

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Upper Columbia Programmatic Habitat, Middle Methow River (M2) Barkley Bear Habitat Improvement

Project No.: 2010-001-00

Project Manager: Jamie Cleveland – EWU-4

Location: Okanogan County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 – Protect/restore/improve fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration proposes to fund the Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation to implement the Middle Methow River (M2) Barkley Bear Habitat Improvement Project. The project proposes to improve ecological function and instream, off-channel, riverine wetland, and riparian habitats for ESA-listed Upper Columbia River (UCR) Spring Chinook, UCR Steelhead, bull trout, and other aquatic organisms within the middle reach of the Methow River and the lower section of Bear Creek. Project implementation is anticipated to occur between July 2020 and November 2021.

The proposed project includes the following key elements:

- Construct a new inlet channel paired with an apex logjam to increase the sustainability of the existing and reconnected side channels.
- Remove the concrete and steel Barkley headgate and conversion of the existing intake canal to a side channel feature to increase floodplain connectivity built with a perennial connection, but may evolve towards a long seasonal connection.
- Build 4 engineered logjams to increase channel complexity in the existing island side channel (“1970’s Channel”).
- Construct multiple small log structures to promote channel development and help define the island flow path.
- Restore a perennial connection between Bear Creek and the Methow River by removing the fish screen and associated infrastructure, filling a portion of the Barkley Canal, and constructing a new outlet channel.
- Build an engineered logjam in the main stem Methow to increase instream complexity near the outlet of Bear Creek.
- Plant approximately 3 acres of previously cleared areas with native riparian trees and shrubs to restore a functional riparian forest buffer.
- Remove 650 feet +/- of riprap on the left bank of the Methow River to increase floodplain connectivity.

Funding the proposed activities fulfils commitments begun under the 2008 National Marine Fisheries Service Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (as supplemented in 2010 and 2014) (2008 BiOp) and ongoing commitments under the 2019 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System BiOp (2019 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/ Brenda Aguirre

Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>07/06/2020</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.

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Project Site Description

The project is located in Okanogan County, Washington approximately three miles southeast of the town of Winthrop along the Methow River from approximately River Mile 49 to 50 and the lower 1,000 feet of Bear Creek from its confluence with the Methow River to the Lower Bear Creek county road. The legal description is Township 34 North, Range 21 East, Section 13.

The project site consists of riparian, floodplain, wetland, and upland areas along the Methow River and Bear Creek. Vegetation types and land use in the project area consist of riparian cottonwood forest, agricultural pastureland, a large irrigation diversion intake (Barkley Canal) and associated headworks, and fish screen facility. The surrounding upland area is rural residential, shrub steppe, and agricultural pastureland. The valley bottom is largely a rural residential landscape with some agricultural fields and riparian forest stands. Most of the project area has been altered by human disturbances. Road and levee construction, ditch operations, and riparian clearing have altered community structures; exotic species are abundant. The land is owned by multiple private owners and the Washington Department of Natural Resources.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA consulted on the project throughout the design development process, 2016 - 2020. The consulting parties included the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation. BPA received letters of concurrence from DAHP for the following activities, listed by the date the letter was received:

- 5/6/20 for the addition of a permanent spoils area
- 8/28/19 for the addition of a staging/materials storage area
- 2/20/18 for revised project designs based on pre-implementation geotechnical surveys
- 9/28/16 for the addition of pre-implementation data collection activities, the addition of access routes, and addition of 4 acres of floodplain to the project area
- 2/29/16 for M2 Barkley-Bear Habitat Complexity Project (conceptual design)

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation to construct project elements would disturb soils; erosion control measures and revegetation would be implemented to minimize impacts.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status plant species or habitats are present in the project area. Up to 3 acres of vegetation would be disturbed associated with excavation to install logjams in the banks of the Methow River, construct new outlet channel for Bear Creek, and to access the project site. Disturbance areas would be revegetated with native seed, shrubs, and trees after project completion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status wildlife species have been documented in, or adjacent to, the project area; and no designated habitat is present. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by construction noise and increased traffic during locally approved daylight hours.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would disturb approximately 1.2 acres of water in and adjacent to the Methow River, and approximately 0.09 acres of water in Bear Creek. MSRF obtained a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit (NWP-2020-290) and Section 401 certification on June 30, 2020.

Fish would be subject to temporary noise and elevated turbidity associated with installation of instream project key elements. The proposed project would be done in accordance with BPA's HIP biological opinion for effect to federally-listed Upper Columbia River steelhead, UCR spring Chinook, and Columbia River bull trout. A HIP Project Notification Form was submitted to the Services on April 28, 2020. Because an extension to the in-water work window would be required, a variance was requested and approved by NMFS – Columbia Basin Branch on April 28, 2020, and by the USFWS – Central Washington Field Office on April 29, 2020. Additional special-status fish species identified in the project area include Pacific lamprey, coho salmon, West slope cutthroat trout, rainbow and inland redband trout. HIP conservation measures would be implemented to minimize impacts to federally-listed species, which would also minimize impacts to the state special-status species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands would be disturbed. This project has been designed to avoid adverse impacts to wetlands. Reconnecting the floodplain and removing anthropogenic features reducing physical and ecological connections between the wetlands and river is expected to result in expansion of existing wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater proposed; depth of disturbance is not anticipated to draw down groundwater levels; spill prevention measures would be present on site to reduce the risk of groundwater contamination.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change to existing land use would occur. The project is on privately-owned and Washington Department of Natural Resources lands.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: New logjams structures and Bear Creek outlet would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and would not be located in a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary, small amounts of dust and vehicle emissions would be generated during construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary construction noise would be generated during local approved daylight hours.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No known soil contamination or hazardous conditions and no adjacent CERCLA sites.

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 project sponsor, MSFR, would complete the project on lands owned by those who have consented to allow the sponsor to enter their property.

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

Signed: /s/ Brenda Aguirre July 6, 2020
Brenda Aguirre, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist