Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: North Fork Salmon River Cole Project

Project No.: 2010-072-00

Project Manager: Eric Leitzinger, EWM-4

Location: Lemhi 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: BPA proposes to fund the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) for a fish habitat improvement project on the North Fork Salmon River. The project would use a tracked excavator to construct two 15-foot-wide floodplain channel inlets, 225 feet long and 175 feet long, and install 120 boulders (in clusters) and 23 log structures (log-jam and channel-spanning structures) within a ½ mile reach of the North Fork Salmon River to improve spawning, rearing, and overwintering habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Chinook salmon (Oncorhynchus tshawytscha) and steelhead trout (Oncorhynchus mykiss).

Site-specific work-area isolation and fish salvage would be applied to sites being excavated to install the log jam structures. This would require the redirection of stream flows away from these areas (localized sites about 100 to 150 square feet each along the river bank) during construction to effectively de-water the construction sites. This de-watering would be done following fish capture ("fish salvage") and relocation of captured fish to free-flowing portions of the stream.

The completed project area would be seeded with native grasses and forbs and planted with live willow and cottonwood stakes, and containerized plants.

The project would be completed during the July 7th through August 15th in-water work window for this reach of the North Fork of the Salmon River. The project would require approximately 2,920 feet (0.6 mile) of temporary access road and two staging areas (approximately 3,300 square feet [0.07 acre] each). Construction-area isolation and fish salvage would be conducted in one location. Riparian planting would occur in disturbance areas during the mid-October to early November fall dormant season.

This Proposed Action fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Columbia River System Biological Opinion and would support conservation of Endangered Species Act-listed species considered in the 2020 Endangered Species Act consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System.

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.

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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: North Fork Salmon River Cole Project

Project Site Description

The project is located in a narrow (about 0.25 mile wide) floodplain of the North Fork Salmon River on private land approximately 4 miles north of North Fork, Idaho. It encompasses approximately 32 acres of riparian shrub (willows and cottonwoods) and open conifer forest (Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir) used primarily for livestock grazing. Open meadows and pastures of grass and sedge cover approximately 1/3 of the project area. The project area is used primarily for pasturage and hay production.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Nez Perce Tribe, Shoshone Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation, and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on March 1, 2024, and received a concurring response from SHPO on March 12, 2024 that there would be No Adverse Effect on an agricultural waterway located within the project area. No other responses were received.

The project area was expanded and on May 16, 2024, an amended consultation was submitted to the same parties on the expanded area of potential effect (APE) and No Adverse Effect determination. The amended consultation included discussions of two previously known resources identified within the expanded APE and the agricultural waterway discussed in the March 1 consultation.

No response was received from any of the consulting parties during the 30-day regulatory response period, thus concurrence was presumed, and consultation completed.

2. Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Soils would be impacted on about 0.25 acre from excavation of the floodplain channel inlets and from the development and use of the temporary access roads and staging areas. Installation of log structures would likely disturb about 100-200 square feet of soil at each site (about 0.06 to 0.1 acre cumulatively). Best Management Practices (BMP) have been developed to avoid or minimize temporary fine sediment impacts, increased turbidity downstream, and erosion during construction. All ground disturbance would be stabilized and monitored throughout the implementation period.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vegetation would be impacted on about 0.25 of an acre from excavation of the floodplain channel inlets, the development and use of the temporary access roads and staging areas, and the operations of heavy equipment while installing the log structures. Disturbed areas would be revegetated by seeding and plantings of native species. Post-project conditions would provide for an increased diversity vegetative conditions because of increased wetting of the floodplain and the expansion of wetland conditions.

No plant species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act are present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wildlife habitat (vegetative loss) and small animals would be impacted on about 0.25 acre from excavation of the floodplain channel inlets, the development and use of the temporary access roads and staging areas, and the operations of heavy equipment while installing the log structures. Restored and expanded riparian conditions, however, would likely increase habitats for wildlife providing for an increased number and diversity of species.

There would also be disturbance of wildlife by the temporary presence and activity of humans and the use of construction equipment in the riparian habitats. This could temporarily displace them from their preferred habitats during construction (a few days within any one reach), and they would likely re-occupy the site once human activity has moved or ceased.

No wildlife species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act are present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon, Snake River steelhead, and bull trout are present in the project area. The project was reviewed and consulted on under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program programmatic Biological Opinion under Section 7 of the ESA. The project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval, including turbidity monitoring requirements and in-water work timing. No state-listed special-status species occupy the project area.

HIP conservation measures would be applied during work-area isolation and fish salvage to minimize impacts to individual fish. Fish salvage involves electro-shocking, capture, and handling of fish during their relocating. This is stressful on individual fish, but less so than stranding them without water if fish salvage and relocation were not to be conducted, and less so that from impacts from heavy turbidity if work-area isolation was not applied.

Some aquatic invertebrates and amphibians may be displaced or killed by mechanical activities at each construction site and where work areas would be dewatered, but quick re-occupation of these small sites by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following construction is anticipated.

The sediment produced from these restoration actions is not anticipated to be greater than what occurs naturally during annual, natural, high flow events, and the long-term effects of this project would be a decreased potential for unnatural sediment inputs; an increased potential of the floodplain to effectively manage its sediment loads; and a reduction of stream temperatures from improved stream form, instream habitat structure, and increased

riparian vegetative cover. In the long term, the project would benefit fish and aquatic species by improving floodplain connectivity, increased cover, and riparian shade.

A Clean Water Act Nationwide Permit 27 (NWS-2020-724) would be obtained by IDFG to ensure the project meets national water quality standards

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The North Fork Salmon River is incised in the project area and lacks floodplain interaction necessary to produce riparian wetlands, though riverine conditions dominate most of the construction areas.

The restoration activities proposed would result in minor and temporary ground disturbances within or near the in-channel wetlands, but are designed to reactivate the floodplain by encouraging interaction through the channel inlets and increasing floodplain inundation annually. As a result, the wetland areas are expected to increase by an additional 15-20 acres. Overall, the project would improve wetland function, abundance, and ecological value.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although there would be ground disturbances as a result of the project, the work is not expected to substantially effect groundwater and aquifers. Groundwater recharge and water table levels would potentially improve as a result of increased water storage throughout the floodplain. The proposed project would either have no effect or a positive effect on groundwater and water tables.

There would be no groundwater withdrawal. There would be some miniscule potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills from the equipment used for culvert replacement, but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater is unlikely.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no specially-designated areas in the project area and no change in land use would occur as a result of the proposed project. The project would not change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to project actions.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made.

Instream structures and floodplain inlet channels would not change the visual character of the landscape along, or as seen from, local roads.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some exhaust and greenhouse gas emissions from the motorized equipment used for construction actions, but these are short-term only, and no long-term source of emissions or exhaust would be created. Vehicles used to transport workers,

supplies, and equipment to the site would be another potential source of exhaust and greenhouse gases, but this also would be minimal and short term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some short-term noise impacts from the heavy equipment used for construction, but this type of noise is consistent with that of common ranching and haying operations in this farmstead and the local area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicle and excavator operation and working with hand and power tools have their attendant risks to equipment operators, but there would be no condition created from this action that would introduce new human health or safety hazards or risk into the environment. No condition created by this action would increase the burden on the local health, safety, and emergency-response infrastructure.

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 actions proposed have been planned in cooperation with private landowner, whose residence is nearby. The action would proceed following notification of the affected landowner who authorized the restoration project actions.

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

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