

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: CTUIR Grande Ronde Basin Project Site Maintenance, Evaluation, and Vegetation Management

Project No.: 1996-083-00

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser – EWL-4

Location: Union and Wallowa Counties, 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 the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) to conduct ongoing fish and wildlife habitat improvement actions in the basin of the Grande Ronde River and its tributaries in northeastern Oregon. These actions would support the conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions would support BPA's commitments to CTUIR in the Columbia Basin Fish Accord, as amended, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for the effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System 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.).

Project actions would include the following:

Vegetation Maintenance (VM)

CTUIR would apply herbicides to control noxious and non-native weed growth at project sites totaling roughly 170 acres. Herbicide would be applied using either ATV-mounted boom sprayers or hand wands and backpacks as appropriate. CTUIR would use herbicides targeted at specific species of undesirable vegetation, including several broadleaf species that have become endemic in the area like Scotch thistle (*Onopordium acanthium*), spotted knapweed (*Centaurea stobe*), and sulfur cinquefoil (*Potentilla recta*). Work would be consistent with vegetation maintenance practices on these properties in prior years with the goal of long-term stabilization of native vegetation.

Fence Maintenance (FM)

CTUIR would conduct routine maintenance on roughly 30 miles of existing cattle exclusion fencing at past project sites. Almost all of the fencing is 3-strand barbed wire, with limited segments of wooden post-and-rail and other styles. CTUIR would conduct routine inspections of fencing

segments and repair any damage caused from wildlife, the elements, and vandalism. CTUIR would also install and remove seasonal livestock water access gaps on some management areas. Work would be limited to in-kind replacement and repair and no new fencing segments would be constructed.

Project Evaluation and Monitoring (PE)

CTUIR would monitor past project sites to ensure that project goals are being met. This monitoring would include visually inspecting past habitat projects, taking topographical surveys of channel and floodplain restoration projects, installing temperature probes to measure stream conditions, taking pictures and video of project sites to compare year-over-year conditions, and conducting visual inventories of fish, wildlife, and vegetation present at sites. Results of monitoring would help inform future habitat improvement projects throughout the Grande Ronde basin.

Project Locations

Project actions would take place on private properties on which CTUIR holds conservation easements, as well as tribally-owned properties. The names of the properties, their locations, and actions that would take place on each property are listed below.

Name	County	Midpoint Coordinates	Actions
Lookingglass Creek	Union	45.450044 N 117.523035 W	VM, PE
Rock Creek	Union	45.320236 N 118.204484 W	VM, FM, PE
Catherine Creek RM37	Union	45.216347 N 117.906223 W	VM, FM, PE
Southern Cross	Union	45.177978 N 117.812025 W	VM, FM, PE
McCoy Meadows	Union	45.263019 N 118.401333 W	VM, FM, PE
Bird Track Springs	Union	45.301464 N 118.306839 W	VM, PE
Longley Meadows	Union	45.316707 N 118.274294 W	VM
Kirby Fite	Union	45.163279 N 117.791805 W	FM, PE
Cunha Conservation Easement	Union	45.285033 N 118.403778 W	FM, PE
Dark Canyon/Meadow Creek	Union	45.284389 N 118.382782 W	FM, PE
Middle Upper Grande Ronde River	Union	45.208605 N 118.395066 W	PE
Meadow Creek	Union	45.245847 N 118.474964W	FM, PE
McDaniel Phase I and II	Wallowa	45.495215 N 117.409505 W	PE

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:

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: CTUIR Grande Ronde Basin Project Site Maintenance, Evaluation, and Vegetation Management

Project Site Description

The Grande Ronde River is one of the largest tributaries of the Snake River. The 182-mile long river drains more than 4,100 square miles across the northeastern Oregon and the southeastern Washington. The region surrounding the river is emblematic of the Blue Mountains ecoregion, with a diverse complex of mountain ranges, valleys, and high elevation plateaus crisscrossed with snowmelt-fed streams and rivers. Lower elevation areas are dominated by bunchgrass prairies and desert-like scrubland, while many mountainsides are covered by extensive alpine woodlands. The area has historically hosted considerable spawning and rearing habitat for numerous anadromous salmonid species, including ESA-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*).

Human habitation along the rivers in this region has been present for thousands of years. By the mid-nineteenth century, intensive agriculture, logging, and livestock grazing had begun to drastically affect the natural conditions of rivers the area. Stream channelization, increased irrigation withdrawals, and overgrazed riparian corridors greatly reduced the quality and quantity of habitat available for fish. Project actions would largely take place in these riparian areas and are focused on restoring the historic conditions.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed actions and determined that this undertaking is a type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties (BPA CR No. OR 2022 040). No further cultural resources review or consultation was required.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project actions would have only minor effects on geology and soils. New fence posts to replace broken and fallen fencing would potentially require soil disturbance, but CTUIR would seek to reuse existing post holes to the greatest practicable extent and any new holes would only require small, localized disturbances. Other actions would not cause any disturbances to geology and soils beyond minor disruption of the topmost layer of soil from movement of people and equipment (ATVs, trucks, etc.).

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed threatened Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) has been documented in Union and Wallowa Counties (USFWS Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool). Spalding catchfly is a small perennial herb found in dry upland prairie. Since project actions take place in wetter riparian areas, it is highly unlikely that any Spalding's catchfly would be in the area or affected by project actions and there would be no effect on Spalding's catchfly.

Oregon State-listed Greenman's desert parsley (*Lomatium greenmanii*) has been documented in Wallowa County (Oregon Department of Agriculture). However, all currently known populations are located at higher elevations in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Greenman's desert parsley, as the name suggests, is not typically found in wet riparian corridors. It is therefore unlikely that any Greenman's desert parsley would be in the area and there would be no effect on Greenman's desert parsley.

Non-listed plants would be affected by vegetation maintenance. Herbicides would be targeted at invasive and noxious weeds that are outcompeting desirable native vegetation at project sites. While this herbicide use would have short-term negative effects on vegetation in the applied areas, the long-term effects would be to remove invasive species and improve conditions for native populations of plants.

Notes:

- All herbicide use would conform to the limitations of BPA's Habitat Improvement Program programmatic biological opinion (HIP4 BiOp)(HIP PNF#2023064). Only HIP4 BiOp approved chemicals and methodologies would be used, which would limit applications and minimize herbicide drift and leeching.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) has been documented in Union and Wallowa Counties (IPaC). Project areas lie within identified wolf use areas that are monitored by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) (ODFW Wildlife Division). Grey wolves typically avoid human presence and noise like those caused by project actions. It is unlikely that any wolves present would stay in area during project work. This disturbance would be temporary and cause no long-term loss of habitat or take of wolves. Effects on grey wolves would therefore be minor and consistent with the not likely to adversely affect determination of BPA's HIP4 BiOp.

No separately listed Oregon State endangered species have been recorded on or nearby to the project sites (ODFW Wildlife Division).

Non-listed wildlife at the project sites would be temporarily disturbed by project actions, such as noise from human presence and equipment. This disturbance would be limited in scope and duration and there would be no long-term effects on wildlife.

Notes:

- All project actions would conform to the limitations of BPA's HIP4 BiOp (HIP PNF#2023064), including species-specific conservation measures for ESA-listed grey wolf.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Snake River Chinook salmon, Snake River basin steelhead trout, and bull trout are present in the Grande Ronde River and its tributaries throughout Union and Wallowa Counties (IPaC, StreamNet Mapper). No separately-listed Oregon State endangered fish species are present in the area (ODFW Wildlife Division). No project actions would take place in-water. No changes to the existing conditions of waterbodies would occur. Negative effects on fish would be limited to minor disturbance from human presence and noise. These effects would be very minor and would be not likely to adversely affect fish present in waterbodies near project sites, consistent with the determinations in BPA's HIP4 BiOp for these fish species. Project actions are aimed at protecting and restoring riparian vegetation to improve in-stream fish habitat, which would have long-term positive effects on fish and waterbodies.

Notes:

All project actions would conform to the limitations of BPA's HIP4 BiOp (HIP PNF#2023064), including species-specific conservation measures for ESA-listed fish species. No herbicide would be applied to waterbodies and only HIP4 BiOp approved chemicals and methodologies would be used, which would limit applications and minimize herbicide drift and runoff into waterbodies in order to further reduce the potential for impacts to fish from vegetation maintenance actions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are mapped wetlands located on many of the properties. Project actions would have minimal effects on these wetlands. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur. Effects on wetlands would be limited to removal of noxious and invasive vegetation in order to restore areas for colonization by native species. This would improve the quality of any wetlands present.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or groundwater use are proposed. Project actions would have no effect on local water tables.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No changes to land use are proposed. No changes to ownership or access of the properties are proposed.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Changes to visual quality would be minor. Vegetation maintenance would remove noxious and non-native species to allow for native vegetation to recolonize treated areas. These effects would be minor. In-kind fence repair would not change the visual characteristics of the fence line. No other changes to visual quality are proposed.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some exhaust generated from equipment and vehicles used for project actions. These effects would be minor, consistent with past work at these properties, and cause no long-term changes to local air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some noise generated from equipment and vehicles used for project actions. These effects would be minor, consistent with past work at these properties, and cause no long-term increases to noise in the area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All employees would use best practices to ensure human health and safety. Only herbicides from the list of approved chemicals in the HIP4 BiOp would be used to minimize any possible impacts to human health and safety from vegetation maintenance actions

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: All project sites are located on either tribally-owned land or private land upon which the Tribe holds a conservation easement. No external coordination is required.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed: <u>/s/ Thomas DeLorenzo</u>	<u>June 27, 2023</u>
Thomas DeLorenzo	Date
Environmental Protection Specialist	