

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Upper Benewah Stream Enhancement (River Mile 12.5)

Project No.: 1990-044-00

Project Manager: Elizabeth Santana, EWM-4

Location: Benewah County, Idaho

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 Coeur d'Alene Tribe (CDAT) to implement a stream enhancement project in the upper reaches of Benewah Creek, near river mile 12.5, in Benewah County, Idaho. The project would increase historical floodplain connectivity, reduce sediment inputs from a nearby roadway, increase side channel habitat, and improve native plant communities for the benefit of fish and wildlife species, including westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii*)—a focal species for CDAT conservation efforts.

Project activities would span about 1,960 feet of Benewah Creek upstream of the creek crossing on Benewah Creek Road. Proposed restoration activities would include raising the channel bed, stabilizing head cuts, rerouting a section of the creek away from the road before it enters the culvert, adding large wood, and activating side channels.

Riffles and pools would be constructed in the project reach using a combination of wood structures buried below grade and the addition of stream gravel (about 240 cubic yards of gravel). Wood structures would consist of up to six logs stacked on top of each other and pinned with rebar. Logs would be about 20 feet to 30 feet in length and 12 inches in diameter. Seven wood structures would be constructed within the project reach. Structures would be oriented perpendicular to flow and buried into the channel bed (minimum of 3 feet deep) to establish a stable grade and provide scour protection. Ends of logs may also be buried into banks on one or both sides of the structure (depth to match the channel bed excavation). Structures would be backfilled to match the surrounding grade. Cottonwood poles, approximately 6 feet tall, would be driven about 2 feet deep into the channel bed on the downstream side of each end of the structure to provide support. Imported stream gravel would be placed in the channel bed (across the width of the channel) over a length of 10 feet to 20 feet on the upstream and downstream sides of each wood structure. Depth of imported stream gravel would range from about 0.5 feet deep to 2 feet. Overall, imported stream gravel would be placed over about 300 feet of channel to create riffle and pool habitats that emulate existing conditions.

About 35 cubic yards of material would be excavated at two locations along the creek to open connections with existing side channels. Large wood jams would be constructed within Benewah Creek in proximity to excavated areas to help direct flow to the side channels. About 350 feet of side channel would be activated and would provide seasonal habitat during high flows and be dry

during low flows. Large wood (individual logs) would be placed across the entire site to simulate natural wood loading to streams. These would be constructed by felling adjacent trees or bringing wood from off-site.

About 150 feet of channel adjacent to Benewah Creek Road upstream of the culvert would be filled as this segment of creek is causing erosion of the road prism. A combination of rock fill (about 40 cubic yards), logs (about 20 cubic yards), and soil (about 80 cubic yards) would be used as fill. A new channel segment, about 120 feet long, would be excavated so the creek has a straighter approach to the culvert to prevent erosion of the road prism and return the channel to a more natural condition. About 250 cubic yards of material would be excavated for the new segment and the channel would have an average depth of 1.5 feet.

One temporary staging and stockpile area (about 0.6 acres) and temporary access routes (about 910 feet) would be established in upland locations prior to construction. The staging area and access routes would be mowed prior to use. No other road preparation or surfacing would be needed. One lane of Benewah Creek Road would be closed for approximately 4 hours during construction immediately upstream of the culvert. The closure would be coordinated with the local Benewah County highway district, and a traffic control plan would be implemented. Benewah County would post signs prior to the closure, and the project would provide a flagging crew for traffic control.

After construction, riparian and wetland areas would be planted with containerized plants and dormant willow cuttings to increase the coverage and diversity of native wetland plant communities. Disturbed areas, including the temporary staging area and access routes, would be decompacted, seeded with a native grass mix, and mulched.

Equipment needed for the project would include low ground pressure, rubber tracked equipment (dump trucks, excavator), a mini excavator, a mower, hand and power tools, and a variety of work vehicles to transport crews.

The site would be monitored for several years after construction is complete. If native plants are slow to establish or if there are structural failures, fish passage barriers, or infrastructure risks, CDAT would implement adaptive management procedures—including structure modifications, adding new structures, additional grading around the channel, and replanting. Annual weed monitoring would trigger manual removal (*e.g.*, hand pulling, mowing, weed eating) or targeted herbicide applications by CDAT as needed.

Funding the proposed actions would support 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 1021.102 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 the current *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Procedures*, 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.

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Evaluation

This evaluation 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: Upper Benewah Stream Enhancement (River Mile 12.5)

Project Site Description

The project site is on upper Benewah Creek, about 9 miles southeast of Plummer, Idaho. The project is within the exterior boundaries of the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation on a parcel owned by CDAT that is designated for conservation. The proposed activities would complement similar stream enhancement work completed in the last year on Benewah Creek near river mile 10.5. The surrounding area is mainly coniferous forests interspersed with meadows, residences, and agricultural lands. Elevations in the project area are around 2,800 feet. The creek supports spawning and rearing of westslope cutthroat trout. There are mature trees in the riparian area of the creek but the creek itself and the surrounding land in the floodplain have been altered by construction of Benewah Creek Road, which is a county-managed gravel road with infrequent traffic.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with CDAT and the CDAT Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) on April 18, 2025 (BPA Cultural Resources No.: ID 2024 059). On October 6, 2025, BPA provided consulting parties with a summary of BPA's efforts to identify historic properties and BPA's determination of no historic properties affected. No responses were received by the end of the 30-day consultation period.

Notes:

- The project would coordinate with the THPO for cultural training and notification procedures prior to the start of construction.
- If cultural material is inadvertently encountered during implementation, the THPO would be notified and would coordinate and assess the finding in consultation with BPA.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary impacts on geology and soils due to displacement and compaction of soil from construction equipment used to excavate soils for channel realignment, side channel connection, and wood structure placement. There would also be temporary impacts to soils from planting activities. Erosion and sediment control best management practices would be implemented before and during work to minimize the potential for excessive soil runoff during construction. A water truck would be present during construction to provide dust abatement as needed. During construction and until the site is stabilized, silt fencing would be installed and maintained around all disturbed areas to prevent erosion and runoff. Temporary stockpiles of excavated or dredged material would be stabilized to prevent erosion. Work areas would be contoured to match the surrounding grade following construction and seeded and planted with native riparian or upland plant species to facilitate soil recovery. Impacts to biological components of soils from future herbicide use would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels and compliance with best management practices (BMPs), including minimizing drift and overspray.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed, state, or Tribal special-status plants are known to be present in the project area. There would be temporary impacts to existing vegetation including crushing and removal by heavy equipment, excavation, and trampling from work crews. Some trees would be intentionally felled in or near the floodplain area to add large wood to the floodplain. Future herbicide use would result in plant mortalities, mainly invasive species, but there may be some overspray onto native vegetation. Impacts would be minimized by applying according to the manufacturer's label, having a licensed applicator, and minimizing drift and overspray. In the long term, the project would have a beneficial effect on vegetation through seeding and planting of disturbed areas with native plants and the removal of invasive plant species during subsequent monitoring, as needed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, state, or Tribal special-status wildlife species or habitats are documented within the project site. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists the North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), ESA-listed Threatened, as having the potential to be in the project area. In addition, IPaC lists the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), ESA-proposed Threatened, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), ESA-proposed Endangered, as having the potential to be present in the project area. There is no designated critical habitat for ESA-listed or proposed wildlife species in the project area and no confirmed presence of any of the species in the project area. Due to the site's elevation (below 3,000 feet and below typical elevations for wolverine resident and maternal habitat), proximity to the road and residences, and lack of native vegetation, it is unlikely these species would be present in the project area. The project would have no effect on ESA-listed or proposed wildlife species.

IPaC information indicates that bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) are likely present in Benewah County for several months of the year. There is no confirmed presence of nests or previously used nest sites for bald eagles in the project area, and the project would be starting near the end of the typical breeding season (August). If a nest is observed in the project area, CDAT would employ protection measures (e.g., timing, distance) as necessary to ensure eagles would not be harmed as a result of the project. Therefore, the project would have no adverse impacts to bald eagles.

There would be temporary disturbances to resident wildlife due to human presence and equipment noise. Conservation measures would be used to minimize impacts. Equipment use would occur after nesting and breeding seasons of migratory birds. No habitats would be modified to any degree that might permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from equipment noise and human presence. Wildlife would likely reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed activities. Future herbicide application would have short-term impacts to wildlife that would be minimized by following BMPs, such as following manufacturer's labels, not applying herbicides during migratory bird nesting season, and minimizing overspray and drifting. The proposed project is expected to improve aquatic and riparian habitat, which would have a beneficial effect for wildlife species in the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No ESA-listed fish species are documented within the project area, which is currently blocked to the passage of anadromous fish species due to downstream dams. IPaC lists bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), ESA-listed Threatened, as having the potential to be present in Benewah Creek, but there is no designated critical habitat in or near the project.

