

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: East Fork Grande Ronde Upper Fly Creek Small Stream Project

Project No.: 1992-026-01

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser, EWL-4

Location: Union 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 US Forest Service, Wallowa Whiteman National Forest (WWNF), La Grande Ranger District (District) to conduct aquatic habitat restoration activities along the East Fork Grande Ronde River, Upper Fly Creek and Squaw Creek located approximately 20 miles southwest of La Grande in Union County, Oregon. The proposed restoration activities would occur on WWNF lands and the WWNF would be the lead Federal agency for complying with federal, state and local laws and regulations.

Proposed work would include adding wood structures into 7.5 miles of stream. Each of these streams are located within the Upper Grande Ronde River Subbasin. All three streams support steelhead and redband trout. The East Fork Grande Ronde River also provides rearing habitat for spring/summer Chinook salmon. The District would construct channel spanning log jams in the streams to add roughness and habitat complexity and increase floodplain interaction and promote flooding. These activities are expected to promote longer periods of hydrologic production, decrease stream temperatures, and increase riparian vegetation.

The District would also create small debris jams (consisting of tree tops, branches and small trees less than 8 inches in diameter) in the streams at an average of 30 - 40 jams per mile. An additional 50 whole trees (10-inches to 12-inches in diameter) per mile would be spaced in between debris jams. Trees for instream structures would be harvested from within 200 feet on each side of the streams. All of the material would be felled and transported to the streams by mini excavators. Tree felling and transport of the materials would occur in June and placement of the trees in streams would occur during the in-water-work window, July 1 – 31.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp), while also supporting BPA's ongoing efforts to mitigation for effects of the FCRPS 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 1021.410(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/ Brenda Aguirre

Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

May 26, 2021

Date

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.

Proposed Action: East Fork Grande Ronde Upper Fly Creek Small Stream Project

Project Site Description

The proposed activities would occur in the Upper Grande Ronde Subbasin. Legal descriptions for the project sites are: East Fork Grande Ronde River T6S, R35E, Sections 10 – 12; Little Fly Creek T5S, R34E, Section 36 and T6S, R34E, Sections 3, 4 and 9; and Squaw Creek T5S, R34E, Sections 15 and 22. The Subbasin consists of moderately sloped, rolling mountains. Elevations range from approximately 1,000 to 5,000 feet. Most of the Subbasin is forested with interspersed areas of grasslands and scrub/shrub. Land use is dominated by forestry and livestock grazing.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On 11/10/2020, the WWNF South Zone Archaeologist reviewed the proposed project and determined there were “no historic properties affected” and the project fit within the Programmatic Agreement between the WWNF and Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation were consulted – no response. WWNF is the lead federal agency for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for this project.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Minimal soil disturbance would occur; use of mini-excavators and work timing would occur when soils are dry and erosion control measure would be used.

Notes:

- Erosion control methods (water bars, replanting, sediment barriers, mulches or erosion fabrics, etc.) would be put in place before season-ending precipitation event
- Effective ground cover would be placed over 60% of the disturbed soil after seeding
- Bank stabilizing trees would not be pushed over

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Although ground disturbance is proposed, there are no ESA-listed, state listed, or sensitive plant species known to exist on the project sites. Project areas with non-listed plants disturbed as a result of implementation would be planted with native vegetation following project completion.

Notes:

- Prior to implementation a qualified botanist would conduct a field survey to verify the presence or absence of sensitive plants known or suspected in the project area. If sensitive plants are found, they would be avoided. The botanist would then evaluate the results and ensure consistency with the determination of effects presented in the Biological Evaluation.

- Locally sourced and genetically appropriate native plant materials would be used for all revegetation efforts connected with project activities. District Invasive Plant, Botany, or Native Plant staff would be consulted for specific guidance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Eight sensitive species are known to exist on the project sites: Columbia spotted frog, bald eagle, white-headed woodpecker, Townsend's big eared bat, fringed myotis, fir pinwheel, thinlip tightcoil and shiny tightcoil. The District obtained ESA Section 7 coverage from the US Fish and Wildlife Service under the Programmatic Biological Opinion for Aquatic Restoration Activities in the States of Oregon, Washington, and portions of California, Idaho and Nevada (ARBO II) on 11/23/2020, and would implement the terms and conditions of ARBO II to avoid impacting individuals or habitats. Non-status wildlife 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.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Temporary sedimentation would be generated with instream work. The project would impact 7.5 miles of stream (1.5 miles of East Fork Grande Ronde River, 3.0 miles of Upper Fly Creek and 3.0 miles of Squaw Creek). The District received authorization from the US Army Corps of Engineers on 1/19/2021 (Verification Letter NWP-2020-353) to use the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 Regional General Permit-4 (RGP-4) and associated Oregon Department of Environmental Quality CWA Section 401 Water Quality Certification. The District would implement the terms and conditions of RGP-4 while placing wood below the ordinary high-water mark at the project streams.

All streams contain ESA-listed summer steelhead and East Fork Grande Ronde River contains spring/summer Chinook salmon. The District obtained ESA Section 7 coverage from the National Marine Fisheries Service under the Programmatic Biological Opinion for ARBO II on 11/23/2020, and would implement all terms and conditions to avoid or minimize potential adverse effects to the listed fish. Non-status fish (such as redband trout) 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.

Notes:

- Bank stabilizing trees would not be pushed over
- Adequate quantity of trees would be retained within 30 feet of stream bank for future instream wood recruitment
- Equipment passes over streamside areas would be limited to one to two passes, where possible, to prevent vegetation loss, trail creation, and compaction

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would avoid on-site wetlands; the District would implement all terms and conditions of the RGP-4. The project is expected to increase wetland function at the proposed sites over the existing conditions.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although ground disturbance is proposed, the work is not expected to have a substantial effect on groundwater and aquifers. The project structures would have a positive effect on groundwater recharge and water quality once the new wood structures have slowed streamflow and spread water across the floodplains and raise the water table, thereby creating new wetlands and aquatic habitat.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur for the proposed project. The project activities would be consistent with the WWNF land management area designations.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The newly installed wood structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and the topography of the surrounding area, and would not be located in a visually sensitive area. Any change to the visual quality due to construction vehicles or equipment would be short term and temporary.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

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

Potential for Significance: No

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

Potential for Significance: No

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 or hazardous conditions, no CERCLA sites, and no changes to electric or magnetic fields as a result of the proposed project.

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: No notification – All work on WWNF administered lands.

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

Signed: /s/ Brenda Aguirre May 26, 2021
Brenda Aguirre, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist