

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Latah SWCD Fry Creek Riparian Planting and Vegetation Maintenance

Project No.: 2008-604-00

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 Latah Soil and Water Conservation District (Latah SWCD) to continue implementation of the Fry Creek Riparian Planting Project located on state land where a restoration project was previously implemented by Idaho Department of Lands. Project activities would include continuing efforts to revegetate approximately 33 acres comprised of two non-contiguous parcels (upper and lower meadows). The area includes approximately 18 acres of riparian area along Fry Creek. The site would be revisited annually for five years to ensure plant survival and to control weeds.

All plants and materials would be transported to the various planting sites via 4x4 truck and/or ATV. A diverse mix of native trees, shrubs, forbs, and grasses would be planted throughout the project site to provide a variety of rooting depths for soil stability, to provide increased ground coverage to prevent weed encroachment, and to increase wildlife and pollinator habitat. Planting would be conducted by Latah SWCD field crews and would utilize hand tools such as shovels, gas-powered augers, and water-jet stingers for installation of vegetation cuttings. Temporary protective fencing would be installed around plants as needed. Riparian plantings would be focused in the stream channel to the top of the bank. Some additional caged plantings would be offset from the stream bank but would remain within the riparian corridor.

Vegetation maintenance would include selective replanting if necessary to replace mortalities in previously planted areas to support a robust, native riparian plant community. Existing plants would be maintained with mulch additions, repair or replacement of temporary protective fencing, and weed control activities to assure survival. Weed control would be limited to removal by hand or with weed eaters.

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 also support Bonneville's commitments to the State of Idaho in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as amended, 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.

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
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: Latah SWCD Fry Creek Riparian Planting and Vegetation Maintenance

Project Site Description

Proposed activities would occur on state land near Fry Creek, a tributary of the Potlatch River. The project site is an existing restoration site located approximately three miles northeast of Bovill in Latah County, Idaho. The Potlatch River watershed is part of the Palouse Prairie ecosystem of Northern Idaho and Eastern Washington. This area is comprised of loess-covered basalt plains with deeply incised canyons running off the upland regions. Riparian conditions along the creek have been affected by extensive logging, agriculture, and grazing land uses. Over forty percent of the basin is now devoted to farming and ranching. The current built environment includes roads and fences. The limiting factors for steelhead habitat within the Potlatch River basin include high water temperatures, flashy stream flows, low summer base flows, lack of complexity in stream composition, barriers to migration, and sedimentation.

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 on July 30, 2021.

Consulting parties included the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (IDSHPO), the Nez Perce Tribe, and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe. BPA received concurrence from the IDSHPO on August 19, 2021. No other responses were received as part of BPA's consultation efforts.

Notes: One potentially eligible resource is present within the APE for the Fry Creek site – 10LT282, a segment of the Potlatch Lumber Company Logging Railroad Spur line. To minimize effects to those resources, the following monitoring and minimization measures are proposed: an Inadvertent Discovery Plan (IDP) would be put in place for the duration of the project, which would outline the process to be followed in the event of a post-review discovery of cultural materials. This IDP would be distributed to personnel associated with implementation of the project.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Planting and vegetation maintenance tools would be limited to shovels or mechanized hand tools. No heavy equipment operations (e.g., bulldozers, excavators) would be used, so there would be no large-scale soil displacement, soil mixing, or other mechanical soil disturbance. Weed removal would be by mechanical means only (hand pulling and weed eating). Minor and temporary ground disturbances would occur as part of the proposed actions but would not impact the geology and soils. Proposed treatment areas have been previously disturbed by work during implementation of original restoration activities. The proposed actions would be intended to improve habitat conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal or state special-status plant species known to exist in the project area. Minor and temporary vegetation disturbances associated with site access, ground disturbance, and weed treatment would occur as part of the proposed activities but would have short-term effects on vegetation. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects from repairing fencing to keep cattle out and restored or improved vegetative conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), which is ESA-listed as Threatened, has the potential to be in the project area; however, there is no designated critical habitat in the project area and the site's elevation (below 3,000 feet) is not considered suitable habitat for foraging and reproduction (typically 4,000 feet and above). The project's potential impacts to wolverines are covered under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program Biological Opinion (HIP BiOp). Relevant HIP conservation measures pertaining to project activities would be applied. Effects would be minor and consistent with the not likely to adversely affect determination in the HIP BiOp.

There are no state special-status wildlife species or their habitats known to exist in the project area. Wildlife present during project activities may be temporarily disturbed by human presence and noise, but effects would be temporary and removed when the crews leave. Improved habitat conditions would result in long-term positive impacts, including increased riparian plant density, diversity, and habitat structure.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project's potential impacts to federally-listed species would be covered under BPA's HIP BiOp. Federally-listed Snake River Basin steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) are present in the Potlatch River watershed. There are no other federally-listed or state special-status species in the project area.

The proposed actions would take place near, but not in, any water bodies. No changes to the existing conditions of streams would occur. Short-term impacts on listed and non-listed fish in the project area would be disturbance from human presence, noise, and possible sediment runoff from the site. Conservation measures would be implemented to minimize potential effects. Project actions would improve floodplain interaction of Fry Creek in the project area and restore native riparian vegetation for the benefit of aquatic species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the hydrology within the project area, and any activities within or near wetlands would be limited to methods with little to no ground disturbance. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur. Effects on wetlands would be temporary and limited to plantings and 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.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater are proposed. No herbicide use is proposed. The proposed actions would have no impacts to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change and no impact to specially-designated areas would occur as a result of this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality and the project would be returning the area to a more natural vegetative condition.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to the air quality of the environment from dust and exhaust due to vehicle use for site access and vegetation management actions as a result of this project. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from 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 work is 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. All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker 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: Latah SWCD coordinates work on state endowment lands with the Idaho Department of Lands.

Signed:

Jacquelyn Schei, ECF - 4
Environmental Protection Specialist