

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Upper Nason Creek Aquatic Restoration Project Phase 3 - Groundwater Testing

Project No.: 2009-003-00

Project Manager: Tori Bohlen, EWU-4

Location: Chelan County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.1 Site characterization and environmental monitoring

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Yakama Nation Fisheries (YNF) to excavate groundwater test pits along Upper Nason Creek in central Washington. The information from groundwater tests would be used to inform a potential future aquatic-habitat restoration effort near the confluence of Nason and Whitepine Creeks on Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF)-managed land.

The project proposes to excavate up to 10 temporary test pits to determine groundwater elevations, flow, and volume rates. The test pits would document floodplain sediment layers and establish a network of water level loggers to track water surface elevations. The temporary test pits would measure approximately 5 feet by 12 feet (1.5 meters by 3.6 meters), with a maximum depth between 5 and 8 feet (1.5 meters and 2.5 meters). A rubber tracked excavator would be used to dig the pits, a PVC standpipe would be installed within the pits, and a Hobo water-level logger device (piezometer) would be suspended in the tubes. Once finished, the test pits would be back filled with the excavated material. Sites would be reached using existing access roads, a designated stream crossing, and driving over brush and around trees to reach the test sites. Vehicles would be parked off of the OWNF roadway on a pull-out near the Upper Nason Creek site. The project would occur in 2024 during the in-water work period, for the stream crossing, of July 1 – 31, and take four days to complete. Equipment and materials would be stored offsite when not in use.

Funding the proposed activities would support conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with both 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 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.).

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.

Brenda Aguirre
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.

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Project Site Description

The project site is located on OWNF-managed land along Nason Creek within T26N, R15E, Section 1, approximately 17 miles north-northwest of Leavenworth, Washington, at an elevation of about 2,400 feet. The project site is also about one-quarter mile south of Washington State Highway 2 and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad. The project area is characterized by northern cascade riparian vegetation such as Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), cottonwoods (*Populus balsamifera*), and willow (*Salix spp*). Land use is primarily forestry and dispersed camping.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA is the lead federal agency for Section 106 compliance under the National Historic Preservation Act for the groundwater testing planned to occur at Nason Creek Phase 3. BPA initiated Section 106 consultation with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR), Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN), and Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) on March 29, 2024, and received a response from DAHP on April 1, 2024, concurring with the Area of Potential Effects (APE); no other responses were received. A cultural resources field survey and report were subsequently completed. No cultural resources or historic properties were identified or recorded as a result of the survey or consultations. BPA sent a determination of no historic properties affected to consulting parties on May 21, 2024. DAHP concurrence was received on May 21, 2024. No comments were received from the YN or CTCR within the consultation period ending June 21, 2024.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Soil would be displaced during pit excavation. The depth of soil disturbance would not exceed 8 feet. The pits would be backfilled following standpipe piezometer installation. Soil would also be displaced during equipment crossing Nason Creek to access and leave the project site. Any potential impacts to soils at the crossing would be minimized by limiting the use of the crossing.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed or state special-status plant species in the project area. Plants in the immediate vicinity of the project area would be subject to short-term impacts as a result of trampling by vehicles used to reach the project site. This would not be expected to have long-term impacts to plant communities. At the completion of the groundwater tests, each test pit location would be filled and contoured to pre-existing conditions. To reduce impacts to plant species, large mats of topsoil would be set aside during excavation. These mats would be placed on top of the backfilled material following installation of the test pits. Vegetation that had been stripped during project implementation would be sorted for native and non-native materials. Non-native materials would be placed into the holes first, while native vegetation would be buried on top.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*), northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) and its critical habitat, and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) have the potential to occur in the project area. Any potential impacts to ESA-listed species at the Nason Creek project site would be minimized by following the measures outlined in the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS for Aquatic Restoration Activities in the States of Oregon, Washington and portions of California, Idaho and Nevada (collectively known as ARBO II). Any impacts to both listed and non-listed wildlife species at the project site would be limited to the immediate project area, where there would be a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary (over 4 days) elevated noise disturbance.

Notes:

- The YN and its contractor would adhere to all design features described in the USFS's ESA Section 7 ARBO II consultation to minimize impacts to ESA-listed species.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Nason Creek contains ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and steelhead (*O. mykiss*) and their critical habitat. No separately listed state fish species have been recorded in the project area. Any potential impacts to ESA-listed species at the Nason Creek project site would be minimized by following the measures outlined in the USFS's ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS and NMFS for Aquatic Restoration Activities in the States of Oregon, Washington and portions of California, Idaho and Nevada (ARBO II). Any impacts to both listed and non-listed fish species at the project site would be limited to the immediate project area, where there would be a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary elevated noise disturbance.

Notes:

The YN and its contractor would adhere to all design features described in the USFS's ESA Section 7 ARBO II consultation to minimize impacts to ESA-listed species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands are not present in the project areas. The proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Standpipe piezometer pits would be installed to a depth of six feet in order to measure ground water levels. Water would not be withdrawn or diverted from the system.

Notes:

- Spill prevention measures would be present on site to prevent groundwater contamination.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary displacement of dispersed camping due to excavation activities onsite would occur for 4 days. Land use would not change in the long term as a result of the proposed action.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Visual quality would not change as a result of the proposed action because after revegetation, test areas would be recontoured and match pre-project conditions.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of emissions associated with the use of excavation equipment onsite would occur for 4 days.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary noise increases associated with excavation equipment would occur.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: 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: The Nason Creek project area is on federal lands managed by the USFS, which is actively involved with the planning of the proposed action.

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

Signed:

Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist