

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Potlatch Watershed Beaver Relocation

Project No.: 2002-061-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz, EWM-4

Location: Latah 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 proposes to fund Latah Soil and Water Conservation District to relocate beavers to suitable areas where additional beaver activity would restore or maintain habitat-forming processes. The use of beaver to improve habitat for steelhead and other anadromous fish is consistent with recommendations of the Snake River Salmon and Steelhead Recovery Plan (NMFS 2017). Funding the proposed activities 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. (USC) 839 et seq.).

Beavers would be trapped at the request of private landowners and relocated to sites where potential for landowner conflicts would be minimal. The preferred trapping period would occur between mid-August and the end of September, with some trapping occurring through mid-October to avoid trapping pregnant females and ensure winter survival. Habitat suitability criteria would also be used to determine appropriate release sites where beavers would be likely to remain. Monitoring site visits would occur in spring and fall the year following relocation to determine if the beavers have remained in the area.

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:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>August 18, 2020</u>
Sarah T. Biegel	Date
NEPA Compliance Officer	

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: Potlatch Watershed Beaver Relocation

Project Site Description

The beaver trapping would occur within the Potlatch Watershed in the Big Bear Creek, East Fork Potlatch, and Corral Creek subwatersheds. Beavers would be transplanted to locations where adequate food plants are present, and ponds suitable for protection from predators (greater than three feet deep) are naturally available or provided by previously constructed beaver dam analogues. Other conditions such as channel gradients less than six percent, adequate floodplain access and valley width, suitable soils, and adequate stream flow would be present.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project actions require no ground disturbance and do not involve historic structures.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project actions require no ground disturbance and would not damage vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project actions require no ground disturbance and would not damage vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status species or habitats are within the project sites. Latah SWCD would obtain a depredation control permit from IDFG and report harvest/take. Beaver trapping and relocation may be traumatizing to the beavers relocated, and some mortalities may occur. The methods applied, however, would be those known to minimize stress and mortality as much as possible, and maximize potential for successful relocation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The trapping and relocation of beavers requires no ground disturbance and would not damage waterbodies, or floodplains. The trapping may temporarily disturb nearby fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The trapping and relocation of beavers requires no ground disturbance and would not damage wetlands. One of the desired outcomes at the relocation sites would be to restore and encourage wetland hydrology and increase the extent of wetland habitat.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no groundwater withdrawal. An increase in beaver activity in the relocation site could increase water storage and beneficially raise the water table.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur. No specially-designated areas are present.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have no effect on visual quality. No visually-prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impact on air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no notable increase associated with trapping and releasing beavers.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. Proper safety considerations and protective gear would be used when handling live animals. Release sites would not be located near infrastructure, such as roads and culverts that could be impacted by hydrologic changes.

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: Beaver trapping would occur where private landowners have contacted Latah SWCD requesting assistance to relocate beavers from their property. Release sites could occur either on private land with prior contact and approval of a willing landowner or through coordination with the U.S. Forest Service to release the trapped beaver on suitable riparian forest land.

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 August 18, 2020
Carolyn Sharp, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist