

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Wolf Bay 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 channel reconnection project on private and state-owned land in Clatsop County, Oregon. The project aims to reestablish and improve floodplain connectivity and juvenile salmonid access to wetland habitat where railroad infrastructure along the Oregon shoreline of the lower Columbia River Estuary has limited hydrologic connectivity.

Reconnecting this floodplain habitat would provide multiple new access points for out-migrating and rearing salmon traveling along the Oregon shoreline, providing access to about 43 total acres of wetland habitat. Project elements would provide immediate habitat benefit as well as enhance the longer-term trajectory of functioning tidal habitat. The work elements for this restoration project include breaching a railroad embankment in two locations, constructing two railroad bridges at the breach sites and excavating tidal channels to connect the new openings. The work would provide fish passage during all phases of the tidal cycle. All of the channel excavation material would be placed in designated areas to reduce non-native cover while improving topographic complexity and species diversity, and seeding and planting all disturbed areas with native species.

The installation of the bridges would require importing rock, installing pre-cast concrete pile abutments, pounding pilings, and installation of pre-cast concrete single span bridges. The bridges would both be about 16 feet in width and one bridge would be about 60 feet long and the other bridge would be about 35 feet long. Excavation of the railroad embankment would begin by removing the railroad track, and the top layer of rock to get to soils and materials in which bridge piles could be driven through. Once the bridge piles are all installed, the remainder of the soils would be excavated down to grade during low tides to ensure all work is being performed in the dry. Pre-cast concrete pile abutments would be installed and round scour protection rock would be placed to protect the bridge abutments and buried under 18 inches of onsite native soils. The side slopes and all disturbed soils above about 8.8 feet (excluding the railroad surface) in and around the openings would be reseeded with native grasses after completion of construction.

The openings would require minor channel excavation into the surrounding waterways beyond the opening itself to ensure ingress and egress opportunities for fish throughout the tidal cycle. For the first opening, channel excavation would be limited to matching the existing grade to connect

into Cathlamet Bay to the north and the Wolf Bay embayment to the south. The channel opening would be approximately 40 feet wide at the bottom from toe to toe. For the second opening, an 85-foot-long channel would be excavated through the new opening to connect to an existing channel network on the interior and exterior of the site. There would be approximately 23 feet of excavation required on the north side of the opening to connect into an existing channel network. Similarly, the channel would be excavated 62 feet to the south of the second opening to connect to a channel within the Wolf Bay embayment. The channel would be approximately 14 feet wide from toe to toe and taper down as it connects into the existing channel network to approximately 8 feet wide. Both connection channels would have side slopes of 3:1.

To control invasive species at the site, native material would be strategically placed in a portion of the wetlands which are currently dominated by reed canary grass. Only the native soils excavated from the openings at the railroad breaches (rock or other imported railroad fill would not be placed in these zones), as well as all of the native soils generated from each of the channel connections would be used.

Most of the proposed work would occur within waters and wetlands; only the top of the railroad prism is above existing wetland areas. The site is accessible by existing railroad infrastructure that ties into an existing roadway. It is anticipated that equipment needed for the project would include low ground pressure excavators, off road haul trucks, a bulldozer, a crane, and potentially a barge (if unable to access the site via land). Equipment and other temporary and permanent construction materials would be staged within designated areas that have been selected based primarily on elevation and within areas where impacts to native species would be minimized. Staging areas were selected to be in upland areas (above 14.5 ft NAVD88) on existing infrastructure.

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 Federal Columbia River Power System (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:

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: Wolf Bay Restoration Project

Project Site Description

The Wolf Bay project area is located at approximately River Mile (RM) 20 of the Columbia River Estuary in Clatsop County, Oregon. The project area contains a railroad track and embankments that are no longer in use. The existing conditions at the Wolf Bay site present a hydrologic barrier to salmon. The site currently has one small connection point between the interior 43 acre tidal wetland complex and the Columbia River Estuary. This existing connection is an undersized trestle bridge that presents a velocity barrier (velocities exceeding 2ft/second) to juvenile salmonids 82 percent of the time. In a 24-hour day, the site is only accessible about 3.75 hours due to velocities that exceed the bi-directional juvenile salmon fish passage threshold.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties on July 17, 2022, (OR 2022 023). BPA consulted with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the Shoalwater Bay Tribe, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. BPA did not receive a response from any of the 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. Some tree and shrub clearing would be necessary to get from the barge to the railroad, and some clearing

of vegetation may be necessary on the railroad itself where it has become overgrown. Clearing of existing vegetation would be strategically designed to minimize impacts to the maximum extent practicable to provide access. 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 plants.

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. The project area is also known as the Twilight Eagle Sanctuary, which was established in 1992 for the preservation and protection of habitat for a nesting pair of bald eagles (which are no longer 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 to restoring the project area to a more natural condition and 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, chum, 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 work area would be isolated using a set of turbidity curtains on the outside (north Columbia River side) and a set on the inside (south embayment side), in addition to a temporary bulkbag cofferdam if needed. These would be new openings in the railroad prism, so all flows would have an existing outlet at the trestle bridge located on the western edge of the site. Temporarily blocking off this area for construction activities would not result in any changes to site access for fish or existing hydrology, but would provide a means of isolating the construction activities from the adjacent waterbody/wetlands.

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. CREST would obtain all required permits prior to project implementation. Wetland quality would improve due to the restoration of natural flow patterns and the replacement of invasive species with native plants.

Notes:

- Obtain Regional General Permit #6 and Removal-Fill Permit prior to project construction

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 are 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. The railroad is not currently in use, so there would be no disruption of rail service as a result of the project.

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 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: There are several interested parties in this project and CREST has solicited feedback throughout the design, permitting and review processes. The defunct railroad line is owned by ODOT and operated by Portland & Western Railroad Inc. This project would occur on land owned by the Columbia Land Trust, North Coast Land Conservancy, and ODOT. All project actions would be coordinated with the landowners.

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 April 10, 2023
Shawn Skinner Date
Environmental Protection Specialist