

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: White Creek Phase II Habitat Improvement Project

Project No.: 1997-056-00

Project Manager: Jesse Wilson, EWL

Location: Klickitat County, Washington

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 the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN) Fisheries to implement the White Creek Phase II Habitat Improvement Project. Activities include minor habitat actions that would result in long-term benefits, specifically for federally-listed Middle Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and may also provide benefits to other terrestrial and aquatic species and their habitat.

YN proposes to harvest trees by tipping trees over using an excavator or log loader, then trees would be skidded to helicopter landing zones and laid out as single logs for placement. Skid trails would be flagged by Bureau of Indian Affairs forestry staff; all skidding would be completed on existing and marked skid trails. Harvested trees would be a mix of Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*). All harvesting would occur outside of northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis*) nesting, foraging, and roosting habitat.

YN proposes to place wood via helicopter to restore channel complexity and habitat complexity and habitat diversity along the mainstem of White Creek between river miles (RM) 5 to 8. Approximately 360 logs would be placed at 35 locations along White Creek. Most logs would range from 14 inch diameters at breast height (DBH) to 26 inch DBH with approximately 60 logs being greater than 26 inch DBH.

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 Fish System 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. (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:

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: White Creek Phase II Habitat Improvement Project

Project Site Description

White Creek is located within the closed area of the Yakama Nation's lands in south-central Washington. White Creek is a critical tributary to the Klickitat River with its confluence at RM 40 of the Klickitat River. The forested portions of the White Creek watershed have been utilized for commercial timber harvest since the 1950s. Timber harvest, road construction, road maintenance, and cattle grazing would continue on adjacent lands to the project area for the foreseeable future.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist initiated consultation in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act on January 11, 2024, with YN Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) for on reservation actions. On August 6, 2024, YN THPO sent BPA concurrence of a no historic properties affected determination. On August 8, 2024, BPA sent a combined initiation and determination to the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and the Cowlitz Tribe, with a determination of no historic properties affected for the off-reservation actions (WA 2024 033). DAHP concurred with BPA's determination on August 13, 2024. No other responses were received within the 30-day consultation period.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary impact to soils and geology would occur during tree harvest, hauling, staging of trees via heavy machinery, implementation and once structures are functional. However, the disturbance during harvest would be consistent with activities occurring on the forest management area, and disturbance would be minimal during wood placement activities and scouring or accretion due to the structures would be expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The work would temporarily disturb some vegetation when placing wood, and during harvesting actions, but the project would result in improved riparian conditions which should benefit localized riparian plants. Harvesting of the small wood would occur on an upland Tribal-owned property within previously timber harvested locations. There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plants or state special-status species within the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be potential for activities to temporarily displace wildlife due to human activity; however, the displacement would be minor and short term. There are no ESA-listed wildlife or state special-status species within the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Mid-Columbia River steelhead and its designated critical habitat are present in the project area. Effects to water bodies, floodplains, and fish would be minimal; limited to temporary, low level turbidity as wood structures may contribute to localized scour. Tree harvest actions would occur in the upland and therefore, would have no potential to impact waterbodies, floodplains, or fish. The wood placement was reviewed in accordance with the current biological opinion issued by NMFS (WCRO-2020-00102) on the effects of BPA's Habitat Improvement Program. In the long term, this project would improve water quality and habitat for ESA-listed and non-listed aquatic species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no designated wetlands located in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The activities are designed to restore habitat functionality. One result of increased floodplain connection may be locally improved groundwater or aquifer conditions.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The activities would not change land use or affect any specially-designated areas, as in accordance with the Yakama Nation management.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality. The new large wood structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and would not be located in visually sensitive areas. Any changes to the viewshed due to helicopter use would be short term and temporary.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Air quality may be impacted by the additional travel, heavy equipment during harvest activities, and helicopter use at the project sites, but impacts would be local and temporary in nature.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Work activities would raise noise levels above ambient levels for short periods of time, but only during regular working hours until work is completed.

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 around timber harvest and helicopter use but is not expected to create a 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: All harvest and placement activities would occur on property owned by the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation. However, helicopter landing would occur on private land and would be coordinated by the Yakama Nation and the private landowner.

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