Aquatic Restoration Activities in and near Umatilla National Forest

As described in the

US Forest Service's Umatilla National Forest Aquatic Restoration Environmental Assessment

Finding of No Significant Impact
Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA-2119
November 2019

INTRODUCTION

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings for the proposed funding of aquatic restoration activities in and near the Umatilla National Forest. In August of 2018, the US Forest Service (USFS) released the *Umatilla National Forest Aquatic Restoration Environmental Assessment* (EA), which analyzed the effects of the activities proposed under the Aquatic Restoration Biological Opinion (ARBO). Some of the activities described in the EA also describe BPA-funded activities. Under the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act, BPA hereby adopts the USFS' EA (DOE/EA-2119) under 40 CFR 1506.3. BPA was not a Cooperating Agency; therefore, BPA is recirculating the EA as set out in 40 CFR 1506.3(b).

BPA provides funds to project sponsors for aquatic habitat improvement activities that would be covered under the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinions (National Marine Fisheries Service consultation number 2013/9724; US Fish and Wildlife Service consultation number 01EOFW00-2013-F-0199). These activities are similar to the ARBO activities presented in the EA as part of the Proposed Action. BPA has further determined that the BPA-funded restoration activities covered under the HIP Biological Opinions, as described in the EA, do not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 *et seq*.).

BPA hereby adopts the EA, with the additional information listed below and based on its analysis and public comments received by USFS. BPA has determined that their aquatic restoration activities in and near Umatilla National Forest that would be covered under the HIP Biological Opinions are not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of NEPA (42 USC 4321 *et seq*.). Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required and BPA is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for BPA's funding of the Proposed Actions, which are not the type of actions that normally require preparation of an EIS and are not without precedent.

Mitigation measures would be determined based on site-specific Supplement Analyses that would be done for future activities analyzed under this EA. BPA would require that project sponsors adhere to these mitigation requirements. Further, all site-specific projects would require adherence to the HIP conservation measures, as described in the HIP Biological Opinions.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

A notification of availability would be mailed to potentially affected parties. The Final EA and this FONSI are available on BPA's project website: http://www.bpa.gov/goto/Aquatic Restoration Activities in and near Umatilla National Forest.

PURPOSE AND NEED

BPA is a federal power-marketing agency that is part of the U.S. Department of Energy. BPA's operations are governed by several statutes, such as the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act) (16 U.S.C. 839 et seq.). Among other things, the Northwest Power Act directs BPA to protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife affected by the development and operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS). To assist in accomplishing this, the Northwest Power Act requires BPA to fund fish and wildlife protection, mitigation, and enhancement actions consistent with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's (NPCC) Fish and Wildlife Program. Under this program, the NPCC makes recommendations to BPA concerning which fish and wildlife projects to fund.

BPA needs to respond to project sponsor requests for funding under the NPCC's Fish and Wildlife Program. In meeting the need for action, BPA seeks to achieve the following purposes:

- Support efforts to mitigate for effects of the FCRPS on fish and wildlife in the mainstem Columbia River and its tributaries pursuant to the Northwest Power Act.
- Help BPA meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by fulfilling commitments begun under the 2008 NOAA Fisheries Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (as supplemented in 2010 and 2014) (2008 BiOp) and ongoing commitments under the 2019 NOAA Fisheries Columbia River System BiOp (2019 CRS BiOp). The 2008 BiOp called for identifying tributary habitat restoration projects and the 2019 CRS BiOp largely continues the tributary habitat restoration program.
- Fulfill BPA's commitments under the 2018 Columbia River Fish Accord Extension agreement.
- Minimize adverse effects to the human environment, avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of ESA-listed species, and avoid adverse modification or destruction of designated critical habitat.

PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, BPA would fund aquatic restoration activities within the Umatilla National Forest and adjacent property. As specific funding requests are made to BPA, BPA would use the EA to help evaluate the potential environmental effects for the requested activities. The EA evaluates typical environmental effects and identifies mitigation measures for habitat improvement activities that will continue to be proposed within the Umatilla National Forest and adjacent property. Under the Proposed Action, BPA would tier environmental analyses for site-specific projects to the EA.

BPA's primary framework for prioritization is known as Atlas, which is a data driven framework for identifying and prioritizing habitat restoration projects. The Atlas framework provides a scoring and ranking matrix to prioritize areas and actions on the premise that restoration funds should be prioritized based on biological benefit, and restoration programs are able to demonstrate that the project is appropriate. Further information about Atlas can be found here: https://www.salmonrecovery.gov/doc/default-source/default-document-library/atlas-fact-sheet---aug2015---final.pdf. BPA also utilizes other prioritization frameworks and action plans developed by project partners or other agencies in areas where Atlas has not been developed or an acceptable framework exists. The USFS employs the Watershed Condition Framework and the Regional Aquatic Restoration Strategy to identify and prioritize projects. While BPA and the USFS use different prioritization frameworks, they both consider similar elements.

Many of the habitat improvement projects funded by BPA would be done in accordance with BPA's HIP Biological Opinions, which has large overlaps with the USFS' ARBO as described in the EA. When BPA developed the Proposed Action in the HIP Biological Assessment to support the HIP ESA Section 7 consultation, BPA incorporated actions and conservation measures from several other regional habitat restoration ESA consultations, including ARBO. As such, there are many similarities between the resultant biological opinions.

While there are minor differences between the HIP and ARBO biological opinions, as summarized in Table 1, they share much in common as they were developed to ensure standardization between programmatic biological opinions. Commonalities between HIP and ARBO include:

- US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)/ National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) joint consultations resulted in mirrored biological opinions;
- Primarily aquatic-driven programmatic biological opinions;
- Same reinitiation triggers for HIP and ARBO;
- No expiration date;
- Similar (but not identical) activity categories (Table 1); and
- Similar implementation process.

Table 1: Activity categories and actions shared between the HIP and ARBO programmatic biological opinions

Activity	ARBO	HIP
Fish Passage	Yes	Yes
Large Wood	Yes	Yes
Legacy Structure removal	Yes	Yes
Channel reconstruction	Yes	Yes
Off- Side-Channel Restoration	Yes	Yes
Streambank restoration	Yes	Yes
Set-back or Removal of Existing, Berms, Dikes, and Levees	Yes	Yes
Reduction/Relocation of Recreation Impacts	Yes	**No**
Livestock Fencing, Stream Crossing and Off-Channel livestock watering	Yes	Yes
Piling Removal	Yes	Yes
In-channel Nutrient Enhancement	Yes	Yes
Road and Trail Erosion Control, Maintenance, and Decommissioning	Yes	Yes
Invasive and Non-Native Plant Control	Yes	Yes
Juniper Removal	Yes	Yes
Riparian Vegetarian Planting	Yes	Yes
Bull Trout Protection	Yes	**No**
Beaver Habitat Restoration	Yes	Yes
Sudden Oak Death Treatments	Yes	**No**
Surveys	Yes	Yes
Tide/Flood Gate Removal	Yes	Yes

BPA's HIP implementation monitoring program is also similar to the monitoring conducted to support ARBO. As part of BPA's funding process and HIP requirements, monitoring is conducted as appropriate for specific actions, both during and after a project, to track effects and compliance with the HIP. BPA

files Project Completion Forms with NMFS and USFWS to report on implementation monitoring to ensure compliance, demonstrating that general and specific conservation measures defined in the HIP are adequately followed, effects to listed species are not greater than predicted and incidental take limitations are not exceeded, and turbidity was monitored in accordance to the HIP. In addition to the compliance monitoring BPA conducts for all projects, select projects may also have action effectiveness monitoring or status and trends studies funded by BPA.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, BPA would not adopt the EA nor use the NEPA pathway afforded by the adoption of the EA. BPA would not utilize analysis in the EA to help expedite site-specific project environmental review. Currently, BPA evaluates habitat improvement projects as they are advanced by project sponsors at different times. The projects are rarely packaged or timed in a manner that facilitates efforts for coordinated environmental review under NEPA. BPA often conducts individual environmental evaluations and NEPA implementation for similar projects in close proximity with nearly identical environmental effects. The No Action Alternative continues this practice.

SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

To determine whether the Proposed Action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, BPA analyzed the potential impacts of the proposal on human and natural resources as presented in Chapter 3 of the EA. The potential impacts associated with the Proposed Action are summarized below. The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts. The following discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

Aquatic Resources – Hydrology and Fisheries

- Overall, actions would improve instream and riparian habitat and overall watershed conditions for all aquatic species, including those listed as threatened and endangered under the ESA. These improvements would contribute to improved growth and survival of individual fish through enhanced spawning, incubation, rearing, and migration for fish species.
- Construction activities could have short-term impacts to individual fish from turbidity increases, accidental spills of fluids from construction equipment, loss of fish habitat (before new habitats form), or direct injury or mortality.
- Best management practices (BMPs) would reduce the potential for erosion and runoff to waterbodies and wetlands during construction activities, help stabilize disturbed areas, and reduce potential water turbidity impacts.
- Temporary water quality impacts to fish would be minimized because in-water work would occur within the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in-water work window, a time when stream flows are low, conditions are dry, and fish species are in their least vulnerable life stages. Further, construction would be isolated and fish would be salvaged from construction areas to further reduce temporary water quality degradation impacts to fish.
- Disturbed ground in floodplains would be revegetated to minimize the long term floodplain impacts.
- Restoration activities would address hydrologic connectivity between river and floodplains restoring ecological function to floodplains, increasing floodwater conveyance and storage capacity. This would increase the floodplain's ability to more safely store and move floodwater.
- Riparian vegetation communities would be enhanced, which would promote ecosystem resiliency to the future effects of climate change.

- Impacts to existing high-quality wetlands are not anticipated. Historical wetlands would be restored to maximize beneficial effects.
- Increased frequency of floodplain inundation would result in deposition of additional sediment and soils, increased moisture retention, and increased vegetation establishment.

Wildlife

- There would be a long-term benefit to animals, such as beaver, amphibians, waterfowl, shorebirds, and insect-eating birds. These species would have expanded and improved wetland and aquatic habitat for breeding and feeding.
- Any incidental mortality to wildlife from construction activities and temporary displacement of wildlife near work areas would be low because of the duration of impacts would occur, and because more mobile wildlife species would be expected to avoid work areas during construction.
- Bird and other wildlife habitat may be affected through the removal of trees. However, the tree habitat removed would be distributed (not clumped in one area) within tree removal sites, and frequently taken from the edges of adjacent woodlands.
- Use of erosion control mitigation measures would minimize or eliminate the delivery of sediments from restoration activities into nearby streams and potential injury to aquatic wildlife from workers, equipment, or accidental spills of hazardous materials.

Botany

- Botanical surveys would identify any sensitive, USFS Management Indicator Species (MIS), or ESA-listed species prior to groundbreaking.
- Disturbed areas would be revegetated with native plants to reduce the risk of spreading weeds into disturbed areas.
- In the long-term, native plant communities in the riparian area would improve by increasing the amount of moist/wet riparian habitat available, increasing the cover of native plants along the streambanks, and providing more large wood substrates for mosses and lichens.

Soils

- Restoration activities could have a short-term impact on geomorphology, soils, and topography due to the amount of material displaced, but the long-term impacts would ultimately restore natural soil-forming processes, erosion patterns, and floodplain function.
- Soil disturbance due to construction activities would temporarily increase soil erosion and compaction.
- Soil compaction from tree removal would be minor, and temporary; where trees are cut, stumps would be left in place.
- Mitigation measures (use of sediment barriers, reseeding disturbed areas, etc.) would minimize the risk of soil erosion during construction and would aid in soil recovery.
- In-stream wood placement and riparian plantings would have short-term minor impacts to the soil resource resulting from soil disturbance to construct log jams along the stream bank and from the movement of construction equipment.
- Access routes would be recontoured to reduce soil compaction, increase infiltration capacity, and prevent unauthorized motorized access.

Silviculture

- Any trees removed for the constructed log features would be off-set by the planned revegetation of the disturbed sites with native trees, grass, forbs, and shrubs propagated from locally collected seed.
- A reduction in tree density would increase the growing space of residual trees providing more available moisture, nutrients, and light, improving residual trees' health and increase growth helping some trees to achieve large-tree status in a shorter period of time. Other trees such as aspen and cottonwoods may grow into the space providing opportunities for ground vegetation.
- Reduction of juniper densities within its home range would improve the availability of ground water allowing for more robust growth of residual vegetation and improve the overall health of the ecosystem.

Fire and Fuels

- Any trees removed for the constructed log features would reduce potential fuel loads and free up resources for residual trees improving vegetation health, which may then be more resistant to fire.
- A reduction in juniper density would decrease fuel load and reduce fire potential.
- Prescribed burn BMPs restrict burn location and timing, to minimize fire danger.

Air Resource

- Short-term construction effects are expected from dust and exhaust from the operation of construction equipment. Short-term impacts would be localized to construction sites, would be temporary in nature, and would not result in permanent regional impacts to air quality or a change in air quality that would likely create any risk to human health.
- There would be temporary and local greenhouse gas emissions during short-term construction activities.
- There would likely be no long-term impact on air quality as completed restoration projects routinely require no on-going construction equipment operations. In the long term, riparian vegetation communities would be enhanced, which would promote ecosystem resiliency to the future effects of climate change.
- Prescribed burn BMPs would restrict burn location and timing to minimize smoke emissions.

Range

- Any trees removed for project elements would open the forest canopy providing additional access to light and other resources to herbaceous vegetation.
- Prescribed burns may have a negative impact on range in the short term, but long term would be beneficial to grasses and forbs.
- Where livestock are excluded from riparian forage or river access, offsite watering or fords may be provided.
- Inundation of floodplains may be beneficial to grasses and forbs.

Heritage Resources

- BPA would complete site-specific cultural resource analyses and consultations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, if appropriate, that would lessen potential impacts to cultural resources.
- Any identified cultural resources would be marked and avoided in accordance with the outcome of the Section 106 process. Similarly, monitoring would be conducted when needed.
- If unanticipated sites are discovered during construction, minimization and avoidance measures identified in the Archaeological/Cultural Resources Inadvertent Discovery Plan would be implemented.

Recreation

- The scale and duration of land use and recreational changes are expected to be small.
- Recreationists using and traveling through project areas would experience short-term impacts from construction-related activities. These impacts would occur primarily during daylight hours during the summer months while the projects are being implemented.
- There would only be a temporary increase in construction traffic and roads would be maintained and improved where necessary to handle additional traffic.
- While there would be short-term effects from exposed soils and installed habitat elements to visual resources, in the long term after revegetation, these effects would be reduced. Project activities would be in compliance with Comprehensive River Management Plans for any Wild and Scenic Rivers.

DETERMINATION

Based on the information in the EA, as summarized here, BPA 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 BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

/s/ SCOTT G. ARMENTROUT *November 08, 2019*
SCOTT G. ARMENTROUT Date
Vice President
Environment, Fish and Wildlife