

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Yankee Fork Nutrient and Eightmile Restoration

Project No.: 2008-904-00

Project Manager: Jennifer Lord, EWM-4

Location: Custer County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of Cultural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Habitat, B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes (Tribe) to implement habitat protection, restoration and improvement projects consistent with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program. Activities would include small-scale habitat protection, restoration, and improvement actions.

The proposed actions include data collection, nutrient enhancement, and Eightmile Creek restoration and would include:

- Data collection: Chemical, physical, and biological data would be collected in the Yankee Fork Salmon River watershed to quantify and assess the fish community and conditions in aquatic and linked terrestrial habitats. Data would be collected via surveys (habitat, topographic, and electrofishing), data loggers, and photopoints.
- Nutrient enhancement: To improve ecological integrity in spawning and rearing habitats, the project would place up to 1,000 Chinook salmon carcasses in mainstem habitats along the Yankee Fork Salmon River and the lower 1.5 miles stream segment of Eightmile Creek.
- Eightmile Creek Restoration: The Eightmile Creek restoration would install approximately 400 pieces of loose large wood to the stream channel, floodplain and a fish habitat/bank stabilization structure within the lower 1.4 miles of Eightmile Creek.

Trees would be placed in the stream and floodplain in a manner that would mimic natural tree recruitment processes such as streamside and avalanche recruitment. Prior to placing trees with root wads, a reasonable effort would be made to remove excessive amounts of soil from rootwads to limit the amount of sediment introduced into the stream. The intent of the project is to place the trees in the stream and then allow the trees to function in a natural manner. Therefore, none of the trees would be anchored to the stream channel or stream bank with materials such as rebar, cables, chains, or other ballast materials.

The project would install a habitat/stabilization structure composed of 17 trees and 3 boulders immediately upstream of the bridge on the Custer Motorway that crosses Eightmile Creek. Stream flows are impacting one of the abutments on this bridge and may eventually compromise the integrity of this bridge. This structure would help protect this abutment and redirect flows towards the center of the bridge.

These actions would result in long-term benefits for terrestrial and aquatic species and their habitats. Combined, these actions will improve habitat conditions for fish, specifically, these actions are designed to benefit Federally-listed Snake River Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), Snake River steelhead trout (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and cutthroat trout (*O. clarkii*), and westslope trout (*O. c. lewis*).

These actions would satisfy some of BPA's Columbia River tributary mitigation commitments begun under the 2008 NMFS' Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (as supplemented in 2010 and 2014) (2008 BiOp) and ongoing commitments under the 2019 NMFS' 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/ Israel Duran

Israel Duran
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient/CRGT

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Katey Grange</u>	<u>July 7, 2020</u>
Katey Grange	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: Yankee Fork Nutrient and Eightmile Restoration

Project Site Description

The Yankee Fork Salmon River basin of Custer County, Idaho, supports a diverse array of native resident fishes; however, past and current land management activities (i.e. intense timber harvesting, dredging, mining, unauthorized camping) have impacted areas critical to the survival of bull trout, shorthead sculpin, westslope cutthroat trout, cutthroat trout, steelhead, and Chinook.

Nutrient enhancement and data collection would occur throughout the basin on a mix of public (Salmon-Challis National Forest) and private lands.

The Eightmile Creek restoration would be completed within the Salmon-Challis National Forest on the lower 1.4 miles of Eightmile Creek, as it connects to the Yankee Fork, approximately 20 miles west of Challis, Idaho. Vegetation is composed mainly of high elevation early succession coniferous forest with alpine shrubs. The Custer Causeway and Eightmile campground are less than a mile downstream of the restoration activities. Within a several mile radius there are camping, mining, trails, other recreational activities and interests.

The reduction of large wood has had a substantial impact on physical processes in Eightmile Creek. This includes a reduction in pool quantity and quality, a loss of cover, and changes in stream substrate composition including a loss of spawning gravels. Vegetation has been recovering in these areas, but needs time to mature before natural tree recruitment levels return to pre-logging levels. This work would simultaneously address the loss of wood and the potential failure of the Custer Motorway.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No.

Explanation: Data collection and nutrient enhancement would not be groundbreaking or otherwise disturb historical or cultural resources and therefore, would result in no effect to historic properties.

On June 18, 2018, BPA and the Salmon-Challis National Forest agreed that the Salmon-Challis National Forest would be the lead federal agency for Sec 106 compliance. The Eightmile Creek activities were consulted on in 2019 by the Salmon-Challis National Forest as the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 lead. They determined that the project would not impact cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Data collection and nutrient enhancement would not change or otherwise disturb geology and soils. Additionally, the placement of large wood is not expected to affect geology and soils. However, construction of the habitat/stabilization structure would involve excavation to place structure. All excavated materials would be returned as cover and ballast for the structure. A temporary supersack coffer dam would be used to prevent sediment from entering the Eightmile Creek.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Data collection and nutrient enhancement may result in minor, temporary vegetation disturbance as personnel travel to stream sites.

The Eightmile Creek restoration project would have impacts due to placement of wood, and is expected to cause minor, temporary impacts to plants. However, there are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed or USFS sensitive plant species in the proposed action area. The actions would have no effect on sensitive plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Survey areas overlap Canada lynx and North American wolverine habitat. These listed species and their critical habitats are not present within the project area; therefore, there would be no effect on ESA-listed species or critical habitats as a result of fence repair.

BPA determined that the Eightmile Creek work would have no effect on ESA-listed wildlife species. Any impacts to non-listed wildlife species would be limited to the immediate site where there would be a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary elevated noise disturbance.

No other special status wildlife species were identified within the project areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The personnel have the potential to disturb fish as they work in and along streams to conduct surveys, download data, collect photopoints and/or distribute nutrients. There would be no long term negative impacts to fish or their habitat.

The Eightmile wood placement has been reviewed for potential impacts and has been approved for implementation (HIP# 2020069). Effects to water bodies would be minimal; limited to temporary, low level turbidity. There would be no net rise in floodplain elevations. Actions would have no effect or be classified as low to medium risk to species according to the current BPA Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) programmatic biological opinion issued by the USFWS and the National Marine Fisheries Service. In order to minimize potential impacts to fish and their habitats, all work would occur within the in-water work window, a temporary supersack coffer dam would be used to salvage fish, and the creek would be diverted around the habitat/bank stabilization structure to minimize turbidity.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the project areas.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The data collection and nutrient enhancement would not cause ground disturbance; therefore, there would be no impact to groundwater or aquifers.

The Eightmile wood replacement work may provide a minor beneficial impact to groundwater and aquifers as functionality returns to the project site.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The work would not change or affect land use or any specially designated areas and is consistent with the management of the Salmon-Challis Forest. Additionally, the project would not impact recreation, mining, or other uses/users in the area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Visual quality may be impacted by the additional travel to project sites but impacts would be local and temporary in nature.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Air quality may be impacted by the additional travel to project sites and during the Eightmile work but impacts would be local and temporary in nature.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some work activities would raise noise levels above ambient levels for short periods of time, but only during regular working hours until work is completed.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work activities.

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: Nutrient enhancement and data collection would occur throughout the Yankee Fork basin in coordination with a mix of public managers (Salmon-Challis National Forest) and private landowners. The Eightmile Creek restoration would be completed in coordination the Salmon-Challis National Forest. The proposed activities would occur according to terms and conditions for access and use of the lands.

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

Signed: /s/ Israel Duran 07/07/2020
Israel Duran, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
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