

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Red River & Newsome Creek Watershed Restoration

Project No.: 2002-072-00

Project Manager: Jennifer Lord, EWM-4

Location: Idaho County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20, Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat; B1.3 Routine maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) to perform ongoing habitat maintenance and restoration efforts in the Red River and Newsome Creek watersheds. Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These activities would also support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 Endangered Species Act consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, while also supporting 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.).

The actions proposed are as follows:

Riparian Vegetation Planting and Browse Protection Fencing

Riparian vegetation would be planted around the river corridor within a 247-acre conservation easement within the Red River watershed. Planting efforts in the Red River and Newsome Creek meadow systems have been ongoing since 2007 with the objective of providing a healthy, functioning riparian zone with stabilized stream banks, increased shade for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed salmonids and native fish, and the eventual recruitment of large woody debris to increase stream habitat complexity. The Red River and Newsome Creek reaches are designated final critical habitat for steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), and important habitat for Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), coho salmon (*O. kisutch*), mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*), cutthroat trout (*O. clarkii*), and other resident fish species.

All plants would be eight-gallon container nursery stock with the seed collected from the Red River watershed. The following native riparian species may be planted:

- Quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*)
- Black cottonwood (*P. section Aigeiros*)
- Thinleaf alder (*Alnus incana*)
- Douglas hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*)

- Bebb willow (*Salix bebbiana*)
- Sandbar willow (*S. exigua*)
- Geyer willow (*S. geyeriana*)
- Serviceberry (*Amelanchier*)
- Woods rose (*Rosa woodsia*)
- Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*)

The meadow would be accessed via existing trails using a light-duty pickup truck or utility terrain vehicle with a utility trailer. Due to the large plant sizes, small heavy equipment, such as a mini-excavator with an 18-inch auger bit or similar piece of equipment and a handheld power auger would be required. Each planting hole would be approximately 2.5 to 3 feet deep, with soil backfilled around the base of the plant. Implementation would occur in September during the driest part of the year. Follow-up inspections would be performed to assess the establishment of vegetation in the project area. Any weed infestations encountered would be dealt with by manual methods such as hand pulling or machete. Vegetation would be re-planted in areas where plants did not survive or were washed out with high flows.

Browse protection fencing would be installed around new plants to protect mainstem Red River habitat. This fencing would consist of either poly-mesh or cattle panel rolled into a circle and wrapped around the plant(s), then secured using metal T-posts driven into the ground with a post pounder.

Plant Maintenance

The NPT would perform plant maintenance in areas of the Red River and Newsome Creek watersheds that have previously undergone riparian planting. This would be carried out by hand using pruners and/or clippers. No mechanized equipment would be used. Sites would be reached via walking or all-terrain vehicle.

Fence Repair

Two miles of fence along Red River that was constructed in 2008 would be thoroughly inspected by the NPT for loose or weakened posts and for bent and/or compromised barbed wire, and subsequently repaired as needed. The fence protects approximately four miles of streambank and 246 acres of riparian habitat. Fence repairs would include the in-kind replacement of fence posts and wire where identified as being needed during inspections. No new fence posts would be installed.

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/ Thomas DeLorenzo
Thomas DeLorenzo

Concur:

<u>/s/ Katey C. Grange</u>	<u>August 5, 2021</u>
Katey C. 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: Red River & Newsome Creek Watershed Restoration

Project Site Description

The project would occur in riparian and meadow areas within the Red River and Newsome Creek watersheds in the Clearwater subbasin. The Newsome Creek project area is located approximately 10 miles north-northwest of Elk City, ID on U.S. Forest Service managed land in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest, an area of about 58 acres.

The Red River project area is located approximately five miles southeast of Elk City, ID. The planting effort would be concentrated in the Lower Red River Meadow conservation easement area between the mouth of Siegel Creek and just north of the mouth of Cole Creek on private land with a conservation easement surrounded by the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest. The fence in need of repair is located along the east bank of Red River, approximately 3.3 miles north-northeast of Little Moose Creek, on privately-owned land. Emergent wetlands occur intermittently along the fencing. The area is at an elevation of 4,200 feet and has a variety of high mountain meadow grasses. Lodgepole pine trees are on higher ground on the edges of the meadow. Some hawthorn trees are also present in the project area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) for yearly planting and annual fence maintenance at the Red River Meadows site and vegetation maintenance in former planting areas on June 9, 2021 (BPA CR Project No. ID 2021 031). Consulting parties were the NPT and Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). ID SHPO provided a letter concurring with BPA's determination of No Historic Properties Affected on June 23, 2021. The consultation period ended on July 9, 2021 with no other comments received.

BPA designated the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) as the lead federal agency for Section 106 of the NHPA for the Newsome Creek plant maintenance portion of the project, as the Newsome Creek plant maintenance area lies within the Nez Perce National Forest. BPA received a Determination of Eligibility and Effect letter from the USFS on May 21, 2021. The USFS determined there would be no potential to cause effects on historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Plant maintenance and fence repair would not involve ground-disturbing activities; thus, there is no potential to affect geology or soils. Installation of browse protection fencing would not require excavation. Stakes driven into the ground to a depth of 8 to 12 inches would not have an effect on existing soil conditions. There would be a temporary increase

in soil displacement during planting activities. The depth of soil disturbance would not exceed three feet. Planting holes would be backfilled, then foot tamped, and watered to minimize erosion potential.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ESA-listed or U.S. Forest Service (USFS)-designated sensitive plant species in the project area. Work would occur outside of sensitive timeframes for plants (spring and early summer). The existing plant community is composed mainly of sedges and grasses, which recover from disturbance quickly (within the next growing season). These plants would be subject to short-term impacts as a result of excavation equipment disturbing the soil. Impacts would be limited to the immediate area of excavation, and the project would have long-term benefits to riparian plant communities due to an increase in habitat complexity.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area overlaps ESA-listed Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) habitat. These species and their critical habitat are not present within the project area; therefore, there would be no effect on ESA-listed species or critical habitats. Work would also occur outside of sensitive timeframes such as elk calving (which is finished by mid-June). Wildlife present on the worksites may be disturbed by human presence (sound, movement, shadows). These disturbances would be temporary, localized, and minor and cause no lasting impact to the wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Steelhead, bull trout, Chinook salmon, and coho salmon are present in the Red River and Newsome Creek. No in-stream work is proposed; therefore, the project would have no effect on listed species or critical habitats.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: While the proposed fence repair would occur in an area where freshwater emergent wetlands are intermittently present, all repairs would occur within the existing fence footprint and would not impact any wetlands. Freshwater emergent wetland depressions within the Red River meadow planting area would be avoided during planting activities and would have no impact on wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater proposed. Therefore, there would be no impact on groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing land use would not change as a result of this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no adverse effects to the visual quality of the environment as a result of this project.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of emissions associated with increased vehicular traffic would occur during project activities. There would be no significant changes to air quality as a result of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The noise generated by project implementation would not substantially impact the surrounding environment. Noise from human presence and machinery would be minor, temporary, and localized to the work areas.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety.

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 NPT has coordinated and would continue to coordinate with private landowners via a representative who relays all information to the landowner. Coordination with private landowners for actions occurring on USFS-managed land would be carried out by USFS staff working in concert with the NPT representative.

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

Signed: /s/ Thomas DeLorenzo August 5, 2021
Thomas DeLorenzo, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist