Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge Floodplain Reconnection Project

Finding of No Significant Impact
Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA-2276
April 2025

INTRODUCTION

Bonneville Power Administration (Bonneville) announces its environmental findings for its proposal to provide funding to the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (KTOI) to restore floodplain connectivity to the historic Kootenai River floodplains within the Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge (KNWR or Refuge) in Boundary County, Idaho near Bonners Ferry, Idaho. The KNWR is managed by the USFWS. The USFWS and the KTOI are the project sponsors. The project's reconnection activities would include breaching levees, raising roads, replacing water control structures, enhancing wetlands, and re-establishing wetland connections.

Bonneville developed an environmental assessment (EA) evaluating the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. The EA was released for a 30-day public comment period in September 2024. Bonneville received eight unique comments on the EA to which Bonneville provided responses in the final EA.

Bonneville hereby adopts the EA, and based on its analysis and public comments received, Bonneville has determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as amended (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 *et seq*.).[1] Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required, and Bonneville is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action is not the type of action that normally requires preparation of an EIS and is not without precedent.

Attached is a Mitigation Action Plan that lists all the mitigation measures that Bonneville as well as the KTOI and its contractors are committed to implementing.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

The FONSI will be posted on Bonneville's project website:

http://www.bpa.gov/nepa/kootenai-natl-wildlife-refuge.

[1] *BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this EA BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to DOE's own regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021, to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.*

PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, Bonneville proposes to provide funding to the KTOI to restore floodplain connectivity to the historical Kootenai River floodplains within the KNWR in Boundary County, Idaho near Bonners Ferry, Idaho.

The KNWR is managed by the USFWS. The USFWS and the KTOI are the project sponsors. The project's reconnection activities would include breaching levees, raising roads, replacing water control structures, enhancing wetlands and riparian areas, and re-establishing wetland connections. All these actions would occur within an overall project area of about 2,330 acres.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, Bonneville would not provide funding to KTOI for the Kootenai National Wildlife Refuge Floodplain Reconnection Project. The KNWR would continue to be managed as described in the KNWR's Comprehensive Conservation Plan with wildlife, habitat and public use programs remaining essentially unchanged.

Further, Bonneville would not provide funding to FHWA to raise Riverside Road on the KNWR.

SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

To determine whether the Proposed Action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, Bonneville analyzed the potential impacts of the proposal on affected resources and presented this analysis in Chapter 3 of the EA. The potential impacts associated with the Proposed Action are summarized below. The Proposed Action, with implementation of selected mitigation measures, would have no significant impacts. The following discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts will not be significant.

Geology and Soils

Impacts to geology and soils would range from low adverse to moderate beneficial:

- There would be short-term low-level impacts to soil, such as compaction, from implementing restoration actions and road reconstruction. These impacts would not be significant because compacted soils would be decompacted to a minimum of 18 inches and replanted allowing them to return to their pre-construction productivity and function in the years following the completion of construction activities.
- There would be moderate beneficial long-term effects of restoration actions from the improvements to soil quality and productivity from reestablishing the soil's hydrologic, biologic, and nutrient-cycling functions.

Vegetation

Impacts to vegetation would range from low adverse to moderate to high beneficial:

- There would be short-term low-level impacts to vegetation due to crushing and removal during construction. These impacts would not be significant because the project area would be replanted with native vegetation after construction, which would restore a native riparian plant community.
- There would be long-term high beneficial impacts to vegetation due to restored floodplain function and revegetated native plant communities.

Water Resources

Impacts to water resources would range from low adverse to moderate beneficial:

- There could be short-term low adverse effects to water resources from small amounts of turbidity reaching the Kootenai River after the initial seasonal inundation. Construction work would not occur during the wet season. These impacts would not be significant because of the timing of planned construction actions and relatively low amount of sediment expected to reach the Kootenai River.
- There would be long-term moderate beneficial effects to water resources from restored floodplain function on the KNWR and revegetated native plant communities.

Wetlands

Impacts to wetlands would range from low adverse to moderate beneficial:

- There would be short-term low adverse effects to wetlands from floodplain grading in wetland areas. These impacts would not be significant due to the short-term nature of the construction disturbances and the improved wetland hydrologic function resulting from the breaching the levees.
- There would be long-term moderate beneficial effects to wetlands from reconnecting the historic Kootenai River floodplain resulting in an increase in quantity and quality of wetland habitats.
- Floodplain grading would create approximately 30 acres of new, low elevation features that would be expected to develop into wetlands. Flooding associated with levee breaches would support the development of riparian, non-wetland habitats that would contribute to increased floodplain function.

