

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: South Tongue Point Restoration Project

Project No.: 2010-004-00

Project Manager: Anne Creason, EWL - 4

Location: Clatsop 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 tidal wetland restoration project on public and state-owned land in Clatsop County, Oregon. The project aims to increase connectivity between the project site and the mainstem Columbia River for improved salmonid access, and to increase the area of off-channel habitat by expanding the total area of tidal and seasonal inundation within the project site. The project site is located in a reach of the lower Columbia River estuary that historically provided expansive and diverse rearing habitat opportunities for ESA-listed and threatened juvenile salmonids.

The South Tongue Point Restoration project would re-establish shallow water and floodplain habitat at a site buried in dredge material sands. Originally part of the Columbia River, the site was transformed in the late 1940s and 1950s into higher elevation riparian and upland forested areas. The restoration project would excavate tidal channel networks to provide off-channel foraging and refuge habitat for out-migrating juvenile salmonids. Approximately 19 acres would be excavated and transformed back into tidally accessible floodplain habitat. This would be done through the creation of tidal channel networks, flow-through channels, and scrapedown areas. Installation of large wood would be used to enhance habitat for juvenile salmonids by providing shade and cover, and contributions to food sources.

Additional work would include mechanically removing the trees and shrubs that are in the proposed channel footprints and within the disposal pile areas. Some of these trees would be retained on site for habitat enhancement but some would also be off-hauled. Tree branches, tree tops, and shrubs would be masticated into a wood mulch that could be used as a soil amendment to try and boost productivity from the nutrient-poor dredge sand. The project site would be revegetated upon completion of the project with native seeding and plantings.

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:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>November 15, 2022</u>
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: South Tongue Point Restoration Project

Project Site Description

The site covers an area of approximately 102 acres and is located within Clatsop County, Oregon, along the tidally dominated portion of the lower Columbia River Estuary at Columbia River Mile 18. The waterway riverward of the site is referred to as the John Day Channel of the Columbia River, which was dredged following WWII to establish a protected embayment for post-war storage of naval vessels; this dredge fill was then placed at the project site. A predominantly overgrown and currently unused railroad is located along an elevated embankment bordering the western side of the site. Other habitat areas at the site include the eastern shoreline fringe and southern wetland complex. These habitat areas are lower in elevation than the interior of the site, which allows for some existing intertidal habitats including establishment of small channels and ponded areas further supported by beaver activity.

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 October 7, 2022 (OR 2022 096). BPA consulted with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, the Oregon Department of State Lands, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. Concurrence was received from the Oregon Department of State Lands (October 12, 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. The project disturbance footprint and heavy equipment access during construction activities would be minimized to reduce compaction of existing site surface soils. 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. The 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: There are no known Federal/state special-status plant species in the project area. Disturbance 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 replacement of invasive plants with native plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term disturbance to local wildlife would occur due to noise associated with construction and human presence. Bald eagles are known to occur throughout the estuary and likely use the project area for nesting, roosting, and foraging. Biological surveys documented one bald eagle nest within the project area. Short-term impacts to individuals and/or potentially occupied nests would be avoided, minimized, or mitigated through adherence to measures developed in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and described in a short-term eagle incidental take permit. CREST would obtain this permit prior to project implementation. There would be long-term benefits by restoring the project area to a more natural condition; including 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, chum, 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. After construction is complete, when rainfall or surface flow first enters onto newly disturbed soil in the project area, turbidity in South Tongue Point or the outlet channels 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: 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: Some changes in vegetation and the associated visual quality would occur in the immediate project area, but the restoration project would be returning the area to a more natural state and would be consistent with the visual quality of the surrounding area. There would be a long-term improvement in the visual quality of the area due to the restoration of a more native plant and animal habitat condition.

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 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 majority of the site property ownership is by Clatsop Community College, with the eastern shoreline fringe below the ordinary high water line owned by Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL). Clatsop Community College intends to manage its portion of the site ownership for future educational opportunities and restoration vegetation maintenance actions. CREST would be responsible for coordinating with adjacent landowners prior to initiating work.

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

Shawn Skinner
Environmental Protection Specialist

November 15, 2022

Date