

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Nimz Ranch North Quad Project

Project No.: 1992-061-05

Project Manager: 76826 REL 9

Location: Boundary County, ID

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) is proposing to fund the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho to conduct restoration actions along the Kootenai River at a 655-acre tribal-owned property known as Nimz Ranch. Several previous restoration projects have occurred on the Nimz Ranch property in past years. The proposed action would create channels within an existing wetland complex area in the Kootenai River floodplain. Heavy machinery (excavators) would be used to dig out the channels through the existing wetland. Channel depth would range from 2 feet-5 feet. An existing 18-inch corrugated metal pipe culvert would be replaced within a 4-foot by 4-foot reinforced concrete box culvert with flow control to improve fish passage. Approximately 40 acres of the 655-acre property would be graded and contoured to remove reed canary grass and to increase the diversity of water depths within the wetland. Excavated material would be placed in upland areas on-site and planted with native vegetation.

Access would be provided by existing roads and driving overland through fields, although temporary staging areas would be established on-site. Temporary access routes and staging areas would be replanted after project construction with native vegetation.

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.

/s/ Ted Gresh
Ted Gresh

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange
Katey Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: July 23, 2020

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 project site is set within the 655 acre Nimz Ranch property on the historical Kootenai River floodplain. Currently the site contains a variety of relic high flow channels and 267 acres of delineated wetlands. The majority of wetland area is emergent and dominated by invasive monotypic reed canary grass. There is a large permanently inundated floodplain lake and wetland complex.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Cultural resources inventory fieldwork was conducted in July and October 2019. Fieldwork identified three previously unidentified cultural resources. In addition, a previously recorded segment of the Kootenai Valley Railroad (IHSI# 21-1759) was observed and recorded in the APE.</p> <p>BPA determined that the three previously unidentified resources were not eligible for the NRHP and that the segment of the Kootenai Valley Railroad will not be affected by the proposed project. The Idaho SHPO concurred with BPA's determination on June 21, 2020. No tribal responses were received within 30 days.</p>		
2. Geology and Soils	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> The excavation of new channels and regrading would permanently disturb soils on the project site. Best management practices would be implemented to prevent soils from eroding outside of the work site during construction of the proposed side channels. All disturbed areas would be restored with native vegetation to minimize fugitive sediments from entering surface waters and wetlands.</p>		
3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> No special-status (Endangered Species Act [ESA] - listed, state-listed, or sensitive) species are present. Approximately 40 acres would be disturbed during construction. All disturbance areas would be revegetated with native seed and woody plants after project completion</p>		
4. Wildlife (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> No ESA listed, state-listed, or sensitive wildlife species have been documented in or adjacent to the project area and no designated critical habitat is present. Wildlife present on the site during construction activities may be temporarily disturbed by construction traffic and noise, but would likely avoid the area during this time and return once the project work is completed.</p>		

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish**

(including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)

Explanation: The Kootenai Tribe obtained a Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permit (NWP 27) from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on June 16, 2020. Although the project would impact areas of the Kootenai River floodplain the end result of the project would improve riparian function and nutrient exchange, promote geomorphic sustainability, enhance aquatic habitat, and increase habitat diversity. Listed fish species include: Columbia River bull trout and Kootenai River white sturgeon. Because the proposed project would not require any in-water work, BPA made a No Effect determination for ESA listed species on March 10, 2020.

6. **Wetlands**

Explanation: The proposed excavation and grading activities restoration activities are expected to temporarily impact approximately 17 acres of wetlands. The Kootenai Tribe obtained a Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permit (NWP 27) from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on June 16, 2020. These areas would be replanted and restored following construction. These areas would be replanted and restored following construction. In addition, following the completion of the project the wetland area is expected to increase and the quality improved as a result of increasing the surface water connection between Nimz Ranch wetlands and the Kootenai River.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Explanation: Although there would be ground disturbance the work is not expected to have a substantial effect on groundwater and aquifers. One of the benefits of the wetland restoration would be a positive effect on groundwater recharge function once the new hydrologic inputs are able to spread across the floodplain and raise the water table, improving the condition and increasing the area of onsite wetlands and aquatic habitat.

8. **Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Explanation: No change in land use would occur for the proposed project.

9. **Visual Quality**

Explanation: The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality. The new channel and enlarged wetland area would be visually consistent with the surrounding area and would not be located in a visually sensitive area. Any change to the view shed due to construction vehicles or equipment would be short term and temporary.

10. **Air Quality**

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the field site would be very minor and short term during construction, but would resume to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed.

11. **Noise**

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

12. **Human Health and Safety**

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. There would be no soil contamination, hazardous conditions.

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, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: The Kootenai Tribe owns the property where the project would occur. Project plans are presented at a quarterly Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative, a community-based, collaborative effort intended facilitate communication between KTOI and the local community regarding the Tribe's efforts to restore and enhance the resources of the Kootenai Valley. All meetings are open to the public and time is reserved to allow anyone present to ask questions of the information provided.

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

Signed: /s/ Ted Gresh 07/23/2020

Ted Gresh, ECF-4 Date

Environmental Protection Specialist