Fish and Aquatic Habitats

Impacts to fish and aquatic habitats would no adverse to moderate beneficial:

- There would be no short-term impacts from construction on fish and aquatic habitats since in-water work would not occur and any subsequent sediment reaching the Kootenai River would be of low levels.
- There would be long-term moderate beneficial effects for fish caused by new seasonal inundation of the KNWR, such as access to off-channel habitats, increased nutrient

exchange between the river and the floodplain, and floodplain conditions that allow for more complex and diverse riparian vegetation.

Wildlife

Impacts to wildlife would range from low adverse to moderate beneficial:

- There would be short-term low adverse effects from construction noise resulting in displacement of wildlife from their preferred habitats. These impacts would not be significant because wildlife would return to the project area after construction is completed.
- There would be long-term moderate beneficial impacts for wildlife from planting vegetation in wetland and riparian areas that would increase habitat types and complexity.

Cultural Resources

There could be low impacts to cultural resources:

- Previously identified resources in the area would either not be affected or were determined to be not eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Land Use, Recreation

Impacts to land use and recreation would range from none for land use to moderate beneficial for recreation:

- There would be no change to land use as the result of the Proposed Action because the KNWR would continue to be a national wildlife refuge.
- The portion of the KNWR that would be affected by construction would be closed while construction is occurring. Recreationalists would temporarily lose access during this time. These impacts would not be significant because of the short duration of the closure and the resulting improvements for recreationalists following construction.
- There would be long-term moderate beneficial effects to recreation opportunities from road improvements, new viewing areas, and increases in native habitats attracting additional birds and wildlife for visitors' viewing.

Transportation

Impacts to transportation would range from moderate adverse to moderate beneficial:

- There would be short-term moderate adverse effects resulting from the closure of Riverside Road. The road closure would require drivers to follow a temporary detour that would add 30 minutes for travel between the KNWR headquarters and Bonners Ferry, Idaho. These impacts would not be significant because of the short duration of the closure and the improved conditions on Riverside Road following construction.
- There would be long term moderate beneficial effects resulting from improvements to Riverside Road, which would be wider and safer for drivers as well as provide 5-foot-wide shoulders for cyclists, pedestrians and ATV users.

Climate Change

Impacts to climate change would be low adverse to low beneficial:

- Construction equipment for the restoration actions and road improvements would have short-term low-level greenhouse-gas emissions.
- The long-terms effect would be low beneficial resulting from restoration actions by restoring functional riparian, wetland, and floodplain habitats that store carbon.

Noise

Impacts to noise would be low adverse:

- There would be short-term low adverse effects resulting from elevated noise levels from construction activities during daytime hours. Because the Refuge would be closed during construction, no visitors would be present, and thus, would not be affected. Several residences are located across Myrtle Creek on Westside Road but are greater than 150 feet away, so construction noise would result in a minimal elevation of noise above ambient levels. Overall, due to the short duration of these construction-related elevated noise levels, there would not be a significant noise impact.
- There would be no change to noise levels in the long term.

Public Health and Safety

Impacts to public health and safety would be low to moderate adverse:

- There would be short-term low-level adverse effects during construction due to some health and safety risks to workers and the public. These impacts would be comparable to a standard construction project and not significant because adequate signage and other safeguards for workers and public safety would minimize the risks.
- In the long term, low beneficial effects from the widening of Riverside Road, which would create safer conditions for all road users.

DETERMINATION

Based on the information in the EA, as summarized here, Bonneville determines that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA (42 USC 4321 *et seq*.). Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared, and Bonneville is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

Finally, consistent with Department of Energy's regulations in 10 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 1022 *et seq*. (Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements), the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to any wetlands as referenced above and presented in Chapter 3 of the EA. Consistent with 10 CFR § 1022.12 and 1022.13, all impacts to floodplains from the project have been assessed and proper notification provided. As discussed in 10 CFR § 1022.14, Chapters 2 and 3 of the EA include a description of the Proposed Action, including a map identifying the location of the floodplain reconnection actions; the alternatives; discussion of how the existing levee system would continue to prevent flooding on adjacent properties and result in no impact to areas outside the KNWR; and proposed mitigation measures to avoid and mitigate any potential impacts from these actions.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

SCOTT ARMENTROUT

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SCOTT G. ARMENTROUT Date
Executive Vice President
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