

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** West Fork Little Bear Creek Instream Habitat Improvement Project

**Project Manager:** Matthew Schwartz, EWM-4

**Location:** Latah County, ID

**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 Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to implement an instream habitat improvement project on a 0.9-mile-long segment of West Fork Little Bear Creek in the Potlatch watershed. The work would benefit Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead.

Current habitat conditions include a flow-limited river segment that exhibits elevated summer water temperatures, lacks pools and thermal refugia, contains little instream woody material or other off-channel habitat, a disengaged floodplain, and limited overstory shading from riparian vegetation. The project proposes to increase habitat capacity for juvenile steelhead by placing unanchored large trees in the creek to improve habitat complexity, increase sheltered pools and sediment sorting, and improve floodplain inundation. In addition, the streambank would be stabilized with logs and vegetation.

In select locations where additional streambank stability is desired, larger cross-channel spanning structures would be constructed to deflect stress from the bank and naturally collect woody debris over time. The trees in these large wood structures would be harvested on-site by a skilled sawyer using saws and a chain/winch system to move them to the point of installation. Trees would be sized to resist mobility and would be anchored in the streambed and ballasted with native rock material. Smaller woody material would be woven into the structure to provide additional stability. An excavator would be used to create two pools near the stream bank (a total of 0.02 acres and 10 cubic yards). Large wood would be incorporated into the pool to encourage scour and distribution of fine material in the streambed. The timing of construction would occur during minimal flow periods in the late summer. Disturbed soils would be seeded with native grasses, and herbaceous and woody species would be planted to rehabilitate the riparian zone.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions would also support BPA's commitments to the State of Idaho under the 2023 Columbia River Fish Accord Extension agreement, 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/ Carolyn A. Sharp

Carolyn A. Sharp

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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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:** West Fork Little Bear Creek Instream Habitat Improvement Project

## **Project Site Description**

The project is located on private property about 12 miles west of Troy, ID. West Fork Little Bear Creek is an intermittent stream that runs dry in the late summer. It has been impacted by decades of anthropogenic influences dating back to the 1880's when mining and logging were prevalent in Idaho. Activities included construction of a railroad grade alongside and through the riparian area, straightening of the stream channel, and logging in and around the riparian area. This resulted in lack of riparian and streamside wood density, over widening and lack of shade, loss of roughness and complexity resulting in faster waters with decreased pool and resting habitat, bank erosion, sediment input, and loss of floodplain interaction. The railroad corridor has since been converted to a recreational trail, the Latah Trail, maintained and managed by Latah County. The trail comes to an end adjacent to the project site. The existing riparian condition in this reach is characterized by a younger coniferous and willow community alongside the stream corridor.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA consulted with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Spokane Tribe of Indians, and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office. ID SHPO concurrence received December 12, 2022 on BPA's determination of no historic properties affected. BPA CR #: ID 2022 005.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Soil disturbance has been minimized in the design relying on large wood and boulder placement to reengage the floodplain. Work would occur in periods of low precipitation and low to no stream flow to further minimize erosion and disturbance. Large wood structures would be located to deflect streamflows that currently cause bank erosion that threatens the Latah Trail.

### **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. Native vegetation would be salvaged during construction and then replanted, along with additional native seed, willows, and shrubs. Individual trees felled for instream wood structures would be those that are in poor health and/or do not provide existing shade or cover; mostly over 40 feet from the stream bank.

#### **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. It is likely that species would avoid the area during construction and 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: Equipment access and construction activities would take place during low flows when fish are not present and work area isolation and fish salvage is not needed. Project activities would involve some in water work to improve channel complexity and improve shade and cover for listed anadromous fish (steelhead), though flow conditions at the time of construction would be low to non-existent. The Project would comply with BPA's HIP Programmatic ESA consultation (PNF # 2023067) and would implement conservation measures that minimize risk. The project would result in long-term improvement to fish habitat in the Potlatch basin.

Notes:

- Project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval.
- Instream work would be conducted during the established work window determined by IDFG.
- IDFG would obtain a joint 404 permit from Idaho Department of Water Resources and the Army Corps of Engineers under the Clean Water Act prior to project implementation.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

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

#### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to ground water or aquifers are anticipated due to the minimal amount of ground disturbance that would not be deep enough to penetrate groundwater.

#### **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Road access to the project area would be through a former railway corridor that is now used as a recreational trail along one side of the stream, which can support small trucks and UTVs/ATVs. There may be temporary localized disruption to trail access and use during tree felling and construction (a few days to a week), but would not affect use of the remainder of the Latah Trail. Trail closures and signage to protect trail users would be coordinated through Latah County. There would be no long-term change to land use.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no adverse effects to the visual quality of the environment as a result of this project. Temporary disturbance associated with the presence of construction equipment would occur. Disturbed areas would be revegetated with native plants and look more natural in the long term.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be a temporary increase in vehicle emissions and dust during construction. No long-term impacts to air quality

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be a 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 would not adversely impact human health and safety. Operational activities would follow applicable health and safety standards. Trail closures and signage would be coordinated with Latah County to ensure public safety.

### **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: IDFG has coordinated with the private landowner to obtain their permission for the proposed activities. IDFG has also coordinated with the Latah Trail Foundation and Latah County to obtain a temporary construction easement and review project designs and plans for trail signage and temporary restrictions to public access during construction.

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 May 31, 2023  
Carolyn A. Sharp, ECF-4 Date  
Environmental Protection Specialist