

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Hungry Horse Mitigation Habitat Restoration and Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation Project

Project No.: 1991-019-03

Project Manager: Cecilia Brown, EWM-4

Location: Flathead and Lake Counties, Montana

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 continue funding the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to implement resident fish habitat restoration and water quality monitoring activities in northwestern Montana as mitigation for the effects of the Hungry Horse Dam. These habitat restoration and monitoring efforts make up about one half of the activities in the Hungry Horse Mitigation Habitat Restoration and Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation Project.

This categorical exclusion covers the following proposed habitat restoration, public access, information management, and water quality monitoring activities on state and privately-owned lands:

Habitat Restoration - Maintain vegetation (repair deer exclusion fencing and replace dead trees and shrubs) that was previously planted in riparian corridors associated with two conservation easements (Louden and Diamond B), one fish conservation area (Foy's Bend), and one MFWP wildlife management area (North Shore). The lands are located along the Flathead River and north of Flathead Lake. Work would occur in summer/fall.

Conventionally till within the footprint of existing agricultural areas (30 acres) at North Shore Wildlife Management Area (WMA) followed by seeding of dense, native grass cover and planting of ponderosa pine and other woody vegetation. Plantings would occur during the spring.

Control noxious weeds at 9 fish conservation areas (FCA) to secure and protect key fisheries habitats by limiting the spread of existing knapweed, thistle, leafy spurge, toadflax, hounds tongue, tansy, and other undesirable plant species while reducing their overall abundance. Herbicides would be applied using backpack or ATV mounted sprayers by licensed applicators. Timing of applications would depend on weather conditions and would occur during the spring and fall. The select sites include: Osprey View FCA, 10 acres (ac); North Shore Wildlife Management Area, 20 ac; Squeezer Creek Conservation Easement (CE), 40

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: Hungry Horse Mitigation Habitat Restoration and Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation Project

Project Site Description

The project area encompasses several thousand acres located between Kalispell, Montana and Glacier National Park to the east, and between the United States/Canadian border and Ravalli, Montana to the south. The entire area is within the headwaters of the Flathead Subbasin (Northwest Power Conservation Council Subbasin). The project area consists of mountainous terrain. Elevations range from 2,000 to 7,000 feet. Precipitation ranges from 18 to 100 plus inches and mostly arrives in the autumn, winter, and spring as snow. Summers tend to be dry. Vegetation consists of grass-dominated valley bottoms, forested hillslopes, and forest-shrub alpine meadows. Waters in the project area drain into Flathead Lake and include the mainstem Flathead River; the North, Middle, and South Fork Flathead Rivers, and Swan River. Hungry Horse Dam is located on the South Fork Flathead River, about five miles upstream from its confluence with the Flathead River. Lands in the project area are managed by the U.S. Forest Service – Flathead National Forest, National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, State of Montana, and private timber companies and other private land owners.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new ground-disturbing activities; no potential for proposed actions to affect cultural resources or historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minimal soil disturbance would occur; 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 species present. Grasses and shrubs (mostly non-native or invasive species) would be removed or disturbed within approximately 275 acres of previously managed riparian areas. Disturbed areas would be revegetated with native species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Grizzly bear and Canada lynx could possibly be in area. Projects sites occur within or adjacent to areas known to support seasonal usage by grizzly bear and Canada lynx. Vegetation that would be removed would not have the characteristics needed to support foraging or denning habitat. No habitats would be modified to any degree that might permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from project operations. 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.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minimal water body disturbance would occur; water sampling via boat would follow state boating standards. Minimal floodplain disturbance would occur; erosion control measures and revegetation would be implemented to minimize impacts. Bull trout and bull trout critical habitat occur in the project area. MFWP conducts annual coordination with the USFWS under their ESA Section 6 Cooperative Agreement (Blanket Permit PRT-704930) for authorized activities in support of bull trout recovery and received approval from the USFWS for all proposed activities that are likely to occur within areas occupied by bull trout. The USFWS deems these work activities as support for the recovery of bull trout. Proposed activities are not expected to impact bull trout critical habitat.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands are not present in project areas.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater proposed; maximum depth of planting or tilling would be about 3 feet; spill prevention measures would be present on site, and state boating standards would be followed while collecting water samples.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new agricultural land proposed to be removed from potential production; all work would occur in existing conservation areas and areas designated for recreational boating.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed activities would be visually consistent with the existing scenery and activities.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Small amount of dust and vehicle emissions due to habitat restoration and water quality monitoring activities.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary vehicle noise during daylight hours would be consistent with existing noise levels.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed activities are not considered hazardous nor would they result in a health or safety risk to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions as a result of the proposed 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: Coordination occurred with private land owners regarding access to conservation easements for proposed activities.

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 June 8, 2021
Brenda Aguirre, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist