

**Supplement Analysis**  
for the  
**Birch Creek Floodplain Restoration Project**  
(DOE/EA-2135/SA-01)

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Background**

In October 2021, Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) completed the Birch Creek Floodplain Restoration Project Environmental Assessment (DOE/EA-2135). The Birch Creek Floodplain Restoration Project EA analyzed the potential impacts of BPA's proposed funding for the Birch Creek Floodplain Project sponsored by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR).

BPA is proposing to provide funding to CTUIR for access road improvements. The proposed access road improvements would provide safe and reliable access for construction equipment to drill the new groundwater well described in the EA. The Birch Creek Restoration Project EA analyzed a new groundwater well option and the use of the existing access road by construction vehicles and drilling equipment. This new groundwater well would replace the existing groundwater pumping station within the Birch Creek floodplain, allowing for the removal of buried irrigation pipe and utility-line conduit in the floodplain.

This supplement analysis (SA) analyzes the Birch Creek Floodplain Restoration Project EA under the Council on Environmental Quality's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Regulations at 40 CFR §1502.9(d), and the Department of Energy's NEPA Regulations at 10 CFR 1021.314 to determine whether BPA's proposed funding for access road improvements would represent a substantial change in the proposed action relevant to environmental concerns or a significant new circumstance or information relevant to environmental concerns that were not addressed in the Final EA, such that either would warrant the need for a supplemental EA.

**Proposed Activities**

To ensure safe access for construction and well-drilling equipment, an existing two-track access road between the new groundwater well site proposed as part of the floodplain restoration project and an agricultural area up the hill from the restoration project area would be improved. Improvement work would involve blading to smooth out the road surface and adding gravel to harden the road surface and reduce erosion. A dump truck would bring in gravel and small-rock material to place along the road. These road-improvement activities would occur along about one mile to improve road conditions for heavy equipment accessing the well site and to reduce the potential for erosion. All work would occur within the disturbed area of the existing road prism.

**Analysis**

The access road improvements would occur in sections along one mile of an existing access road to allow construction vehicles to access the site of the new groundwater well originally analyzed in the Birch Creek Floodplain Restoration Project EA. The Final EA analyzed this groundwater well option and

the need for construction vehicles to access the new well site using the existing roads currently used for access to irrigated fields (discussed in Section 2.1.6.2 of the Final EA). For the reasons explained below, because the proposed road improvements are a minor addition to the existing groundwater well option analyzed in the Final EA and would remain within the already-disturbed bed of an existing access road, improving that access road does not represent a substantial change to the proposed action relevant to environmental concerns or a significant new circumstance or information relevant to environmental concerns not already addressed in the Final EA.

The primary effects from the proposed access road improvements would be minor disturbances to soil and vegetation from blading and graveling activities. Wildlife could potentially experience effects from noise generated by construction and the presence of equipment. Construction activities would be consistent with and similar to those described in Section 2.2.1 and the effects described in Chapter 3 of the Final EA.

To address these potential effects, minimization and mitigation measures included in the Final EA and adopted in BPA's Mitigation Action Plan would apply to the access road improvements, which include planning construction to minimize soil exposure and erosion potential and washing construction equipment before it is mobilized to control the spread of non-native species. These mitigation measures would apply to site preparation and construction activities.

The area where the new groundwater well is proposed is an introduced upland non-native vegetation community (Section 3.2.1.1.1). Access road improvements would occur along a similar vegetation community and agricultural areas. Because improvement and graveling activities would remain contained within the existing road prism, there would not be an effect to the vegetation growing outside the access road. Mitigation measures described above would limit colonization by noxious and non-native plants.

There are no Endangered Species Act-listed plant or animal species likely to occur in the Birch Creek project area nor would any of these species likely occur along the access road where improvement activities would occur. Because the improvements would occur within the existing access road's disturbed area and not affect soils or vegetation outside it, there would be low potential for effects to state-listed special-status plant or animal species such as the Washington ground squirrel. Surveys conducted in 2019 did not find Washington ground squirrel within the Birch Creek habitat restoration project area and determined that the restoration project area has low potential to provide habitat (Section 3.5.2); therefore, the area affected by the road improvements is unlikely to provide suitable habitat.

The access road improvements would not affect known cultural or historic resources. A survey conducted along the access road in April 2023 did not identify any cultural or historic resources. In addition, consultation with CTUIR undertaken during the preparation for the Birch Creek Restoration Project EA and BPA's Mitigation Action Plan prescribes minimization and mitigation measures for cultural resources that apply to construction of the access road improvements. BPA submitted its no-effect determination associated with the expanded Area of Potential Effect for the proposed access road improvements to consulting parties and Tribes on April 10, 2023. Consulting parties and Tribes included CTUIR, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and the State Historic Preservation Office. BPA did not receive comments from consulting parties and Tribes in response to BPA's no-effect determination during the 30-day consultation period. Therefore, BPA assumed concurrence on May 10, 2023.

The effects of the access road improvements would not differ from the impacts described in Chapter 3 of the Final EA for wetlands, surface or groundwater, recreation, visual resources, water quality, noise, transportation, air quality, and socioeconomic resources. Minor effects to soil and vegetation, and

potentially minor effects to wildlife could occur during construction, however, these effects would be similar to and not substantially deviate from those described in the Final EA. In addition, construction would occur in already-disturbed areas along the access road, which minimizes potential for new disturbance areas. Therefore, the modification of the proposed action in the Birch Creek Floodplain Restoration Project EA to include the access road improvements does not represent a substantial change relevant to environmental concerns or a significant new circumstance or information relevant to environmental concerns that were not addressed in the Final EA.

### **Findings**

BPA finds that the proposed access road improvements and potential impacts are similar to those analyzed in the Birch Creek Floodplain Restoration Project Final EA (DOE/EA-2135, October 2021) and related Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). There are no substantial changes in the EA's Proposed Action and no significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns bearing on the EA's Proposed Action or its impacts within the meaning of 10 CFR § 1021.314 *et seq.* and 40 CFR §1502.9(d). Therefore, no further NEPA analysis or documentation is required.

/s/ Jeff Maslow

Jeff Maslow

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Concur:

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