Bull trout can be found in the Coeur d'Alene Lake, about 9 miles north of the project, but have not been observed in Benewah Creek. Therefore, there would be no impacts to ESA-listed species from the project.

Construction activities, including planting activities and excavation for the new alignment of the creek, side channel connections, and wood structures would have temporary impacts on fish and fish habitat. Presence of work crews, soil erosion, and excessive runoff of sediment into the creek would cause increased turbidity and displacement of individuals. The project would adhere to applicable site-specific BMPs (silt fencing, dust abatement) to prevent sediment from entering the creek and would monitor turbidity during work. The creek would be diverted with cofferdams at each end of the project and a temporary bypass would be installed to convey water downstream. Fish salvage would occur prior to the work area being dewatered. Resident fish, such as westslope cutthroat trout, may experience short-term displacement during construction. Future herbicide application may also affect aquatic species in the project area. Adherence to herbicide application BMPs would minimize short- and long-term impacts. No herbicide would be applied in water and all guidelines for buffer zones would be followed.

The project would qualify as non-reporting under Nationwide Permit (NWP) 27 revised criteria (issued in March 2026) and is authorized to proceed under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), provided that all applicable terms and conditions of NWP 27 are met throughout the duration of the project. The project also meets the terms of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) programmatic water quality certification under Section 401 of the CWA associated with the 2026 NWP 27 and no additional conditions apply.

In the long term, temporary moderate adverse effects to fish occurring during construction would be offset by floodplain and side channel reconnection and enhanced habitat complexity that would lead to low to moderate beneficial effects to fish and the aquatic environment.

Notes:

- CDAT would implement all CWA permitting and certification terms, conditions, and requirements.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project would have minor impacts to wetlands. CDAT identified wetlands in the project area that would be impacted by excavation of side channel inlets (about 11 cubic yards removed from wetlands) and the excavation of the new channel alignment and fill of the old channel segment by the culvert (about 18 cubic yards removed and about 8 cubic yards of fill added). Overall, less than 0.01 acres of wetlands would be impacted. To reduce wetland impacts, CDAT would implement all CWA permitting (as authorized under NWP 27 issued in March 2026) and EPA programmatic water quality certification terms, conditions, and requirements. In the long term, project activities would result in an increase of about 1.5 acres of wetlands.

Notes:

- CDAT would implement all CWA permitting and certification terms, conditions, and requirements.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater are proposed. The proposed project would have no impact on groundwater or aquifers. Future herbicide applications may have impacts to groundwater and aquifers that would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change. CDAT owns the property and has designated it for conservation of fish and wildlife. There are no recreational opportunities at the project site; it is not open for public access, and the creek is not navigable to watercraft. There would be no impact to specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary and permanent changes to visual quality would occur during and after the construction. Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as work zone conditions, vehicles, equipment, and exposed soils. Approximately 150 feet of Benewah Creek would be permanently realigned to flow directly into the culvert instead of flowing along the road prism before entering the culvert. Large wood placed in the floodplain area, additional water inundation in the floodplain and side channels, and native plants would be visible. These components would return the project area to a more natural condition, which would improve visual quality overall in the long term.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor and temporary effects on the air quality from dust and exhaust due to equipment and vehicle use for site access. Pre-project conditions would return upon project completion. Impacts from future herbicide application would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from crews and equipment would be short-term and temporary, occur during daylight hours, and would cease following project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions. All personnel would use BMPs to protect worker health and safety during implementation of proposed actions. The single lane closure on Benewah Creek Road would be implemented according to an approved traffic management plan, including adequate signage for road users and flaggers present during the closure. Future herbicide application poses a slight risk of skin and eye irritations. Effects would be minimized by having a licensed applicator that would develop an herbicide transportation and safety plan before transporting or applying any herbicides, thus making the risk from herbicides insignificant.

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: CDAT owns the property where the project would occur and has designated it for fish and wildlife conservation purposes. CDAT is coordinating with the Benewah County highway district on the temporary road closure during work close to the culvert.

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

Signed:

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist