

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: CDA Fish Habitat Restoration Small Project Actions

Project No.: 1990-044-00

Project Manager: Lee Watts, EWM-4

Location: Benewah and Lake Counties, Idaho

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 proposes to provide funding to the Coeur d'Alene Tribe for small in-stream habitat improvement actions in Lake Creek and Benewah Creek watersheds in northern Idaho.

Planting

Planting within an existing riparian buffer adjacent to upper Lake Creek is proposed for along about 1 mile of previously-completed channel reconstructed to provide shade to moderate water temperature, maintain stream bank stability, increase wildlife habitat values, and improve aesthetics. Planting was started in 2019; this work is a continuation. Plantings would consist primarily of aspen, which would spread by suckering once established, but would also include a variety of willow species in select locations.

Action	Latitude	Longitude
Planting and protective fencing	47.0542570	-117.038276

Large Woody Debris Placement

To increase habitat complexity for westslope cutthroat trout, large woody debris would be placed in sections of reconstructed stream channel in upper Lake Creek to simulate natural woody debris loading, increase habitat complexity, improve channel stability and reduce bank erosion.

Up to 20,000 board feet¹ of wood would be used to create single and multiple log structures in approximately 0.3 mile of channel. Logs would be placed using a CAT 304 mini tracked excavator equipped with a log grapple attachment. Logs would be placed in specified locations where existing wood loads are less than a target wood loading threshold of 65 cubic feet/100 linear feet. A proportion of logs would be partially buried into the bank or placed between existing trees to anchor wood in place, while other logs would be completely buried within the ordinary high water mark of target. Each ground disturbance site would be estimated at 10 foot by 12 foot each, for

¹ This equates to about 200 to 230 logs 12" in diameter and 16' long.

perhaps 20-30 sites where excavation might be needed. A total of 0.6 mile of upper Lake Creek and an unnamed tributary would be treated.

Action	Latitude	Longitude
LWD placement in upper Lake Creek	47.546220	-117.037804

Beaver Dam Analogue Maintenance

Past projects installed beaver dam analogues to create ponds and adjust flow patterns conducive to attract beavers, or to recreate conditions that long-passed beaver populations had created and maintained. The Proposed Action is to maintain previously-installed BDAs (replace woven branches and poles). No new BDAs or extensions are proposed. These structures are maintained by hand; no heavy equipment use is proposed.

Action	Latitude	Longitude
Maintain BDAs in Benawah Creek	47.237607	-116.777158
Maintain BDAs in Lake Creek	47.522570	-117.036560

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/ Robert W. Shull

Robert W Shull
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
CorSource Technology Group

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Date: 07/10/2020

Katey Grange
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.

Proposed Action: CDA Fish Habitat Restoration Small Project Actions

Project Site Description

Project activities would take place in riparian and wetland habitats along stream courses in the Lake Creek and Benewah Creek watersheds. These riparian and wetland project sites are in areas harvested for timber; or within an agricultural/grazing setting surrounded by a forested landscape within the larger ecotone between Northern Rocky Mountain conifer forests and Palouse Prairie. The specific action sites are characterized by low-growing herbaceous and shrubby riparian and wetland vegetation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

The planting and LWD installation sites are within the locations of previously-completed habitat restoration projects for which historic and cultural resource surveys and consultations have been completed. These areas are located in an area previously surveyed and found to have no effect on historic properties (BPA CR # ID 2019 001; SHPO Review # 2019-199; no historic properties affected).

The BDAs to be maintained have been in Lake and Benewah Creeks since 2017 and have been maintained annually. These would be maintained by hand by replacing branches within the existing weave, and replacing posts in like kind. There would be no soil disturbance or additional inundation from the BDA maintenance actions. The action has no potential to affect cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

No heavy equipment would be used in the plantings or the maintenance of beaver dam analogues. A small mini tracked excavator, with low ground pressures would be used to install the large wood in Lake Creek. There would be soil disturbance in the digging needed to imbed some individual logs, and in the maneuvering of the machine for log placement, disturbed soils would be sculpted/re-contoured as appropriate to the specific site and then seeded to minimize erosion potential. Minimal surface soils would be displaced, mixed, or compacted.

There would be no soil disturbance or additional inundation from the BDA maintenance actions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

No Federal/state special-status species or habitats are within the project sites. Native plants would not be removed or destroyed.

Wood installation would disturb some vegetation at those sites, but the sites would be replanted to native species.

BDA actions would require the use of branches from willow and other riparian shrub or tree species, but branches would not be taken in amounts that would kill the source plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

No Federal/state special-status species or habitats are within the project sites.

No habitats would be modified to any degree that might permanently displace medium to large resident wildlife; though some small reptiles, amphibians, or mammals (e.g. frogs, mice, and gophers) may be displaced or killed by operations of the small excavator for wood placement.

The machine operations and wood placement would occur in mid/late-July which would be after migratory birds have completed nesting and fledging. All human activity associated with these actions would temporarily disturb and displace nearby wildlife by, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely.

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

Potential for Significance: No

BDA maintenance would temporarily disturb fish and aquatic species but there would be no soil disturbance or additional inundation from the BDA maintenance actions.

No aquatic habitats would be adversely modified for the long term by the large wood structures, and, they would improve habitat conditions for fish and aquatic species. Some aquatic invertebrates or amphibians may be displaced or killed by installation, but quick re-occupation following construction by members of the same classes of animals is anticipated.

No ESA-listed species would be impacted, but the project's purpose is to improve habitats for native westslope cutthroat trout, which may be temporarily displaced during project actions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

No project activities would occur within wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

There would be no groundwater withdrawal. Maintenance of BDAs maintains expanded flooded conditions and potential for groundwater recharge in those areas. There would be some miniscule potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills from the mini-excavator to be used for large wood placement; but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater is unlikely.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

There would be no land use changes, and no impact to specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

No visually-prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made. All actions would result in native species growing in natural-appearing habitat conditions. BDA's look much like naturally-occurring beaver dams once complete. Likewise, large wood structures mimic what occurs along and within streams naturally.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

There would be some exhaust and greenhouse gas emissions since one mini excavator would be used; though only for a few weeks. Vehicles used to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the sites would be another potential source of exhaust and greenhouse gasses, but this also would be of short term. This action creates no long-term source of emissions or exhaust.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

There would be some noise impacts for a few weeks while the mini excavator would be used, but this type of noise is not inconsistent with that of common logging, ranching, or farming operations throughout the Lake Creek and Benewah Creek watersheds.

Other noise sources would be from humans working on the site, the use of gasoline-powered planting augurs, and the use of vehicles to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the project sites.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Vehicle and excavator operation, and working with hand and power tools have their attendant risk to users, but there would be no condition created from these actions that would introduce new human health or safety hazards or risk into the environment.

No condition created by these actions would increase the burden on the local health, safety, and emergency-response infrastructure.

Neither project actions nor operation of project-associated vehicles on public roads would hinder traffic or access by emergency vehicles.

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: NA

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: The project actions in the Benewah Creek watershed are proposed by the Coeur d'Alene Tribe to be implemented by tribal members on properties owned and managed by the Coeur D'Alene Tribe. The Actions in the Lake Creek watershed would be implemented on private lands, the owners of which had been cooperating with the tribe on restoration actions on these sites for the past couple of years. Before operations, the CDA tribe would notify and coordinate with those private land owners.

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

Signed: /s/ Robert W Shull
Robert W Shull
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
CorSource Technology Group

Date: July 10., 2020