Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Dalton Lake Restoration Project

Project No.: 2010-004-00

Project Manager: Anne Creason, EWL -4

Location: Columbia County, OR

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: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce (CREST) to implement a channel reconnection project on State-owned land in Columbia County, Oregon. The project aims to reconnect an historical floodplain wetland/lake to the lower Columbia River Estuary and to improve juvenile salmon access to backwater habitat for feeding and rearing during outmigration.

The primary objective of the project is to remove a concrete water control structure (WCS) and associated pipes and earthen berm that currently block fish passage between the Columbia River and Dalton Lake. The outlet channel would be slightly widened above and below the existing WCS and large wood would be anchored in the channel to provide habitat complexity. A 65-foot railcar bridge would be constructed where the WCS is now to maintain trail access for recreation, maintenance, and emergency services. Upstream of the channel work and outside of the outlet channel, a 0.4-acre area currently dominated by reed canarygrass would be scraped down 1.5 ft to remove the invasive grass and would be subsequently replanted with natives. Excavated material from the channel and marshplain-lowering areas would be deposited onsite well above Ordinary High Water (OHW; 17.4 ft NAVD88) on top of upland vegetation currently dominated by non-native blackberry.

Due to local stakeholder concerns regarding the longevity of beaver dams within the channel and possible reductions in lake water levels if beaver were to abandon the site, there would be an adaptive management plan to maintain existing water surface elevations in Dalton Lake. This plan would only be implemented if the existing beaver dams are washed out or otherwise lost and beavers do not seem likely to rebuild the beaver dams. The strategy would involve installing wooden grade control structures that are intended to mimic the function of the existing beaver dams. If implemented, five log structures would be installed within a longitudinal span of approximately 100 feet, straddling the location of the two primary beaver dams.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These proposed activities also fulfill commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp), 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.).

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/ Shawn Skinner
Shawn Skinner
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel *June 8, 2022*
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: Dalton Lake Restoration Project

Project Site Description

Dalton Lake is located approximately thirty miles northwest of Portland between St. Helens and Columbia City and is bordered by the Columbia River and Rutherford Parkway. The site is directly adjacent to the Columbia River and currently subject to extreme flow events and the spring freshet flood, and this project would not increase or decrease flood inundation extents. The project site is a floodplain backswamp lake bounded to the east by a natural levee running along the Columbia River and to the west by the valley wall.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no historic properties affected on May 3, 2022, (OR 2021 186) and recommended that an archaeological monitor be present for the marshplain-lowering work. BPA consulted with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the Oregon Department of Transportation, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. Concurrence was received from the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (June 6, 2022) and the Oregon Department of Transportation (June 6, 2022). BPA did not receive concurrence from any of the other consulting parties within 30 days.

Notes:

- In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, work would be stopped immediately and a BPA Archaeologist and Historian would be notified, as well as consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary, minor impacts to soil may occur from potential increased erosion during construction and grading activities. Sediment control Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Work area would be isolated to prevent increased levels of erosion or turbidity.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status plant species are known to be present. Disturbance of plants in the project area would largely occur to non-native plants. There would be a long-term benefit by restoring the project area to a more natural condition through the treatment of invasive plants and replanting with native palnts.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status wildlife species are known to be present. Minor, short-term disturbance to local wildlife would occur due to noise associated with construction and human presence. There would be long-term benefits by restoring the project area to a more natural condition; restoring habitat for local wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish in proximity to the project area include coho, Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout. Pacific lamprey (State sensitive species) may be present in the Columbia River; which is adjacent to the project area. The project was reviewed and consulted on under the HIP Biological Opinion under Section 7 of the ESA. The project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval, including turbidity monitoring requirements and in-water work timing. The new bridge and channel widening would be constructed “in the dry” and the work area would be isolated to prevent increased levels of erosion or turbidity. After construction is complete, when rainfall or surface flow first enters onto newly disturbed soil in the project area, turbidity in Dalton Lake or the outlet channel could be temporarily elevated.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Most of the proposed work would take place within waters and wetlands, with the exception of staging and fill placement, but these areas would be restored following construction. Wetland quality would improve due to the restoration of natural flow patterns and the replacement of invasive species with native plants.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Groundwater levels typically remain high until August, so excavation of the channel/berm and wetland scrapedown would happen as late in the work window as feasible. There would be some miniscule potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills from the equipment used for construction, but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater is unlikely.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to project actions. There would be no land use changes, and no impact to specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually-prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made. WCS replacement would not change the visual character of the landscape along, or as seen from, local roads.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any increase in emissions from vehicles accessing the project site would be very minor and short term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some noise impacts from the heavy equipment used for bridge construction, but this would be very minor and short term.

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: The project area is within the Dalton Lake Nature Preserve. The Preserve is co-managed by the City of St. Helens and the Dalton Lake Nature Preserve Advisory Committee for conservation and recreation, within the easement constraints of the landowner, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). Dalton Lake has been maintained by the St. Helens Parks and Trails Commission, the City of St. Helens, and ODOT in a cooperative management agreement since 2009. The entire project area is on land owned by ODOT.

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

Signed: */s/ Shawn Skinner* *June 8, 2022*
Shawn Skinner, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist