

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Willamette Valley 2021 Projects – GAWA LWD

Project No.: 2011-004-00

Project Manager: Hannah Dondy-Kaplan, EWM-4

Location: Polk County, Oregon

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 to fund the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to fell trees within lateral channels at the ODFW-owned Gail Achterman Wildlife Area (GAWA) property to improve hydrological conditions. Funding for this work partially fulfills 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.” This is part of ongoing efforts to mitigate for the impacts to fish and wildlife from the construction and operation of Federal flood control and hydroelectric facilities in the Willamette River Basin. Project details are as follows:

Large Woody Debris Placement

River flow at the 290-acre GAWA was impeded dramatically due to land use changes and alterations of the surrounding riverscape beginning as early as the 1800s. Flood control dams and reservoir construction in the upper watershed have caused the once active gravel point bar to become a relatively inactive feature dominated by a mature riparian forest. ODFW actively manages the site to improve and maintain natural floodplain processes, and proposes to fell trees in approximately 10 locations within lateral channels on GAWA that are formed by the flow of water when the Willamette River levels top the island’s banks during the winter.

Tree diameters would range from 20-40 inches. Tree heights are between 20-40 feet. Crews would access the project area primarily on foot, although equipment may be brought in using all-terrain vehicles if necessary. Each tree would be manually sawed using gas-powered equipment and allowed to drop in place. A come-along wench may be used for leverage by using another tree as an anchor to support the tree being cut. The direction of the tree fall is calculated based on surrounding vegetation to ensure that there is enough room for the tree to land on the ground and not snag in adjacent trees. Felled trees would not be anchored or secured to the ground, but standing trees may be used as braces when necessary to keep the felled trees in place when inundated.

Felling would occur outside of the migratory bird-nesting season and under dry conditions only in August and September.

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/ Thomas DeLorenzo

Thomas DeLorenzo

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

August 2, 2021

Sarah T. Biegel

Date

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.

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Project Site Description

The GAWA property is located at the edge of Polk County near the border with Marion County, about 3 miles west of Salem, Oregon, directly adjacent to the Willamette River to the west, at an elevation of about 140 feet. The site is dominated by a mature riparian forest. Vegetation in this section of the island features black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*) ranging in ages from 50 to 80 years old, with Oregon ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*) throughout.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Consultation for the GAWA large wood placement project under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) was completed on 4/26/2021 (BPA CR Project No. OR 2021 095). Consulting parties were the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. No responses were received from consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: This project would not involve ground-disturbing activities. No impacts to soils are expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed or sensitive plant species present in the project area. There may be short-term negative impacts to vegetation from being trampled by felling trees. No long-term effects are anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ESA-listed or sensitive species present in the project area. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by human presence (sound, movement, shadows). These effects would be short term. The improved habitat conditions at GAWA would result in long-term positive impacts, including increased plant species richness and diversity, increased habitat structural diversity, and increased habitat heterogeneity.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Willamette River is designated freshwater critical habitat for ESA-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) and steelhead (*O. mykiss*). No impacts to fish or aquatic species are anticipated during project implementation, as the work would occur when the lateral channels are dry. Long-term impacts to aquatic species as a result of placing large wood in these channels are expected to be low, and have been considered in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (PNF #2022002).

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project could have long-term positive impacts to wetlands by promoting floodplain connectivity, which could potentially expand the wetland area and re-establish native vegetative communities.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater is proposed in this project. There would be no impacts to groundwater or the water table as a result.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing land use would not change as a result of this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would contribute to the natural appearance of the property.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to air quality are expected. Exhaust emissions from all-terrain vehicles and wood-cutting machinery would be minor, localized, and temporary.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Human presence and equipment use during project implementation at GAWA would result in temporary, localized noise increases. These increases would not substantially impact the surrounding environment.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety.

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 property is owned and managed by ODFW. No external coordination is needed.

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

Signed: /s/ Thomas DeLorenzo August 2, 2021
Thomas DeLorenzo – ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist