

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Greenbelt Land Trust Floodplain Forest Enhancement

Project No.: 2009-012-00

Project Manager: Allan Whiting, EWL - 4

Location: Benton and Linn Counties, OR

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 Greenbelt Land Trust (GBLT) to perform vegetation management on 176 acres of floodplain forest across three protected properties (Harkens Lake, Horseshoe Lake, and Little Willamette).

Removal of existing vegetation is needed to improve floodplain habitat and structural heterogeneity. The goal of the project is to reach a target density of approximately 200 mature trees per acre. Herbicide applications would be implemented to control invasive species and to prepare the site for native planting events. The proposed actions consist of the following:

- Thinning/mastication of 157 acres of planted forest with a tracked Mulchers. Work would occur at Harkens Lake (79 acres), Horseshoe Lake (46 acres), and Little Willamette (32 acres) to reduce stand tree/shrub volume by approximately 33%.
- Apply spot treatment with herbicide crews in all treatment units. Contracted backpack herbicide crews would reenter to apply spot treatments to re-sprouting trees and shrubs and invasive species. Treatment areas would be approximately 26 acres at Harkens Lake, 15 acres at Horseshoe Lake, and 10 acres at Little Willamette.
- Broadcast 150 pounds of seed (native forbs, grasses, sedges and rushes) across 67 acres. About 51 acres would be opened by the thinning/mastication and an additional 16 acres would be seeded with native grasses where thinning/mastication was implemented at Harkens Lake in 2023.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2008 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Willamette River Biological Opinion, 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.

Shawn Skinner
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 proposed project is located across three permanently protected properties and collectively comprises over 800 acres: Harkens Lake, Horseshoe Lake and Little Willamette (Benton and Linn Counties). These properties were brought into the Willamette Wildlife Mitigation Program by BPA, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for their strategic location and recognition of their outsized potential contribution to salmonid recovery efforts. Over the past ten years GBLT has converted well over 500 acres of agriculture land into diverse floodplain forests, wetlands and prairies. The project areas are now actively managed to increase the ecological value for multiple Oregon Conservation Strategy Species (salmonids, birds and wildlife). The actual project footprint is 176.3 acres and the treatment areas all consist of floodplain forest and riparian habitat.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties on October 22, 2024 (OR 2024 162). BPA consulted with the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Concurrence was received from the SHPO (November 19, 2024). BPA did not receive concurrence from any other consulting parties within 30 days.

Notes:

- In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, work would be stopped immediately and a BPA Archaeologist and Historian would be notified, as well as consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would have limited effect on soil and geologic resources. Track and tire disturbance would occur throughout the project area; but generally only a few inches in depth. The minor disturbance would be balanced through the proposed action goal of a restored floodplain forest.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no known Federal/state special-status plant species in the project area. Disturbance of plants in the project area would largely occur to non-native plants and overcrowded areas. There would be a long-term benefit by restoring the project area to a more natural condition through the treatment of invasive plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term disturbance would occur to wildlife species in the area from noise associated with mechanical weed treatment; including western pond turtles (Oregon-listed Sensitive species). A wildlife crew would survey the area for turtle nests before the thinning work is implemented. Noise and human disturbance would only last a few days and wildlife would return to treatment areas quickly upon completion. The goal of the work is to improve riparian and floodplain habitat for the benefit of terrestrial and aquatic species. There are no other known Federal/state special-status wildlife species in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not involve any in-water work or impact water bodies. The restoration activities do take place in the floodway, but any temporary impacts would be minimized by the restoration of the floodplain forest. The goal of the work is to improve riparian and floodplain habitat for the benefit of terrestrial and aquatic species. Potential impacts to ESA-listed species (Upper Willamette River Chinook salmon and steelhead) from herbicide applications would be covered under BPA's programmatic Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinion with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not be changing the hydrology within the project area, only removing non-native vegetation. The wetlands in the project area would be enhanced and restored by this project. Disturbance of the wetlands is for the purpose of removal of invasive plant species. Any potential wetland impacts would be limited and temporary. No permanent fill would be added to wetlands. There would be a long-term benefit by restoring the project area to a more natural condition.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Herbicide impacts to groundwater and aquifers would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's label and would be limited (spot treatments). The proposed actions would have no long-term impact to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would not impact or change land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some changes in vegetation and the associated visual quality would occur in the immediate project area, but the changes would be returning the area to a more natural state and would be consistent with the visual quality of the surrounding area and/or native plant habitat. There would be a long-term improvement in the visual quality of the area due to the restoration of a more native plant and animal habitat condition.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term impacts to air quality from vehicle emissions and dust generated by equipment use (mowing lawns, mulching). Herbicides would be applied as spot treatments by hand-held backpack sprayers with limited or no impact to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term increase in ambient noise during use of vehicles and equipment.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work activities.

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 project is on privately owned land, but GBLT holds conservation easements on all 3 properties. GBLT would coordinate with landowners prior to any project actions.

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

Signed:

Shawn Skinner
Environmental Protection Specialist