of culturally important animals and plants. The property falls under Designated Forest Land zoning and has been privately owned, primarily used for cattle grazing prior to 2016. The Spokane Tribe owns all of the surrounding parcels, with an adjacent BPA-funded wildlife mitigation parcel to the northeast. There are no buildings or structures except for a fence bordering the eastern boundary, and the property currently lacks formal access except for a seasonal unimproved road.

The topography of the property is characterized by moderate to steep foothills ranging from 2,000-2,600 feet in elevation set against the western edge of Boundary Butte, with upland glacial drift plains and productive soils formed in glacial till mixed with volcanic ash and loess. The property contains approximately 16 acres of montane meadow, an ephemeral pond under one acre, and three intermittent, non-fish-bearing streams that discharge off-site into a tributary that flows into McCoy Creek and McCoy Lake. The site's climax ponderosa pine forest was converted into an early successional recovering community by a large wildfire in 2015. Overstory regrowth and understory vegetation include ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) saplings, some Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) on northern slopes/draws, red-stem ceanothus (*Ceanothus sanguineus*), serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), Douglas hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*), elderberry (*Sambucus* ssp.), pinegrass (*Calamagrostis* spp.), and lupine (*Lupinus* spp.). Invasive and noxious species are present in open, disturbed areas and along the road, including cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*), bulbous bluegrass (*Poa bulbosa*), Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), and common bugloss (*Anchusa officinalis*).

Whitetailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), and moose (*Alces alces*) have been documented on the subject parcel, as well as elk (*Cervus elaphus*), which use the site year-round, incuding during spring calving season. Carnivores documented in the area include black bear (*Ursus* americanus), wolf (*Canis lupus*), and bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), alongside upland birds like ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) and wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). These species utilize the meadows, drainages, and covering timber for critical activities, primarily for wintering and feeding, as well as breeding and migrating. Standing snags present from the wildfire provide optimal habitat for songbirds, woodpeckers, owls, and bats.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no effect due to land acquisition which includes transfer of title and the creation of a conservation easement. To the extent that future activities on the property may have an effect, it is expected that the Spokane Tribe would comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

2. **Geology and Soils**

   Potential for Significance: No

   Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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

   Potential for Significance: No

   Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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

   Potential for Significance: No

   Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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

   Potential for Significance: No

   Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

6. **Wetlands**

   Potential for Significance: No

   Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

   Potential for Significance: No

   Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

8. **Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

   Potential for Significance: No

   Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

9. **Visual Quality**

   Potential for Significance: No

   Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

10. **Air Quality**

    Potential for Significance: No

    Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

11. **Noise**

    Potential for Significance: No

    Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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: Prior to closing, notice of the acquisition would be mailed to nearby landowners and interested parties. Additionally, BPA would run advertisements in local area newspapers for at least two weeks to inform the public of the pending acquisition.

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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