Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Green Valley Ranch Fish Passage and Habitat Restoration

Project No.: 1992-026-01

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser, EWL- 4

Location: Wallowa County, Oregon

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 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to restore fish passage, channel complexity, and riparian habitat on a reach of the Wallowa River. Proposed actions involve removal of an irrigation diversion, channel re-alignment and roughening, irrigation system consolidation, installation of habitat structures, and riparian vegetation management. The proposed restoration would improve river and floodplain conditions, reduce impingement risk to fish, and provide access to spawning habitat for ESA-listed species, including spring and summer Chinook salmon, steelhead, coho salmon, bull trout and potentially sockeye salmon. The project would also benefit Pacific lamprey. Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp) and 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.).

Specifically, the project would include the following activities:

- Irrigation Diversion Removal: A makeshift diversion structure constructed of posts, railroad ties, traps and debris that spans the existing side channel would be removed. An excavator would be used to remove diversion materials. Materials unsuitable for reuse would be disposed of off-site.

- Channel Re-alignment and Roughening: Approximately 120 feet of channel and floodplain would be graded with an excavator to realign flow paths following the diversion removal. A center-channel thalweg would be constructed to accommodate low-flow and maintain year-round passage. Channel habitat would be restored through roughening using a variety of cobbles, boulders and other suitable streambed materials. Channel elevation would not increase or decrease more than 3 feet. Excavated materials would be used for backfill or other project components.

- Irrigation System Consolidation: During channel realignment a gravity fed irrigation ditch would be graded up to the existing irrigation ditch and fish screen. The existing rotating drum screen and existing fish return would remain in place and the existing irrigation pump would be relocated downstream of an existing rotating drum screen. A headgate would be installed at the point of diversion to control flow rates entering the irrigation system. An excavator and other mechanical tools would be used for removal and installation actions.

- Habitat Structures: A collection of large woody material (LWM) structures would be installed throughout the channel and floodplain. Single logs would be placed within the side channel to create floodplain roughness. A series of multi-log rootwads would be installed in the bank to create in-stream habitat. Materials would be locally sourced, transported, and stockpiled at the project site. An excavator would be used to trench or pit the streambed and floodplain; the wood structures would be embedded; and excavated material would be used to ballast the structures in position.

- Vegetation Management: During construction, mature trees would be avoided; invasive species would be manually removed and disposed of off-site, and salvageable vegetation within the project area would be replanted. Following construction, all surfaces would be graded to restore staging areas and access route to pre-existing conditions. All disturbed areas would be seeded with native grasses and mulched to prevent invasive species encroachment. Locally sourced birch, alders, and willow stacks would be planted through the project site using hand tools and heavy equipment when necessary.

The project would occur during the in-water work window (July 15th – Aug 15th). Temporary access routes, stockpiling, staging, and a refueling locations with appropriate conservation measures would be establish and restored post construction. Fences and culverts within the project area may also be restored or placed is damaged during construction.

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/ Lindsey Arotin
Lindsey Arotin
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

KATEY GRANGE

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Katey C. Grange
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: **Green Valley Ranch Fish Passage and Habitat Restoration**

Project Site Description

The Green Valley Ranch Fish Passage Restoration would occur on the mainstem of the Wallowa River, approximately 2 miles southeast of Enterprise, in Wallowa County, Oregon. The project site sits at the base of the Wallowa Mountain on about 11 acres of private land and includes a portion of the river's mainstem, a braided side channel, floodplain, an existing irrigation pumping station, and diversion structure. The land and the surrounding area has been primarily used for agriculture that has left the land and waterways ecologically degraded. The waterway consists of gravel, cobbles and boulders, and large woody material is present throughout the project reach. Vegetation is primarily reed canary grass with minimal riparian vegetation, and some tree cover adjacent to the floodplain.

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 of March 21, 2022 (BPA CR Project No.: OR 2021 077). BPA did not receive a response to the determination correspondence from Oregon State Historical Preservation Office, the Nez Perce Tribe, or the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation with in the 30-day consultation period.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The fish passage and restoration activities would disturb soils on the project site. Best Management Practices (BMP) have been developed to avoid or minimize temporary fine sediment impacts, increased turbidity downstream, and erosion during construction. All ground disturbance would be stabilized and monitored throughout the length of implementation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Permanent changes to the project area vegetation would occur as a result of the fish passage and restoration. According to the U.S. FWS's Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) the Spalding Catchfly, an ESA-listed threatened species, may be present in this region; no designated critical habitat is present. Project sponsors confirmed that these species have not been observed on or near the project site. Additionally, presence is unlikely due to degraded vegetation conditions and reed canary grass coverage. Therefore, there would be no effect on Spalding Catchfly or any other ESA-

listed species. During construction invasive species would be removed and native vegetation would be salvaged when possible. Disturbed areas would be revegetated with seed and native species. Overall this project would improve the riparian habitat and prevent erosion.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: According to IPaC, presence of the gray wolf (ESA listed endangered) may be possible in this region. However, according to ODFW's "Area of Known Wolf Activity" in Wallowa County, no wolf activity has been documented near the project area. Additionally, Encounters at the project site would be highly unlikely as gray wolves are nocturnal and generally avoid human populated areas. The proposed actions are not expected to affect any special-status species, and therefore a no effect determination was made. Non-listed wildlife in the project area would be disturbed by the effects of project activities, such as human presence and noise from equipment. This disturbance would be limited in duration and cause no lasting impacts to local wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Fish passage and habitat restoration construction would permanently alter the waterway and temporarily disrupt aquatic life. Impacts to ESA-listed species, including spring and summer Chinook salmon, steelhead, coho salmon, bull trout and potentially sockeye salmon would be covered under BPA's programmatic Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinion with the USFWS and NMFS. BMPs would be used to prevent soil erosion and excess sediment downstream. Work zone isolation and low flow fish passage techniques would be used; these activities would have temporary effects to the body of water and fish such as: increased turbidity, habitat disturbances, and increase in physiological stress to aquatic life. In the long term, this project would improve fish passage, reduce risk of impingement on the existing irrigation pump, and improve water quality and habitat conditions for ESA-listed and non-listed aquatic species.

ODFW obtained the following permits:

- Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permit under the Regional General Permit (RGP) 6 from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on May 26, 2022. RGP-6 is covered by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) under a CWA Section 401 Water Quality Certification for the Reissuance of Regional General Permit #6 with Modifications for Bonneville Power Administration Funded Habitat Improvement Projects – Corps No. NWP-2022-93
- Removal-Fill Permit from the Oregon Department of State and Lands (DSL) on April 4, 2023, to satisfy Oregon Statutes (ORS), Chapter 196—Columbia River Gorge; Ocean Resource Planning; Wetlands; Removal and Fill-Section 196.795-990 – Permit No.: 63740-RF
- Zone Permit from the Wallowa County Planning Department on March 8, 2022 to fulfill the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) ESA Section 7(a)(1) Conservation Action Program – Zone Permit no.: 22-11

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands are present and would be permanently impacted as result of the fish passage and habitat restoration activities. However, wetland disturbances would be minimal and involve grading to reconnect the floodplain and adding LWM to improve habitat complexity. Efforts would be made to preserve the wetlands to the greatest extent possible. No fill would be added, and staging and site access routes would avoid wetlands. If wetlands are disturbed, they would be restored to pre-construction conditions. The proposed restoration project intends to activate and reconnect historical floodplains, promote groundwater recharge, and improve river processes; all of which would expand and promote the health of existing wetland habitat

Permits: Please see section *5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish* for permit information.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbances and changes in hydrology would occur during fish passage and habitat restoration activities. This project would increase instream complexity and floodplain engagement; which would promote groundwater recharge, form hyporheic flow paths, and reconnect historical floodplain wetlands. Overall the project would benefit groundwater and increase water storage.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur as a result of the proposed fish passage and habitat restoration. The project is located on private land with an irrigation system used for agriculture. The irrigation system would be altered to reduce ecological impact, however, the landowner would maintain existing water rights and land usage.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed restoration efforts would temporarily and permanently change the landscape of the project area. Changes to the landscape due to construction vehicles or equipment would be short-term and temporary. Permanent changes such as increased riparian habitat, natural water ways, and diversion removal would overall improve visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the field site would be very minor and short term during fish passage and habitat restoration construction. Air quality would resume to normal condition immediately upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed fish passage and habitat restoration work would result in temporary increase in ambient noise due to vehicle traffic, power equipment, and human presence

during project activities. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed fish passage and channel restoration activities are not considered hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions as a result of the project.

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: ODFW in partnership with the Grande Ronde Model Watershed Council (GRMW) and Geo Engineers developed and agreed upon the proposed actions collaboratively with the landowner. Construction schedules and mobilization of heavy equipment would be coordinated with landowners.

Signed: */s/ Lindsey Arotin* *April 10, 2023*
Lindsey Arotin, ECF - 4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist