

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Opal and Auger Creek Culvert Replacements

Project No.: 1994-042-00/1998-028-00

Project Manager: Chad Baumler – EWL-4

Location: Jefferson 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) and the Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District (together “the Sponsors”) to replace three degraded culverts in southeastern Jefferson County, Oregon. Funding for the proposed action would support the conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) considered in the 2020 ESA-consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for the effects of the Columbia River 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. 839 et seq.).

The Sponsors would replace two old stream crossings along Opal Creek Road, a private access and logging road. The two culverts at the Opal Creek crossing and single culvert at the Auger Creek crossing have begun to degrade and rust, creating potential fish passage barriers. Additionally, the culverts are undersized for the high springtime flows of the streams and steeper than NMFS fish passage criteria, presenting further barriers to steelhead attempting to access the habitat upstream of the crossings.

The Sponsors would replace these three culverts with two new, open-arch metal culverts – one at each crossing. Work would begin once the streams are dry, typically by late July. After removing the road above the crossings, the Sponsors would excavate and dispose of the old culverts. They would then install cast-in-place concrete footers along each side of the stream channel and attach new corrugated metal culverts to the footers. The new culvert at the Opal Creek crossing would be 40 feet long and 21 feet wide while the new culvert at the Auger Creek crossing would be 36 feet long and 21 feet wide. Both new culverts would provide ample space beneath the arch for rock and gravel to simulate a natural streambed. Following the installation of the new culverts, the Sponsors would rebuild the road above the crossings using the material removed earlier. The Sponsors would also regrade the areas directly above and below the culverts as well as install rock riprap to protect the culverts and road prism from washouts in an extreme flood event.

Following construction, disturbed areas would be seeded and planted with native grass and forbs, along with individual small saplings and monitored in future years to ensure that the area does not become dominated with undesirable weeds. The total area of ground disturbance between the two crossing sites would be less than an acre. All construction would be completed by the end of October 2025, and vegetation planting would be conducted during the winter, with completion by March 2026.

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 *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures* (dated June 30, 2025), 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.¹

Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Policy Analyst

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

¹ BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to the interim final rule to revise DOE NEPA regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021 and NEPA Implementing Procedures (dated June 30, 2025), to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

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: Opal and Auger Creek Culvert Replacements

Project Site Description

Opal and Auger Creeks are tributaries to Trout Creek, a major eastside tributary to the Deschutes River. Streams in the area are fed predominantly by snowmelt and provide cool summertime water ideal for salmonid spawning and seasonal rearing habitat. The surrounding area is emblematic of the Oregon High Desert, with extensive scrubland valleys and juniper-dominated hillsides. The Opal and Auger Creek crossings are located on private land that has been used extensively for historical timber harvest and cattle ranching. The culvert crossings are along one of these private logging roads, although the area is generally used solely for landowner recreation today.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA cultural resources staff reviewed the proposed actions to evaluate the potential effects on historic and cultural resources (BPA CR No. 2024 152). BPA initiated consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWSRO). After conducting a field survey and reviewing recorded cultural resources near the project sites, BPA determined that no historic properties would be affected by the proposed actions on June 2, 2025. SHPO concurred with the determination on July 1, 2025. CTWSRO concurred with the determination on July 2, 2025. The consultation period ended July 2, 2025, with no other responses received.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Sponsors would excavate the areas around the culverts to replace them, as well as re-grade portions of the nearby floodplain. While these actions would necessitate ground disturbance, the effects would be minimized to the greatest extent possible. Moreover, the total area of disturbance is less than one acre and would cause no large-scale impacts on soils outside the immediate project site.

Soil excavated to replace the culverts would be used to backfill over the new culverts and build new road approaches and result in no soil being removed from the site. The long-term effects of the proposed actions would also improve conditions for local geology and soils. The current culverts are undersized and can cause backed up water above the culverts in high flow events, increasing scour and the chance of major washouts. Degradation of the existing culvert bottoms is also causing additional soil scouring beneath the crossings. The new, larger culverts would handle the streamflow better, reducing the impacts on local soil.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ESA-listed plant species present in Jefferson County (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC)). There would be no effect on ESA-listed plant species.

There are no Oregon state-listed plant species present in Jefferson County (Oregon Department of Agriculture). There would be no effect on Oregon-state listed plant species. Effects on non-listed plant species would be mild. Areas which would be excavated or re-graded host little vegetation beyond a small amount of low grass and forb cover. While these individual plants would be removed during construction, the Sponsors would seed and plant native grasses, forbs, and small trees following installation of the new culverts. This would restore the existing conditions to the area, and potentially improve the quality of local vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) is found in Jefferson County. There are currently no known populations of wolves present in the eastern portion of the county near the project sites (ODFW Wildlife Division). There would therefore be no effects on grey wolves from project actions.

There are no separately listed Oregon state-listed wildlife species present in Jefferson County (ODFW Wildlife Division). There would be no effect on Oregon state-listed wildlife species.

Effects on non-listed wildlife species would be mild. Human presence and noise from equipment would temporarily disturb wildlife in the local area during construction. These effects would be short-lived and limited only to the area directly around the culvert crossings. There would be no long-term negative impacts to local wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed steelhead make use of both Auger and Opal Creek seasonally for rearing habitat (StreamNet Mapper). Construction would be during the period when the streams are dry, typically beginning in mid- to late-July and running through October. There would be no living steelhead in the dry stream channels at this time. There would therefore be no short-term effects on steelhead from the project actions. The long-term effects would be positive, allowing more consistent passage for fish through the crossings at all flow levels and use of spawning habitat upstream.

Effects on non-listed fish species would be functionally identical.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no mapped wetlands at or near the proposed project sites (USFWS National Wetlands Inventory). There would be no effect on wetlands from the proposed actions.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells, surface water withdrawals, or groundwater use are proposed. There would be no effect on groundwater.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Both project sites are on privately owned land. No changes in ownership or land use are proposed. Opal Creek Road would be closed while the culverts are replaced, but these closures would be temporary and, because the road is privately owned, would not affect access by the public. The Sponsors would coordinate with the landowner prior to any road closures.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Effects on visual quality would be negligible. Replacing the existing culverts with new culverts would not appreciably alter the subjective visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be short-term effects on air quality from exhaust generated by machinery during construction. These effects would not persist beyond implementation and there would be no long-term effects on local air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be short-term effects on local noise levels from human presence and machinery during construction. These effects would not persist beyond implementation and there would be no long-term effects on local noise levels.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best practices to ensure human health and safety. All machinery and equipment would be operated solely by trained and licensed (when applicable) personnel.

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: All proposed actions would take place on privately-owned land. The Sponsors would coordinate with the landowner for access, as needed. No other outside coordination would be required.

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

Signed:

Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Policy Analyst