

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Pahsimeroi Valley Duck Creek and Lower Page Projects

Project No.: 2008-603-00

Project Manager: Jenny Lord, EWM-4

Location: Lemhi and Custer counties, 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: The Pahsimeroi Valley Duck Creek and Lower Page projects are both river restoration projects that would install large wood structures and logs; develop pools; create meanders; plant riparian vegetation; and narrow the channel width by the placement of sedge mats and clumps, and by installing willow clumps and post-line wicker weaves.

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 *July 15, 2020*
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: Pahsimeroi Valley Duck Creek and Lower Page projects

Project Site Description

The Pahsimeroi River Valley is a broad valley with the river and its tributaries meandering through broad riparian wetlands, willow and alder thickets, and irrigated croplands. The Pahsimeroi River has been modified by wood removal, stream channelization, removal of beaver, and agricultural and grazing, road and railway construction, large scale ranching, and irrigation water withdrawals. This resulted in gradual channel incision, faster waters, bank erosion and sediment input, and loss of floodplain interaction.

The Lower Page project site is on the Pahsimeroi River and is characterized by willow and alder communities with some mature cottonwoods. Decades of livestock grazing in the areas have eliminated recruitment of new riparian plants in the riparian corridor.

The Duck Creek project site is a 2,200 foot-long reach of a single-channel, low gradient spring creek with minimal flow. It is over-widened, shallow, and lacks habitat complexity due to past agricultural impacts. Streambanks are devoid of woody vegetation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Both projects were surveyed and consulted on with Indian tribes and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office which concluded that no historic properties would be affected (SHPO Rev Nos.: 2020-694 (Duck Creek) and 2020-688 (Lower Page)).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Heavy equipment would be used to place large wood pieces and structures which would compact and displace soils at specific sites along the streams. Impacts from construction actions would be minimized by the application of Conservation Measures (erosion control, spill prevention, etc.) from BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation. Upon project completion, the project sites would be re-contoured to facilitate the projects' increased connectivity between streams and floodplains which would increase natural sediment deposition annually at high flows and augment soil conditions for the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Native plants would be mechanically impacted by the machinery needed to install the large wood structures, but native willows and cottonwoods would be protected wherever project designs allow. The project includes extensive riparian planting and seeding of native species, and increased connection

between stream flows and floodplains with increased natural subirrigation to benefit wetland and riparian plant communities. No Federal/state special-status plant species are within the project sites.

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

Potential for Significance: No

There would be only temporary loss or adverse modification of wildlife habitats, but riparian habitats would be expanded, improved, and diversified by project design and riparian plantings. The machine operations and wood placement would occur in August or September which would be after migratory birds have completed nesting and fledging. All human presence and activity associated with these actions would temporarily disturb and displace nearby wildlife, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely. No ESA-listed wildlife species occupy the project areas, but impacts to wildlife would be minimized by the application of Conservation Measures (erosion control, spill prevention, etc.) from BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Project actions would alter stream courses, install large wood structures, and create pools in existing stream courses. That is their purpose, and it improves habitat conditions for fish and aquatic species. Construction activities would temporarily disturb fish and aquatic species but the end result increases the variety and extent of aquatic habitats available.

No aquatic habitats would be adversely modified for the long term. Some aquatic invertebrates or amphibians may be displaced or killed by the short-term construction actions, but quick re-occupation of these sites by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following construction is anticipated. ESA-listed fish species may be temporarily displaced during project actions, but impacts would be minimized by the application of Conservation Measures (erosion control, spill prevention, etc.) from BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Existing wetlands would be protected as much as possible but some riparian wetlands may be impacted by project actions. The completed projects, however, would increase riparian wetland acres for the long term. Projects would increase the connectivity between the streams and surrounding floodplains, increase groundwater inputs, and improve conditions for subirrigation capable of supporting wetland habitats.

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 equipment proposed for pool excavation and wood structure installation; but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater are unlikely.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

There would be no change to land uses in the larger pastures and agricultural plots surrounding the project sites. Project designs would include fencing to preclude grazing on stream banks and riparian habitats, but the cattle-producing lands immediately surrounding the project's riparian areas would continue to be used as before.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

No prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made. All actions would result in native species growing in natural-appearing habitat conditions. There would be short-term impacts from the actions of construction equipment and vegetation removal until revegetation measures succeed in green-up.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Driving of motor vehicles and operation of construction equipment would produce emissions, but the amount would be minimal and short-term, and consistent with that produced by local grazing and agricultural activities.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Noise sources would be from trucks and operation of construction equipment. Noise would be consistent with that produced by local grazing and agricultural activities and would be short-term. These impacts would occur during daylight hours during the summer months.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Vehicle 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: N/A

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Both the Lower Page and Duck Creek projects are located on private lands and have been designed in cooperation with the private land owners. These land owners would be closely involved during implementation of these project actions and would be informed prior to activity.

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

Robert W Shull
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
CorSource Technology Group

Date: July 15, 2020