Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Clear Creek Weed Removal

Project No.: 2008-604-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz, EWM-4

Location: Idaho 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 Trout Unlimited (TU) to remove invasive weeds along Clear Creek in Idaho County, Idaho. Weed removal would support restoration of habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Snake River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), as well as for other sensitive species in the Clear Creek watershed.

Although the proposed project area spans approximately 35 acres, the proposed action would only impact the specific locations within that boundary where weed removal is necessary. Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) would be the main target of removal efforts. Removal methods would include herbicide application using a backpack sprayer and by hand (using a hand-held spray bottle, wiping on cut stems, wicking, or injection into stems). Herbicide application would be completed by a licensed applicator who would follow the approved methods and use the approved herbicides prescribed in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP). No aerial application of herbicide would occur. Work would occur when Japanese knotweed is in full bloom (around August through September in the Clear Creek watershed).

Initial treatments would not likely be 100 percent effective for weed control since dormant seeds or underground rhizomes from existing populations would grow or regenerate in future years. Therefore, follow-up treatments would be needed for several years, with the expectation that the need for treatment would decline over time.

Funding the proposed activities would fulfill commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Columbia River System Biological Opinion and support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Columbia River System Biological Opinion (BiOp). These actions also support BPA's 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

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Concur:

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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: Clear Creek Weed Removal

Project Site Description

The project site is on private property about 2 miles northeast of the community of Clearwater in Idaho County. It is near the boundaries of the Nez Perce Reservation and the Nez Perce National Forest. The creek is a tributary to the Clearwater River. It sits at an elevation of about 1,700 feet and flows through a relatively narrow valley at the project site (about 300 feet wide) with slopes on either side rising to over 1,800 feet. At the top of the northeastern slope is Clear Creek Road, paralleling the creek. The surrounding area is a mix of forested and agricultural lands, with several residences in the general vicinity of the project. The Clear Creek watershed supports Snake River steelhead and other species important to the state and tribes, including Chinook salmon *(O. tshawytscha*), coho salmon (*O. kisutch*), and westslope cutthroat trout (*O. lewisi*). Although rare, bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) have been found in the mainstem of Clear Creek.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance or structural changes associated with the proposed action. A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed action and determined that it would have no potential to cause effect to cultural or historic resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Weed removal would consist of herbicide applications. Herbicide impacts to biological components of soils would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels and by a licensed applicator. Weed removal would be intended to improve fish and wildlife habitat conditions in the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status plant species or those listed under the ESA are present in the project area. Site access would be on existing roads and driveways. Some minor and short-term impacts to vegetation would occur, including trampling from work crews. Herbicide use would result in plant mortalities, mainly weeds, but there may be some overspray onto native vegetation. Impacts would be minimized by following conservation measures in BPA's HIP programmatic consultations under Section 7 of ESA (HIP BiOps), including having a licensed applicator and minimizing drift and overspray. In the long term, the project would have a beneficial effect on vegetation by removing weeds and allowing native plant communities to establish themselves.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or state special-status wildlife species are documented within the project site. The 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 are no designated critical habitats 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 Clear Creek 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 no bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) or golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) have been observed in the project area. If eagles or a nest is observed in the project area, TU 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 eagles.

There would be temporary disturbances to resident wildlife due to human presence. Herbicide application would have short-term impacts to wildlife that would be minimized by following conservation measures in the HIP BiOps, such as following manufacturer's labels, not applying herbicides during migratory bird nesting season, and minimizing overspray and drifting. Wildlife would likely reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed activities. 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

Explanation: ESA-listed steelhead and their designated critical habitat are found in Clear Creek. ESA-listed bull trout have also been observed in Clear Creek but the project area does not contain designated critical habitat. There are a variety of non-ESA-listed fish found in Clear Creek that are important to the state and tribes, including Chinook salmon, coho salmon, and westslope cutthroat trout.

Herbicide application near the creek may have effects for ESA-listed species in the project area. However, the project would follow conservation measures from the HIP BiOps to minimize impacts. No herbicide would be applied in water. Only aquatic labeled glyphosate formulations and hand application methods would be used within 15 feet of the creek to treat emergent knotweed. The proposed treatments of herbicides with a backpack sprayer would maintain an appropriate buffer zone around the creek and would have low potential to drift or enter the creek. No changes to the existing conditions of the creek or floodplain would occur. Impacts from herbicide applications would not be likely to jeopardize the continued existence of ESA-listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of their designated critical habitats.

Additional impacts from proposed activities may include disturbance from human presence and noise during implementation, reduction in streamside vegetation (weeds) which could lead to a temporary loss of shade and localized mobilization of suspended sediments in the stream. These effects would be minor and short term and with the adherence to the conservation measures in the HIP BiOps, would have minimal impact on fish species, the creek, and the floodplain. The project would help restore native riparian vegetation for the benefit of aquatic species, streams, and floodplains.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the hydrology within the project area, and any activities within or near wetlands would be limited to methods with no ground disturbance. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur. Effects on wetlands would be temporary and limited to the removal of weeds to improve conditions for native wetland species. This would have the long-term effect of improving the quality of local 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. 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 underlying land use would not change and no impact to specially-designated areas would occur as a result of this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality and the project would be removing weeds to help return the area to a more natural vegetative condition.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to air quality from vehicle exhaust during site access and herbicide applications. Effects would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's label and following the conservation measures in the HIP BiOps conservation measures. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would result in a minor, short-term increase in ambient noise due to human presence and use of vehicles. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety. Herbicide applications would follow the conservation measures in the HIP BiOps, including having a licensed applicator that would develop an herbicide transportation and safety plan before 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: TU has a signed landowner agreement outlining proposed work on the property and would coordinate work timing with the landowner.

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

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