

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Stowers East Fork Potlatch River Restoration Project

Project No.: 2008-604-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz, EWM-4

Location: Latah County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B 1.20 Protection of Cultural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund Idaho Fish and Game (IDFG) to restore anadromous fish habitat on 1.2 miles of privately-owned land on the East Fork Potlatch River near Bovill, Idaho. The conditions of this wooded meadow complex have been degraded due to past grazing, logging and meadow drainage, and channel straightening. The main objective of this project is to increase lateral rearing habitat for juvenile steelhead through added large wood, a secondary side channel, and alcoves.

Individual trees would be strategically felled by a sawyer from the heavily timbered area on both sides of the river to increase roughness and mimic natural wood inputs. Two 'catcher's mitt' large wood structures would be created from large logs with rootwads placed in the channel with large intertwined trees placed atop to extend into bank riparian trees for added stability. One of these structures would deflect water into a side channel; the second would backwater into the river floodplain. Most channel complexity would be created through the placement of large wood; a single side channel would be excavated to create an alcove and backwater pool.

All in-stream work and off-channel habitat excavation would occur during low precipitation and low flow conditions to minimize disturbance and sedimentation. Work areas would be isolated with sand bags or coffer dams and block nets would be set above and below the construction areas. Electrofishing would be used to salvage any remaining fish, though survey data shows that juvenile steelhead density in the project area is currently low due to lack of existing habitat. Project implementation would occur from June to August, followed immediately with seeding and planting of trees and shrubs to reestablish vegetation in disturbed areas. Additional planting would be completed the following spring. Fencing would be re-established or repaired around the perimeter of the project to remove grazing pressure.

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) 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), BPA has determined that the proposed action:

- (1) fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D (see attached Environmental Checklist);
- (2) does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal; and
- (3) has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

/s/ Carolyn Sharp
Carolyn Sharp
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel
Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: April 29, 2020

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Checklist

This checklist 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.

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Project Site Description

This project is located on privately owned land along both sides of 1.2-mile segment of the East Fork Potlatch, directly downstream from two restoration projects implemented in 2012 and 2019. The proposed restoration site is a wooded meadow complex that has been impacted by decades of anthropogenic influences dating back to the 1940's. This resulted in gradual channel incision, faster waters, bank erosion and sediment input, and loss of floodplain interaction. The existing riparian condition in this reach is characterized by an established alder community that exists only along the existing stream corridor. The project reach contains minimal human infrastructure other than a private landowner bridge constructed from a rail car deck with ecoblock abutments. The nearest infrastructure is the bridge 2.25 miles downstream on State Highway 8.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> ID SHPO concurrence received March 2, 2020. Determination of no historic properties affected. BPA CR #: ID 2019 008. SHPO Rev #: 2019-880.		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Soil disturbance and excavation has been minimized in the design, relying on large wood placement extensively to reengage the floodplain. Excavation work would occur in periods of low precipitation and low stream flow to further minimize erosion and disturbance.		
3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Existing riparian condition is characterized by established alder community. Native vegetation would be salvaged during construction and then replanted, along with additional native seed, willows, and shrubs. Individual trees felled for instream wood structures would be those that are in poor health and/or do not provide existing shade or cover; mostly over 40 feet from the stream bank.		
4. Wildlife (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Minimal impact to wildlife and habitat related to temporary disturbance associated with elevated construction noise. No listed or sensitive wildlife species present.		

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish**

(including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)

Explanation: The project is covered under the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion (BiOp) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (HIP No. 2020037). Listed fish species include: Snake River steelhead. The project is considered to be medium risk under HIP and conservation measures would be followed to ensure that the project would be a benefit to ESA-listed fish species. These measures would also benefit non-listed fish species. A HIP variance was obtained to allow work outside the in-water work window. IDFG would conduct redd surveys prior to in-water construction activities. If redds are detected, they would be avoided until a week beyond emergence.

One of the goals of the project is to restore floodplain functionality and increase the quality and quantity of floodplain habitat for fish. The project area would be staked and flagged, including clearing and grubbing limits of disturbance, to reduce unnecessary disturbance to the floodplain.

IDFG will obtain a joint water quality permit from Idaho Department of Water Resources and the US Army Corps of Engineers to ensure the project meets state water quality standards.

6. **Wetlands**

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are anticipated in wetlands. Erosion control measures would be implemented to prevent sedimentation.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Explanation: No impacts to ground water or aquifers are anticipated due to the minimal amount of ground disturbance that would not be deep enough to penetrate groundwater.

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

Explanation: No change in land use would occur and project activities would not impact existing land uses.

9. **Visual Quality**

Explanation: No permanent impact on visual quality. Temporary disturbance associated with the presence of construction equipment. Disturbed areas will be revegetated with native plants.

10. **Air Quality**

Explanation: A small amount of vehicle emissions and dust may occur temporarily during construction.

11. **Noise**

Explanation: Temporary noise associated with construction activities would occur during daylight hours.

12. **Human Health and Safety**

Explanation: Wood upstream of privately-owned ATV bridge will be anchored to protection of infrastructure.

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, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: Coordination has occurred with landowner. Landowner comments are reflected on the construction plan set. A temporary construction agreement between IDFG and landowner will be signed prior to construction.

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

Signed: /s/ Carolyn Sharp
Carolyn Sharp, ECF-4
Environmental Protection Specialist

Date: April 29, 2020