

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Wenas Wildlife Area Management Operations and Maintenance

Project No.: 2006-004-00

Project Manager: Jennifer Plemons, EWM

Location: Kittitas and Yakima Counties, 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 Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to perform ongoing operations and maintenance (O&M) activities on the Wenas Wildlife Area. Years of soil disturbance, uncontrolled vehicle use, and fires have all contributed to degraded shrub steppe and riparian habitats and widespread weed infestations throughout the wildlife area. WDFW would specifically monitor and maintain vegetation, fences, roads, parking lots, and fire breaks as described further below.

Monitor and Maintain Vegetation

WDFW would conduct vegetation assessments by monitoring established transects. Routine surveys of plants and habitats would be conducted on foot by WDFW staff. Opportunistic observations during other project activities would also be recorded for future treatment.

WDFW staff would maintain desirable vegetation and remove noxious and invasive species to improve wildlife habitat across the mitigation units. Staff would control weeds and invasive species using a variety of mechanical methods (mowing, weed whacking), physical methods (hand pulling, chopping), chemical methods (herbicide), and biological methods (drought stress) as appropriate. WDFW would mow larger growths of undesirable plants as well as roads, parking lots, and fire breaks to limit vegetation growth. In areas where mowing would be impractical, other methods of controlling weeds would be used.

Licensed herbicide applicators would treat as much as 500 acres of upland weeds annually by ground-based chemical, mechanical, and manual methods. Limited riparian area weed treatments (approximately 10 to 20 acres) would occur and would follow BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) programmatic ESA consultation conservation measures, such as using appropriate buffers and application techniques, to avoid effects to listed species.

Maintain Fences, Roads, Parking Lots, and Fire Breaks

Existing fences, gates, buildings and signs would be maintained and repaired as needed to manage public access and exclude stray livestock. WDFW would routinely check segments of the 42 miles of existing fencing to find any damage caused by normal wear-and-tear, the elements, and vandalism. Damage would be repaired, and fencing segments would be replaced with like-for-like replacements as needed. No new fencing construction is proposed. Obsolete materials, fences, and debris would be removed from the project sites.

Existing roads, parking lots, and fire breaks throughout the mitigation units would be maintained. Many of the access roads and parking lots are packed dirt and gravel, and require regular maintenance to repair potholes, washouts, and other damage caused by regular wear-and-tear and the elements. WDFW staff would fill potholes with replacement gravel cobble and regrade the roads as necessary to create a smoother road prism. No work would occur outside the existing prism and no new road construction is proposed. Additionally, many roads serve as fire breaks, staff would ensure that vegetation growth in and around the roads is controlled to maintain the efficacy of the fire breaks. The existing parking lots and pull-outs would be similarly maintained.

Associated infrastructure, such as access gates, signs, and trash cans, would also be maintained. Damage caused by normal wear-and-tear, the elements, and vandalism would be repaired, and infrastructure replaced with like-for-like replacements as needed.

Funding the proposed actions would support conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with both the National Marine Fisheries Services (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 (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 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.

Proposed Action: Wenas Wildlife Area Management Operations and Maintenance

Project Site Description

Wenas Wildlife Area is predominately comprised of shrub steppe (71,777 acres), with the remainder consisting of riparian forest (1,045 acres), ponderosa pine forest (1,390 acres), and riverine habitat (320 acres) located along the Yakima River. Present habitat conditions were influenced primarily by past agricultural practices, extensive livestock grazing, and fires.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed actions and conducted background research into known cultural resource sites in the project area (WA 2024 274). The archaeologist determined that the proposed actions would have no potential to cause effect on historic and cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some of the proposed activities would cause minor soil disturbance of the top layer of soil, but the effect would be minimal. Road and parking lot maintenance would be confined to existing road prisms. Replacement and repair of fences would require some light excavation if new posts are needed, but all digging would be in previously disturbed areas. The effects on soils from these activities would be minor and localized.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal and state special-status plant species known to exist in the project areas. Herbicide would be used in dry conditions for localized treatment of targeted invasive/non-native plants only; proposed activities would inhibit invasive/non-natives and promote native plant species growth. All federal and state special-status habitats would be enhanced due to the proposed activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), and Yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) may be present on the Wenas Wildlife Area. Wildlife typically avoid human presence and would be unlikely to be present during project

activities. Any wildlife in the area would leave during project actions to avoid WDFW staff. Project activities would have minor, temporary impact to wildlife due to displacement during activities. Any impacts would be short term and temporary. There would be no long-term negative effect on ESA-listed wildlife species, and long term effect of maintaining and enhancing the wildlife area would have long term positive impacts on ESA-listed wildlife species. Project-related impacts to ESA-listed species are addressed in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinions with USFWS.

There would be mild negative impacts to non-listed wildlife from some of the proposed project activities. Wildlife would potentially be disturbed by human presence and noise. The effects would be temporary and consistent with typical O&M activities that have been carried out in these areas. There would be no long-term negative effect on wildlife, and long term effects of maintaining and enhancing the wildlife area would have long term positive impacts on local and migratory wildlife in the area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), Columbia River steelhead, and (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and their habitat may be present within waterways on the Wenas Wildlife Area. No proposed activities would take place in the waterbodies or negatively impact any present fish. O&M activities, including herbicide use, would be covered under the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion under Section 7 of the ESA. O&M activities may have minor and temporary effects on ESA-listed or state-listed species due to increased human present and noise, but no lasting effects are anticipated. Habitat restoration such as vegetation management and livestock exclusion maintained by the fence repairs would result in long term benefits for aquatic life.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no mapped wetlands present within the Wenas Wildlife Area (USFWS National Wetlands Inventory). Therefore, there would be no effects to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater is proposed in this project. The proposed activities would not affect the local water table.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wenas Wildlife Area is currently maintained for a variety of purposes, including habitat and public recreation. No changes to these uses are proposed. Some project activities, such as road and parking lot maintenance, would require closing access to the public temporarily to work in affected areas. These closures would be temporary, consistent with past maintenance activities in the area, improve ease of access and public safety, and would have no long term changes to public access and traffic patterns.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any changes to visual quality because of the proposed activities, such as planting vegetation, would be minor.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicles and equipment used for some proposed project activities, such as trucks and mowing equipment, would produce some exhaust. This exhaust generation would be temporary, limited in scope, consistent with past O&M activities at project areas, and cause no lasting impacts to the local air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicles and equipment used for some proposed activities, such as trucks and mowing equipment, would produce noise. The noise would be temporary, limited in scope, consistent with past O&M activities at project areas, and would have no long-term increase to local noise levels.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work may present a small human health and safety risk associated with working with heavy equipment but is not expected to create hazard 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: WDFW is the manager of the property being maintained and is responsible for the actions considered in this CX.

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