

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Lapwai Creek Reach 14 Floodplain Restoration Project Repairs

Project Manager: Jennifer Lord, EWM-4

Location: Nez Perce County, Idaho

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 Nez Perce Tribe to conduct floodplain restoration repairs and revegetation efforts on a Lapwai Creek restoration project on the Nez Perce Reservation in Nez Perce County, Idaho to benefit Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Snake River Basin steelhead. The project would be located within a right-of-way held by Idaho Transportation Department for highway US-95. A restoration project was previously implemented at the site in 2018. During spring high-flow events of 2019 and 2020, the project site experienced extensive lateral channel migration and incision along an approximately 600-foot-long section of newly constructed stream channel. The repair work would include removal of invasive weeds, correction of the channel alignment and stream profile, habitat structure placement to improve complexity, and revegetation of those portions of the project site that experienced low survival from 2018 plantings.

Key features of the restored condition include:

- A single-thread channel with an average slope of 3.3 percent, average width of 25 feet, and average depth of 3 feet.
- Five rock weirs constructed with large boulders that would function as grade control in a step-pool channel morphology.
- Six in-channel wood structures to provide complex habitat and also support the step-pool channel morphology. In some cases, the structures would also incorporate habitat boulders for additional channel complexity and structure ballast.
- Wood structures would also be placed outside the ordinary high water mark of the channel to add roughness in the floodplain.

To minimize disturbance to fish, construction would occur in dry conditions. Fish would be salvaged and relocated upstream and/or downstream of the construction zone. A temporary bypass channel approximately 18 feet wide and 2 feet deep would be constructed to divert water around the construction work zone. When construction of the proposed channel is completed, water would be slowly metered into it until it is carrying the full channel flow and the bypass channel would be backfilled and blended into the natural floodplain topography.

The project would be accessed via the existing US 95 highway. Vehicle staging and refueling would occur in an existing vehicle pullout on the shoulder of the highway. Construction equipment would include track-mounted excavators to shape both the proposed channel and bypass channel

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: Lapwai Creek Reach 14 Floodplain Restoration Project Repairs

Project Site Description

Lapwai Creek's watershed originates at Mason Butte, approximately 9 miles south of the project site. From Mason Butte, the river flows north through various farmlands and the town of Winchester, Idaho before entering the US 95 corridor, paralleling the roadway. Through the highway corridor, Lapwai Creek drains the highway as well as the adjacent hillslopes. The existing project reach lacks instream and floodplain large woody material. A few pieces of wood material placed during the 2018 restoration project remain and those pieces remaining on site are perched above seasonal average flows due to the channel migration and incision. Much of the floodplain vegetation planted during the 2018 restoration project has either eroded during peak runoff events or has not successfully been established. Few pockets of grasses and native woody shrubs have established near the edge of the current channel.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: As this project is located within the bounds of the Area of Potential Effect of a previously implemented project located on the Nez Perce Reservation, BPA consulted with the Nez Perce Tribe Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) on May 10, 2022, (ID 2021 016) to ensure no concerns had arisen since initial consultation and determination of *no historic properties affected* in 2018 (ID 2018 008). BPA received concurrence via email from the THPO on July 13, 2022. In the event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during implementation, work would be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary impact to soil from increased erosion potential during construction. Sediment control BMPs would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Post-construction seeding and revegetation would minimize long-term erosion potential.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or ESA-listed plant species are known to be present and no vegetation would be removed by project activities. Very little vegetation exists within the project site due to past channel scouring, and post-construction seeding and planting would re-establish native riparian plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or ESA-listed wildlife species are documented in or adjacent to the project area and no critical habitat is present. Local wildlife may be temporarily disturbed or displaced by construction noise but the highway adjacent to the project site is an on-going source of noise and wildlife disturbance. It is possible that species may avoid the area during construction but would likely return once project work is complete.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: In-stream work is scheduled to occur between August 1-October 31, 2022. ESA-listed Snake River Basin steelhead occur in Lapwai Creek. Fish salvage and in-stream work area isolation measures would be utilized to minimize construction-related turbidity. Avoidance and minimization measures would be identified in the project Sponsor's Clean Water Act Section 404 Nationwide, further reducing impact to waterways. The project is covered under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion under Section 7 of ESA with Project Notification Form number 2022029. The project would result in long-term improvement to fish habitat in the Lapwai Creek basin.

Notes:

- Project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval.
- The Project sponsor would adhere to all avoidance and minimization efforts identified in the Clean Water Act permit issued for this project.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not take place within or around wetlands, and therefore, there would be no potential to affect wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impact expected because the stream bed would be isolated from stream flow during construction. No long-term change to groundwater recharge potential.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary, negligible disruption to road access and use during construction. An existing highway pullout would be used for staging materials and equipment during construction and would be temporarily unavailable for normal vehicle use. There would be no long-term change to land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is not in a visually sensitive area and 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: Temporary increase in vehicle emissions and dust during construction. No long-term impacts to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in noise during daytime construction activities due to vehicles and equipment use. No long-term impact to noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed project actions do not adversely impact human health and safety. Operational activities would follow applicable health and safety standards.

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, including access and staging, is completely within the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD)'s right-of-way. The Nez Perce Tribe has coordinated with ITD to confirm the design and implementation of the project would be acceptable.

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

Signed: /s/ Carolyn A. Sharp July 25, 2022
Carolyn A. Sharp, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist