

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Yakama Nation's Yakima Basin Habitat Vegetation Management and Maintenance

Project No.: 1997-051-00

Project Manager: Jennifer Lord, EWU-4

Location: Kittitas and Yakima County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance; B1.20 Protection of Cultural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Yakama Nation's Yakima Basin Habitat Project to conduct ongoing vegetation management actions at multiple project sites in Kittitas and Yakima Counties in Washington.

Maintain Habitat Parcels

Maintaining habitat parcels would include vegetation management at habitat acquisitions and previously implemented restoration sites (see table below for site locations) to ensure plant survival and encourage growth through mulching of plants and invasive weed control. Noxious weed control would be carried out by mechanical (e.g., mowing, weed eater, hand-pulling) and chemical means throughout the growing season to limit seed production and reduce weed density. Native vegetation would be established through planting and seeding while weeds would be strategically controlled as needed.

Maintenance activities would include fence repairs. All fences at habitat parcels would be monitored and maintained. Work would include replacing broken posts, fixing gates, replacing broken wires, and removing fallen trees or branches from fence lines. Some habitat parcels would include maintenance of elk exclusion fencing to protect vegetation plantings.

Pott Road Crack Willow Removal

Yakama Nation would conduct ongoing vegetation management and invasive crack willow removal at the 56-acre Pott Road restoration property located adjacent to Reecer Creek in Ellensburg, Washington. Annual vegetation management activities at Pott Road could include installation and removal of weed fabric, native vegetation planting and seeding, herbicide application, and mechanical non-native plant removal.

In addition to ongoing vegetation management work, non-native crack willow removal along the streambanks would encourage the native plant community to establish and create an improved riparian buffer. Trees would be mechanically removed, and stumps painted with herbicide to prevent resprout.

Property Name	Creek Name	Parcel Number
Sampson	Yakima River Slough	18-18-19010-0014, 18-18-19010-0015, 18-18-19010-0002, 18-18-18040-005
Pott Road	Reecer / Currier Creek	18-18-34052-0001
Fortune	Naches River	171410-42404
Harris	Naches River	171409-11402, 11411;11404
Ahtanum Village	Lower Ahtanum Creek	18120343409, 18120343404, 18120343408
Easton	Yakima River	20-13-12-030-0036, 20-13-13-011-0001, 20-13-13-021-001, 20-13-12-120-300003
SF Cowiche RM 12	Cowiche Creek	161435-12001, 16143-521001, 16143411001
Ahtanum Village	Ahtanum Creek	18120343409, 18120343404, 18120343408
RagHeart	Taneum Creek	18-17-05010-0019, 18-17-05010-0019, 18-17-05010-0011, 18-17-05010-0016, 18-17-06020-0011

Table 1: Property locations.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the National Marine Fisheries (NMFS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, and is consistent with BPA's 2020 Memorandum of Understanding with the State of Washington and Bonneville's commitments to the Yakama Nation under the 2022 Columbia River Fish Accord Extension agreement, 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. 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.

Catherine Clark
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

Proposed activities would occur on Yakama Nation off-reservation fee lands, state-owned, and privately-owned lands within the Yakima River Basin. The project sites would occur on existing Yakama managed lands located within Kittitas and Yakima Counties with closest towns being Ellensburg and Yakima. Primary vegetation within the project sites would be riparian and floodplain with focal non-native vegetation for removal being crack willow (*Salix x fragilis*), reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Russian thistle (*Salsola*), etc. All project sites contain perennial waterbodies that are tributaries of the Yakima River.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no heavy equipment operations (e.g., bulldozers, excavators) proposed, so there would be no major soil or ground disturbance with potential to affect cultural resources. All project sites and actions were the subject of cultural resource surveys and consultation with Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and relevant tribes at the time of the original restoration implementation and habitat acquisition from which these subsequent vegetation management actions arise. All actions were determined to have "no potential to cause effect."

Associated BPA records: Sampson (WA 2022 175), Pott Road/Receer Creek (WA 2021 116), Fortune (WA 2016 062), Harris (WA 2016 062), Ahtanum Village (WA 2020 049 and WA 2022 062), SF Cowiche (WA 2023 112), and RagHeart (WA 2021 075).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vegetation management would consist of mechanical (mowing, hand pulling, and weed eating) and chemical weed treatment. Minor temporary ground disturbances would occur as part of the vegetation maintenance but would not impact the geology and soils. Areas have been previously disturbed by work during implementation of original restoration activities. Maintaining vegetation 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 areas. Minor and temporary vegetation disturbances associated with site access 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 removal of invasive plant species and maintenance of native vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no federally-listed or state special-status wildlife species or their habitats known to occur in the project area. Non-listed wildlife present during project activities may be temporarily disturbed by human presence and increase in ambient noise. Any impacts would be short term and temporary. Improved habitat conditions would result in long term positive impacts, including increased riparian plant density and diversity, and habitat biodiversity.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project impacts to ESA-listed species would be covered under the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion (BiOp). Listed fish species present in the project areas include Middle Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and their designated critical habitat. A series of conservation measures would be implemented to ensure that the project would minimize negative impacts and benefit ESA-listed fish species. Other fish species, including non-ESA-listed sensitive species and their habitat would have minimal impact as proposed activities would follow all best management practices for vegetation management activities.

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. Improved habitat conditions would result in long term positive impacts for local wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater are proposed. Herbicide impacts to groundwater and aquifers would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's label and would be limited. The proposed actions would have no long term impact to groundwater and 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-designed 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 effect 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 during implementation. 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 workers' 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: Yakama Nation would continue to work with state land owners and private landowners for access and continued work on project sites.

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

Signed:

Catherine Clark
Environmental Protection Specialist