

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Palensky Wildlife Area Planting

Project No.: 2011-004-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss – EWM-4

Location: Multnomah, 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 funding the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to plant trees and wetland plants and spread native grass seed at the J.R. Palensky Wildlife Area (PWA) in northwestern Multnomah County. Funding for the project would fulfill commitments made by BPA in the 2010 “Willamette River Basin Memorandum of Agreement Regarding Wildlife Habitat Protection and Enhancement between the State of Oregon and the Bonneville Power Administration” and would be part of ongoing efforts to mitigate for the impacts to fish and wildlife from the construction and operation of the Federal flood control and hydroelectric facilities in the Willamette River basin.

ODFW would plant and seed a variety of native plants across PWA to improve habitat conditions for resident wildlife and migratory waterfowl. Approximately 25 total acres scattered across the wildlife area would be planted and seeded. Trees would be predominantly nursery-raised oak saplings between 3 to 6 feet tall, with sizes subject to availability of stock. ODFW would use a John Deere 50G mini-excavator equipped with a 12-inch-diameter auger to dig holes up to 3 feet deep in which to plant the saplings. Small native shrubs would be planted as available using similar techniques or hand tools, as appropriate. Additionally, ODFW would spread native grass and forb seed mix using vehicle-mounted or hand-operated broadcast seeders in areas of upland prairie spread across the WMA.

Planting would begin in the spring of 2025.

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.

Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Policy Analyst

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: Palensky Wildlife Area Planting

Project Site Description

The J.R. Palensky Wildlife Area is a 423-acre wildlife area located in northwestern Multnomah County. Though owned by BPA, ODFW has maintained the property under contract since 1993. PWA sits along the bank of the Multnomah Channel, a side channel that bridges the Willamette and Columbia Rivers and hosts extensive habitat for migratory salmonids traveling to and from the Pacific Ocean. PWA is a mosaic of wetlands, riparian forests, seasonal ponds, and grass fields that provide habitat to a number of critical species of wildlife, including western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*) and northern red-legged frog (*Rana aurora*), as well as winter habitat for many migratory bird species like Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*).

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed actions (BPA CR No. OR 2023 181). Following field surveys of the proposed planting sites, the archaeologist determined that the proposed actions would result in no historic properties affected. BPA initiated consultation with the Chinook Indian Nation, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on September 30, 2024. SHPO concurred with the determination on October 25, 2024. No other responses were received. The consultation period ended on October 30, 2024.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Planting would require some amount of soil disturbance. Holes would be dug in which to place saplings and shrubs. ODFW would use a mini-excavator with an attached auger to dig these holes and would limit the size of the holes to the minimum needed for each individual plant. Root growth from new plantings would have long-term positive effects on soil retention and quality in the local area. Overall effects on local soils would therefore be limited to the locations of each plant and mild overall.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species present at PWA (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPac) tool).

Oregon state-listed water howellia (*Howellia aquatilis*) could potentially be found in the wet areas at PWA (Oregon Department of Agriculture). However, it has never been observed on the property and ODFW believes the plant has been fully extirpated from the state of Oregon. Therefore, project actions would have no effect on water howellia. Negative effects on non-listed plant species would be limited to minor disturbance from crushing or excavation during planting. The long-term effects on overall vegetation at PWA would be positive.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Columbian white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*) could potentially be found at PWA (USFWS IPaC). There is a monitored population of deer which lives along the northern bank of the Columbia River across from PWA. While it is possible that the deer would make their way across the river to PWA, none have been observed on the WMA since ODFW began maintaining the property in 1993. Project actions would therefore be very unlikely to have any effect on Columbian white-tailed deer.

PWA provides habitat for two Oregon Conservation Strategy species, the western pond turtle and the northern red-legged frog (ODFW). The population of pond turtles on the WMA is closely monitored by ODFW staff. Planting would not occur in areas in which the turtles nest nor the ponds in which they are typically found. Similarly, frog spawning locations in PWA's wetlands are monitored by staff and would be avoided to minimize disturbance. While there would potentially be short-term negative effects on these species from noise and human presence in the area, the long-term effects of project actions would be to improve the quality of habitat for these species, and overall effects would therefore be mild.

Negative effects on non-listed wildlife would be limited to temporary disturbance from noise and human presence during planting. The long-term effects would be to improve the quality of vegetation on the WMA, improving conditions for local wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: While there are several ESA-listed fish species present in the nearby Multnomah Channel, including Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), coho salmon (*O. kisutch*), and steelhead (*O. mykiss*)(StreamNet), all planting would be in upland areas more than 300 feet from the Channel. Similarly, no planting is proposed in any of the standing ponds or streams on PWA. There would be no effect on water bodies and fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are mapped wetlands across PWA, and some of the planting locations overlap these wetlands (USFWS National Wetlands Inventory). There would be short-term negative effects on these wetlands from movement of equipment, human presence, and localized ground disturbance from planting the new trees and shrubs. These effects would be temporary and limited in scope to planting locations and would not result in the destruction or degradation of any wetlands. The long-term effects of planting vegetation in these areas would be to improve the quality of wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or actions which would modify groundwater use are proposed.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: PWA is a wildlife area owned by BPA, maintained by ODFW, and inaccessible to the public. No changes to this ownership or use are proposed.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Planting new vegetation would mildly affect the aesthetic quality of the area by restoring conditions closer to the historical natural visual quality. However, PWA is inaccessible to the public and the effects on the visual quality would have no bearing on the public's enjoyment of the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Machinery used for transporting plants and digging holes would produce exhaust. These effects would be mild, temporary, and cause no long-term changes to local air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Machinery used for transporting plants and digging holes would produce noise. These effects would be mild, temporary, and cause no long-term changes to local noise levels.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best practices to ensure human health and safety. All machinery and equipment would be operated solely by trained and licensed (when applicable) personnel.

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: PWA is owned by BPA. Access to the property is along public highways. No external coordination is required.

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

Signed:

Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Policy Analyst