

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Spokane Tribe Upland Habitat Management

Project No.: 2024-004-00

Project Manager: Carlos Matthew, EWU-4

Location: Stevens and Lincoln counties, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 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 Spokane Tribe of Indians (Spokane Tribe or Tribe) to perform habitat management activities within upland habitat areas on Spokane Tribe Reservation lands. Funding supports ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System on fish and wildlife in the main stem 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.).

Proposed upland wildlife habitat management activities would focus on invasive and noxious weed control (approximately 150 acres treated) and vegetation planting (approximately 25 acres). Working to restore these areas through revegetation would help provide the forage on the landscape necessary to support big game herds and prevent emigration, help prepare the landscape for future Columbian sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus columbianus*) translocations and benefit the many other culturally and historically significant wildlife species present within tribal lands. All proposed actions would be consistent with the Tribe's Integrated Weed Management Plan (2021) and Integrated Resource Management Plan (2008).

Herbicide application and plantings would typically take place in the fall and spring. Access would be via existing roads, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) or utility task vehicles (UTVs). Project areas may be revisited in subsequent years to conduct weed control treatments and to maintain vegetation.

Invasive and Noxious Weed Control: Mechanical and herbicide treatments would be used to prepare areas for planting and to control noxious weeds throughout a 150-acre area.

- Mechanical broadleaf noxious weed control would include use of mowers, weed eaters, and disking/tilling. Areas heavily infested with noxious weeds would be treated 1 to 2 weeks prior to herbicide application to increase efficacy of herbicide treatment. Approximately 100 acres would be treated via mechanical control, though ground disturbing mechanical control (disking/tilling) would be limited to approximately 24 acres, the remainder would be mowing and weed eating.
- Invasive annual grass broadcast herbicide treatments would focus on shrub-steppe and grassland areas. Different types of herbicides would be used on a small portion of the wildlife area to determine what would work best in the variety of habitat types being

managed (approximately 10 acres treated). Broadcast herbicide application would occur via broadcast sprayers attached to a tractor, ATV, or UTV depending on site conditions and need.

- Planting preparation and noxious weed control herbicide treatments with a broadcast application would be undertaken in preparation for vegetation plantings (approximately 20 acres treated).
- Broadleaf noxious weed control with herbicide spot applications would be implemented to help native grasses, forbs, and shrubs outcompete invasive weeds (approximately 20 acres treated). Spot applications would be made via backpack sprayers.

Vegetation Planting: Following chemical and mechanical treatments, areas would be planted with native bunchgrasses, native forbs, grasses, shrubs, and trees to prevent invasive annual grasses from overtaking these areas again. Areas identified for plantings may require limited mowing and disking/tilling prior to seeding.

- Seeding would be conducted with a tractor towing a no-till seed drill that minimizes ground disturbance; a tow-behind ATV/UTV seeder; or a hand operated broadcast seeder for areas that our tractor or ATVs and UTVs cannot access. Disturbance depth for seeding would vary from 0 inches (broadcast) up to 4 inches (disking/seed drill). Approximately 24 acres would be seeded with native bunchgrass.
- Planting container plants would be conducted with hand tools (shovels, dibble bars or trench shovels). Planting disturbance depth depends on container sizes but would not exceed 12 inches. Approximately 1 acre (total) would be planted spread between several planting groupings.

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.102 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; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024; 90 FR 29676, July 3, 2025 [Interim Final Rule]) and *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures* (dated June 30, 2025), BPA has determined the following:

- 1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021;
- 2) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion; and
- 3) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal (see attached Environmental Evaluation).

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.¹

¹ BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to the interim final rule to revise DOE NEPA regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021 and NEPA Implementing Procedures (dated June 30, 2025), to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

Daphne Day
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Evaluation

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: Spokane Tribe Upland Habitat Management

Project Site Description

The current Spokane Indian Reservation, roughly 150,000 acres, is located in northeastern Washington state. The reservation is located almost entirely in Stevens County, with a very small portion in Lincoln County. The lands are characteristic of the arid montane area of the northern Columbia Basin, transitioning to the Okanogan highlands to the north. Habitats present including grassland-sagebrush shrub steppe and riparian areas along the waterways and uplands, with a Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) zone at higher elevations and ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*) zones at lower elevations. Land use includes large expanses where new development is restricted and residential areas are generally small, scattered, and low-intensity. Within the upland forests, a combination of active livestock grazing and logging activities can be found. Agricultural use is present in the valleys; there are also active gravel/sand extraction areas within the reservation boundaries.

Some of the reservation lands have been protected as wildlife mitigation areas, where no non-salvage logging can occur and entry is restricted during winter range and fawning periods. Large portions of these wildlife areas designated as big game winter range and wildlife emphasis areas, as well potential Columbian sharp-tailed grouse habitat on the reservation, have burned within the last ten years. These areas are currently infested with several species of noxious weeds, which outcompete the native plant species that wildlife depend on for forage and cover.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On October 17, 2025, BPA initiated consultation and determined that due to previous disturbance, the discrete footprint of the project, and minimal ground disturbance proposed, the project would result in no historic properties affected; §36 CFR 800.4(d)(1). Consulting parties included the Spokane Tribe of Indians and Spokane Tribal Historic Preservation Office. On October 20, 2025, Spokane THPO responded that the project may proceed as planned, with a Post-Review Discovery Protocol.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA will require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by Spokane Tribal archaeologists, THPO, and BPA.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary ground disturbances would occur as part of the vegetation maintenance but would have a minor impact on the geology and soils. No heavy equipment operations (e.g., bulldozers, excavators) would be used, so there would be no large-scale soil displacement, soil mixing, or other mechanical soil disturbance. Herbicide impacts to

biological components of soils would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels. Planting containerized plants would disturb soil only in small planting sites with no large-scale soil disturbance. Vegetation maintenance would be intended to improve soil conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities are designated to alter the existing vegetation composition within the treatment areas. Herbicides would directly target and suppress or eliminate non-native and noxious weeds but could also impact desirable native species. Mechanical treatments would cause soil disturbance, destroying existing vegetation. Over the long term, vegetation conditions are expected to improve as native vegetation establishes.

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA utilized the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool in September 2025, which listed the federally-threatened Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), as a potentially-present species; no designated critical habitat is present. Proposed actions are part of the Tribe's Integrated Weed Management Plan, which includes pre-treatment surveys for ESA-listed species. Additionally, the treatment areas are outside of the known species range, and the nearest documented occurrence in state data is approximately 25 miles from the project boundary. Given the absence of any confirmed presence, the likelihood of the proposed activities directly or indirectly affecting Spalding's catchfly is considered very low. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no effect on special-status species or habitats that may be in project areas and would not result in long-term negative impact to other plant species. In the long term, the project would benefit vegetation by restoring native plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are many wildlife species present throughout the reservation, including large mammals like deer, elk, moose, bear, and cougar as well as important species for hunting like waterfowl and upland game species. Per the USFWS IPAC tool, the list of ESA-listed threatened or endangered species is limited to the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). While suitable habitat is potentially present at and/or near some of the field sites, the yellow-billed cuckoo is functionally extinct in the state of Washington, with no known occurrences near the project area. Thus, the species are unlikely to occur near the project area and the proposed actions are unlikely to have any effect. Two proposed species, the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), also have the potential to occur and may be affected by proposed actions through trampling of host plants; however, the project is unlikely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species. Gray wolf, which are federally-delisted but still considered threatened by the state, are known to occur in the vicinity.

Limited disturbance of normal wildlife behavior could occur from elevated noise and human presence at the various field sites. No plants identified for herbicide treatment are used preferentially for habitat purposes by native species. Some animals may be exposed to applied herbicides through contact with, or ingestion of, treated vegetation, but application would be according to label restrictions which would be too low of toxicity to be of harm. The proposed actions would not result in adverse modification to any suitable protected species habitat. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no effect on special-status species or habitats that may be in project areas and would not result in long-term negative impact to other wildlife species. In the long term, the restoration of native vegetation and habitats would improve wildlife habitat in the treatment areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No action proposed here would physically alter aquatic habitats; there would be no adverse physical changes to water bodies, floodplains, or fish from these actions. Herbicide application would be according to label restrictions which would minimize potential for chemicals to reach water bodies. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no effect on water bodies, floodplains, or fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All proposed activities would take place within upland habitat areas, where no wetlands are located. Therefore, the proposed actions would not impact 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.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed actions would be paused during the hunting season. No project action would permanently alter the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to these actions. Therefore, there would be no negative impact to land use or any specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in temporary and permanent changes to the landscape. During implementation, impacts from material staging, equipment, and human presence would be minor and short-term. Post-implementation, the impacts from unsightly dead plants following herbicide treatment would be short-term. Overall, the project would improve visual quality as the area would return to a more natural condition.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary dust and emissions could increase in the local area from vehicle and equipment use. However, these actions would be consistent with current land use activities typical of the field sites. There would be no permanent change in air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary noise could increase at field sites from vehicle and equipment use and human presence. However, these actions would be consistent with current land use activities typical of the field sites. There would be no permanent change in ambient noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Individuals carrying out the proposed actions would be trained in proper techniques and use of all equipment and chemicals, including proper waste handling rules. Therefore, the project would not create conditions that would increase risk to human health and safety and no impacts are expected as a result of the proposed actions.

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 would occur on land owned by the Spokane Tribe who would be implementing the project. No coordination or outreach would be required.

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

Signed:

Daphne Day
Environmental Protection Specialist