

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Red River Meadows Planting Project

Project No.: 2002-072-00

Project Manager: Jennifer Lord, EWM-4

Location: Idaho County, ID

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20, Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) to conduct ongoing riparian vegetation planting around the river corridor within a 247-acre conservation easement within the Red River watershed. The meadow systems have undergone riparian planting efforts since 2007 with the objective of providing a healthy, functioning riparian zone with stabilized stream banks, increased shade for listed salmonids and native fish, and the eventual recruitment of large woody debris (LWD) to increase stream habitat complexity. The Red River reach adjacent to the project area is listed as critical habitat for steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), and important habitat for Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*), cutthroat trout (*O. clarkii*), and other resident fish species.

All plants would be eight-gallon container nursery stock with the seed collected from the Red River watershed. The following native riparian plants would be planted:

- Quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*)
- Black cottonwood (*P. section Aigeiros*)
- Thinleaf alder (*Alnus incana*)
- Douglas hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*)
- Bebb willow (*Salix bebbiana*)
- Sandbar willow (*S. exigua*)
- Geyer willow (*S. geyeriana*)

The meadow would be accessed via existing trails using a light-duty pickup truck or utility terrain vehicle with a utility trailer. Due to the large plant sizes, small heavy equipment, such as a mini-excavator with an 18-inch auger bit or similar piece of equipment, as well as a two-man handheld power auger, would be required. Each planting hole would be approximately 2.5 to 3 feet deep, with soil backfilled around the base of the plant. Implementation would occur in September during the driest part of the year. Follow-up inspections would be performed to assess the establishment of vegetation in the project area. Any weed infestations encountered would be dealt with by mechanical methods such as hand pulling or machete. Vegetation would be re-planted in areas where plants did not survive or were washed out with high flows.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System biological opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These proposed activities also fulfill commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp).

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/ Mandy Hope

Mandy Hope
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

August 17, 2020

Date

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.

Proposed Action: Red River Meadows Planting Project

Project Site Description

The planting effort would be concentrated in the Lower Red River Meadow conservation easement area, located approximately five miles southeast of Elk City, ID between the mouth of Siegel Creek and just north of the mouth of Cole Creek. The project area is on private land owned by Red River LLC surrounded by the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest. The 247-acre easement title is owned by Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The area is at an elevation of 4,200 feet and has a variety of high mountain meadow grasses. Lodgepole pine trees are on higher ground on the edges of the meadow. A few hawthorn trees are also present in the project area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with BPA's determination of No Historic Properties Affected on July 22, 2020 (BPA CR Project No. ID 2020 004, SHPO Rev. No. 2020-217). Other consulting parties were the C'oeur d'Alene Tribe and the NPT. No response was received within 30 days; therefore, BPA assumed concurrence on August 14, 2020, following the end of the 30-day consultation period.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in soil displacement during planting activities. The depth of soil disturbance would not exceed three feet. Planting holes would be backfilled, then foot tamped, and watered to minimize erosion potential.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species in the project area. Work would occur outside of sensitive timeframes for plants (spring and early summer). The existing plant community is composed mainly of sedges and grasses, which recover from disturbance quickly (within the next growing season). These plants would be subject to short-term impacts as a result of excavation equipment disturbing the soil. Impacts would be limited to the immediate area of excavation, and the project would have long-term benefits to riparian plant communities due to an increase in habitat complexity.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) have the potential to occur in the project area (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) Consultation Code 01EIFW00-2020-SLI-0242). The proposed planting action is considered low risk under BPA's ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) (HIP No. 2020012). The NPT would follow the conservation measures for riparian planting as stated in Section 4.2.5, Category 2e of the HIP Handbook. Work would occur outside of sensitive timeframes such as elk calving (which is finished by mid-June).

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is adjacent to and within the floodplain of the Red River. Red River contains ESA-listed bull trout and bull trout critical habitat. Planting would occur during low flow conditions and outside of critical spawning and rearing timeframes. Equipment storage and fueling areas would be a minimum of 500 feet from live water. No impact to fish or water bodies is expected as a result of implementing the proposed action. There would be long-term positive impacts to fish as a result of increasing stream habitat complexity.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Freshwater emergent wetland depressions within the project area would be avoided during planting activities. No impact to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater proposed. The maximum depth of disturbance would be about three feet. Spill prevention measures would be present on site.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing land use would not change as a result of this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Long-term positive impacts to visual quality as a result of increased habitat complexity.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of emissions associated with use of construction equipment on site.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary noise increases associated with vehicles and construction equipment during planting activities.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety. Construction inspectors would be on site daily to monitor worker health and safety.

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 NPT coordinates with the landowner via a representative who relays all information to the landowner.

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

Signed: /s/ Mandy Hope August 17, 2020
Mandy Hope, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing