Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: ShoPai Beaver Relocations, and Culvert and Solar Water Trough Maintenance and Installation

Project No.: 1997-011-00

Project Manager: Cecilia Brown

Location: Owyhee County, Idaho, and Elko County, Nevada

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:

The Proposed Action consists of funding the Shoshone Paiute Tribe to relocate problem beavers into habitats needing beaver activity for stream restoration in Owyhee County, ID.; the installation of two culverts and two solar livestock watering troughs; and for maintenance of previously installed culverts, fencing, and solar watering troughs in Owyhee County, ID and Elko County, NV.

Beaver relocations

This Proposed Action is to remove over-populated or problem beavers from the Owyhee River, and irrigation canals off of the Owyhee River into areas in nearby mountains on tribal lands where beavers are absent and their presence is desired for habitat improvements for resident fish.

Action	Latitude*	Longitude*
Beaver relocation	41.930530	-116.093100
*Center of activity for multiple actions		

Inspect and Maintain Culverts

Maintenance would include removing debris from culverts and hauling in riprap or rock/gravel if needed to refresh the erosion-control facing of the structures to ensure they do not wash out.

Action	Latitude*	Longitude*
Inspect and maintain culverts	41.973160	-116.069750
*Center of activity for multiple actions		

Fencing and Solar Watering Trough Maintenance

This action is to inspect and maintain approximately 53 miles of fencing and 40+ offsite water developments as needed. Offsite water developments would also be winterized during the autumn months. Some troughs and water developments would be retro-fitted to operate year-round as time and supplies become available.

Action	Latitude*	Longitude*
Fencing and Solar Watering Trough Maintenance	41.858680	-116.105865
*Center of activity for multiple actions		

Install Two Culverts and Two Solar Watering Troughs

Two culverts and two solar-powered watering troughs would be installed. The installation of new culverts would be on lightly-traveled, native-material-surfaced back roads, with little to no road fill. The existing stream crossings are shallow-water fords. Excavations for the new culverts would be shallow, and would be accomplished by a backhoe.

The solar watering troughs each consists of a solar panel (within a pole fence enclosure), which provides electricity to charge a battery which operates a pump which provides water via a buried pipeline to the trough. A small ditch digging machine, or small backhoe, would be used to lay pipeline from the streams to the trough, roughly 200-300 feet each. A small (approximately 10 ft. by 10 ft.) pad would be leveled for each trough.

Action	Latitude	Longitude
Cow Creek Solar Watering Trough installation	41.902210	-116.001110
Fawn Creek Solar Watering Trough	41.883558	-116.045666
Jones Creek Crossing #3 culvert installation	41.885194	-116.011376
West Fork Fawn Creek	41.851454	-116.074805

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/ Robert W. Shull
Robert W Shull
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
CorSource Technology Group

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel
Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel Date: *07/01/2020*
Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist, List of Fish Screen O&M Sites

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: **ShoPai Beaver Relocations, and Culvert and Solar Water Trough Maintenance and Installation**

Project Site Description

All actions would be conducted on the Shoshone Paiute Tribes' Duck Valley Indian Reservation in southern Idaho and northern Nevada. The beaver trapping would occur along the Owyhee River and from irrigation canals in agricultural areas around the town of Owyhee, Idaho. The riparian vegetation along the Owyhee River is that typical of riparian areas in the northern Great Basin, dominated by willow shrub thickets and scattered cottonwood trees.

The fence, culvert, and solar trough maintenance would be widespread across the Duck Valley Indian Reservation.

The culvert and solar trough installation would be in the Cow Creek and Fawn Creek tributaries to the Owyhee River, south of Owyhee, Idaho, in northern Nevada. These tributaries flow through low mountain ranges from the east (Cow Creek) and from the west (Fawn Creek) of the river. All four sites are located in riparian areas along these tributaries, which are characterized by grass/forb meadows and riparian wetlands, with scattered thickets of willows. The surrounding slopes are broad and open, covered mostly by sagebrush and native bunch grasses (or invasive cheatgrass in places), with the draws and higher elevations supporting dense thickets of mountain mahogany and aspen.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

- The trapping and relocation of beavers requires no ground disturbance.
- The maintenance actions on existing culverts, fencing, and solar troughs require no new ground disturbance. The maintenance work would be mostly by hand, though some dumping of gravel or rock on previously constructed culverts may occur.
- The construction actions for the culverts and solar troughs would occur on sites that have been surveyed and consulted on in 2019 with the Idaho and Nevada SHPO offices, with no features found and thus no historic properties affected.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

- The trapping and relocation of beavers would have no ground disturbance.
- The maintenance actions on existing culverts, fencing, and solar watering troughs require no new ground disturbance.

- No heavy equipment (excavators or bulldozers) would be used in any of the maintenance or construction actions. Only a backhoe or small ditch-digging machine would be used.
- The proposed equipment to be used would have light ground pressure, minimizing soil compaction.
- Excavations for the culverts (estimate 15-ft. by 25 ft. each) would be minimal and shallow. The solar trough pipelines would be one to two inches in diameter requiring minimal excavation. Small pads (10 ft. by 10 ft.) for each watering trough would be leveled. Only a small amount of soils would be displaced and mixed at each location.

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

Potential for Significance: No

- The trapping and relocation of beavers requires no ground disturbance and would not damage vegetation.
- The maintenance actions on existing culverts, fencing, and solar watering troughs require no new ground disturbance and would not disturb plants.
- No Federal/state special-status species or habitats are within the project sites.
- The machine operations necessary for placement of the culverts, troughs, and pipelines would mechanically impact and destroy some native plant species on the small sites where they would be placed. The sites would be reseeded to native species.

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

Potential for Significance: No, with conditions

- No Federal/state special-status species or habitats are within the project sites.
- 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.
- No habitats would be modified to any degree that might permanently displace medium to large resident wildlife; though some small reptiles, amphibians, or mammals (*e.g.* frogs, mice, and gophers) may be displaced or even killed by the operations of the backhoe or ditch machines to be used for the projects.
- The machine operations would occur in mid/late summer which would be after migratory birds have completed nesting and fledging.
- All human presence and activity associated with these actions, including maintenance and beaver trapping/relocation would temporarily disturb and displace nearby wildlife, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely.

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

Potential for Significance: No

- The trapping and relocation of beavers requires no ground disturbance and would not damage waterbodies, or floodplains. The trapping may temporarily disturb nearby fish.
- The maintenance actions on existing culverts, fencing, and solar troughs require no new ground disturbance and would not disturb water bodies, floodplains, or fish.
- No aquatic habitats would be adversely modified for the long term by installation of the culverts or the watering troughs' pumps and pipelines. Their purpose is to protect water quality and improve habitat conditions for fish and aquatic species.

- Some aquatic invertebrates or amphibians may be displaced or killed by the installation actions, but quick re-occupation of these sites by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following construction is anticipated.
- No ESA-listed species, or special-status fish or aquatic species are present in the project areas, but native fish species may be temporarily displaced during project actions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

- The trapping and relocation of beavers requires no ground disturbance and would not damage wetlands.
- The maintenance actions on existing culverts, fencing, and solar watering troughs require no new ground disturbance and would not damage wetlands.
- Installation of the culverts would be located in riparian habitats, but would not be located in wetlands.
- The solar troughs would not be located in wetlands or riparian habitats. Pipelines, however, would traverse riparian wetland habitats. These would be reseeded with native species once completed.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

- There would be no groundwater withdrawal.
- There would be some miniscule potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills from the small equipment proposed for culvert and water trough installations; but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater is unlikely.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

- There would be no land use changes, and no impact to specially-designated areas.
- No project action would change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to project actions.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

- No visually-prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made.
- Culvert installations may narrow up the stream crossings from their current conditions, minimizing undesirable visual effects of the muddy, tire-tracked fords currently there.
- The solar water troughs do not resemble natural features on the landscape, but their presence would protect riparian habitat from overuse by livestock and allow vegetative recovery, improving the visual appearance.
- All of the actions are on tribal lands, within an Indian reservation, and far from publicly traveled highways where viewpoints and foreground/middle-ground visual conditions would be of greater concern.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

- There would be some exhaust and greenhouse gas emissions since a backhoe or other small ditch-digging machine would be used; though only for a few weeks for all proposed actions. This action creates no long-term source of emissions or exhaust.
- Vehicles used to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the sites would be another potential source of exhaust and greenhouse gasses, but this also would be short term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

- There would be some noise impacts for a few hours or days at each project site while the backhoe or other equipment might be working, but this type of noise is not inconsistent with that of common ranching, mining, or farming operations throughout the upper Owyhee River basin and on the reservation.
- Other noise sources would be from humans working on the site, and the use of vehicles to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the project sites.
- All noise sources are of low intensity and short term.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

- Vehicle and backhoe operation, and working with hand and power tools have their attendant risk to users, but there would be no condition created from these actions that would introduce new human health or safety hazards or risk into the environment.
- No condition created by these actions would increase the burden on the local health, safety, and emergency-response infrastructure.
- Neither project actions nor operation of project-associated vehicles on public roads would hinder traffic or access by emergency vehicles.

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: NA

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: The project actions are proposed by the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe to be implemented by tribal members on properties owned and managed by the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe.

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

Signed: */s/ Robert W Shull* Date: *July 1, 2020*

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