

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Saddle Mountain Property Acquisition and Stewardship Funding

Project No.: 2002-003-00; BPA-012841

Project Manager: Cecilia Brown – EWM-4

Location: Lake County, Montana

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.25 Real property transfers for cultural resources protection, habitat preservation, and wildlife management

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA is proposing to fund the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) to purchase the Saddle Mountain property, a 40-acre parcel of land located roughly 3.75 miles northwest of Arlee in Lake County, Montana. BPA would hold a conservation easement to permanently protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitat. BPA would also provide stewardship funds toward land management and maintenance of the property to CSKT.

Funding the purchase of the property would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for the effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System on fish and wildlife in the mainstem of the Columbia River and its tributaries pursuant to the Pacific Northwest Electric Power and Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (the Northwest Power Act) (16 U.S.C. (USC) 839 et seq.).

The property consists of roughly 2,000 feet of the Jocko River along with a band of riparian wetland and forest along its banks, in addition to 24 acres of upland shrub and grassland. CSKT would develop a land management plan to guide the protection and enhancement of habitat and other resources on the property. The land management plan would be drafted within 18 months of closing. The management plan would be reviewed by BPA for consistency with the conservation easement and the purpose of the acquisition. If BPA proposes to fund any additional activities on the property, further environmental review may be conducted.

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

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel September 16, 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.

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Project Site Description

The Saddle Mountain property is located in Lake County, Montana, roughly 3.75 miles northwest of Arlee. The total size of the property is 40 acres and the legal description is a portion of Township 17 N, Range 10 W, Section 27. The Jocko River, a tributary to the Flathead River, runs south to north through the center of the property and provides habitat for numerous resident fish species including westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*) and Endangered Species Act-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*). A band of riparian forest and wetland runs along the river, providing shade and habitat for resident wildlife. These forests and wetlands occupy roughly 16 acres of the property. The remaining 24 acres of the property are shrub and grassland and have been heavily impacted by historical agriculture and cattle grazing, with little vegetative complexity or wildlife habitat present.

In addition to the property, the landowner would grant an access easement across the neighboring property to allow for access to the Saddle Mountain property by CSKT personnel. The easement would allow access from Valley Creek Road, the nearest public highway, located to the northwest of the property. The easement would run along a private drive, Schall Lane, to the western border of the Saddle Mountain property.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no effect due to the land acquisition, which includes transfer of title and the creation of a conservation easement. To the extent that future activities on the property may have an effect, it is expected that the CSKT would comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: See explanation for #1 above.

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: Notification letters would be sent to adjacent landowners and other interested parties a minimum of 15 days before the closing date of the sale. Notice would also be posted in local newspapers and information about the sale would be posted on BPA's public website prior to closing.

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 September 16, 2022
Thomas DeLorenzo, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist