Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Tamkaliks and Lostine Wetland Vegetation Management

Project No.: 2007-393-00

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser – EWL-4

Location: Wallowa, 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 Nez Perce Tribe ("the Tribe") to manage vegetation at previous habitat restoration project sites in northeastern Oregon. Funding the proposed actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with both the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, 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 (the Northwest Power Act) (16 USC (USC) 839 et seq.).

Between 2020 and 2022, the Tribe implemented two BPA-funded habitat restoration actions in Wallowa County. The first, the Tamkaliks side channel and floodplain restoration project, created a new side channel complex along River Mile 22 of the Wallowa River. The second, the Lostine wetland and side channel project, restored 28 acres of historic wetland along the banks of the Lostine River. The Tribe planted native plants to establish riparian habitat on the project sites and to revegetate areas that were disturbed by project actions.

In order to ensure that these plants are not being out-competed by invasive and undesirable vegetation, the Tribe would apply localized herbicides as needed at both project sites. Species of concern include reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Scotch thistle (*Onopordium acanthium*), spotted knapweed (*Centaurea stobe*), and sulfur cinquefoil (*Potentilla recta*). The Tribe would apply herbicides targeted at these species using backpack sprayers and wands. The total treatment area would be approximately three acres at the Tamkaliks project site and four acres at the Lostine project site.

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 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: Tamkaliks and Lostine Wetland Vegetation Management

Project Site Description

The Tamkaliks side channel and floodplain restoration project site is located at River Mile 22 of the Wallowa River east of the town of Wallowa. The project site is roughly 20 total acres along the river. Project actions were aimed at restoring historic conditions in the area, which included excavating a dozen depressions to form seasonal wetlands, placing wood jams in the river to improve fish and wildlife habitat, and creating substrate riffles in the river channel. Extensive bunches of native willow (*Salix* sp.) were planted along the banks of the river and local grass and forb seed was spread across disturbed areas following construction.

The Lostine wetland side channel complex project site is located 2 miles southeast of the town of Wallowa along the Lostine River. The project site is roughly 28 acres of private land previously used for agriculture. Project actions at the site sought to restore the heavily channelized Lostine River to historic conditions by removing bank armoring to allow for natural channel migration, excavating new multithreaded side channels for the river, and placing wood jams in the river to improve fish and wildlife habitat. Similarly to the Tamkaliks site, vegetation was planted in disturbed areas and among the new habitat features.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA cultural resources staff conducted cultural resources review and consultation for both project sites prior to initial implementation.

Background research and field surveys of the Tamkaliks project site were completed in 2018. BPA determined that the project would result in no historic properties affected. Consulting parties were the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), and the Nez Perce Tribe. Both SHPO and the Nez Perce Tribe concurred with BPA's determination (BPA CR No. OR 2017 081).

Background research and field surveys of the Lostine wetland project site were completed in late 2020. BPA determined that the project would result in no historic properties affected. Consulting parties were SHPO, CTUIR, and the Nez Perce Tribe. No responses were received (BPA CR No. OR 2019 123).

A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed herbicide applications to ensure consistency with the prior consultations and determined that the proposed herbicide applications would have no potential to affect cultural resources. No further consultation was required.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance is proposed. The extent of ground disturbance from the proposed actions would be disturbance of the top layer of soil by workers walking in the project areas. These effects would be negligible.

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

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed threatened Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) has been documented in Wallowa County (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 and as a result 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 is not typically found in wet riparian areas. It is therefore unlikely that any Greenman's desert parsley would be in the area and as a result there would be no effect on Greenman's desert parsley.

Non-listed plants would be affected by herbicide application. Herbicides would be targeted at invasive and undesirable plants that are out-competing desirable native vegetation at the 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 weeds 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#2023078). Only HIP4 BiOp approved chemicals and methodologies would be used, which would limit applications and minimize herbicide drift and leeching to minimize effects on non-target vegetation.

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 Wallowa County (IPaC). Both project sites lie within identified areas of known wolf activity 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. Any wolves at the project sites would likely leave the area to avoid workers during implementation. 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 caused by human presence. This disturbance would be limited to periods when workers are present and cause no long-term effects. Restoring native vegetation to the project sites would improve habitat for local wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are present in both the Lostine River and the Wallowa River (IPaC, StreamNet Mapper). Bull trout critical habitat is also located within these rivers at and near the project sites (IPaC). No separately-listed Oregon State endangered fish species are present in the area (ODFW Wildlife Division). No herbicide would be applied 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 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 would help restore native riparian vegetation and improve in-stream fish habitat, which would have long-term positive effects on local fish and waterbodies.

Notes:

- All herbicide use would conform to the limitations of BPA's HIP4 BiOp (HIP PNF#2023078), 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 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 both project sites (USFWS National Wetlands Inventory). Herbicide application would have minimal effects on these wetlands. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur. Effects on wetlands would be limited to the removal of undesirable vegetation to improve conditions for native wetland species. This would have the long-term effect of improving the quality of local wetlands, outweighing the short-term effects on local wetland vegetation.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or groundwater use are proposed. Herbicide application would have no effects 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 of or access to the project sites are proposed.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Changes to visual quality of the project sites would be minor. Removal of weeds would have the long-term effect of opening more area for desirable native vegetation, restoring the historical visual quality of the vegetation in the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No actions are proposed that would generate exhaust emissions beyond those generated by vehicles used to transport workers and supplies to the project site. To the extent that exhaust emissions are generated by transport, the effects would be minor and impacts to local air quality would be negligible.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No actions are proposed that would generate excessive noise beyond any generated by vehicles used to transport workers and supplies to the project site. Noise generated by herbicide spray and human presence would be negligible.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All workers would use best practices to ensure human health and 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: Both project sites are located on privately owned property. The Tribe would work with the landowners to ensure access to the project sites. All access would be along public roadways.

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

Signed: */s/ Thomas DeLorenzo* *July 31, 2023*
Thomas DeLorenzo Date
Environmental Protection Specialist