

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: East Fork of South Fork Salmon River Passage Restoration Project

Project No.: 2007-127-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz

Location: Idaho and Valley counties, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine Maintenance; B1.20 Protection of Cultural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Nez Perce Tribe Department of Fisheries Resource Management – Watershed Division to conduct watershed and aquatic ecosystem restoration throughout the Nez Perce Tribal Ceded Territory. The recovery and long-term viability of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed summer Chinook and steelhead populations within the South Fork Salmon River and Big Creek watersheds are at risk due to the presence of fish passage barriers, increased water temperatures, and degraded water quality. The proposed project would address these limiting factors through management of invasive weeds, revegetation of riparian areas, removal of chronic and acute sediment inputs, and reduction of road densities. Project activities would be coordinated with concomitant restoration actions undertaken by the Boise and Payette National Forests, and would include the following actions:

Vegetation Maintenance and Removal

Vegetation maintenance and removal actions would include physical controls (removal by hand, shovel, or weed eater) and chemical controls (approved herbicide by backpack sprayer). Vegetation maintenance and removal would occur annually on portions of land owned by the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) and within conservation easements held by NPT on privately-owned parcels, which are treated annually to maintain and enhance habitat for fish and wildlife. Herbicide treatments would be applied to invasive vegetation along roads within the Boise and Payette National Forests, which are not treated by either Forest Service or the counties.

Plantings

Riparian plantings would occur along denuded segments of streams and rivers which are utilized by, or have the potential to be utilized by, ESA-listed fishes. Plantings would consist of seeding of native grasses and forbs, and hand planting (via shovel) native seedlings or cuttings.

Maintain, Improve, and Decommission Roads

Decommissioning actions would reestablish the natural hillslope contour and profile to the greatest extent practicable. Road maintenance and improvement actions would improve existing road surfaces, contours, and drainage capacity. In general, compact tracked construction

machinery would be used to scarify and dislodge the upper 12 inches of the existing roadbed, and redistribute the loosened material from the roadbed against the cutslope to fill and duplicate the natural hillslope. Cross drain culverts would be installed and/or replaced, streamside shoulders and road surfaces would be regraded to facilitate drainage, and new aggregate would be imported, placed, and compacted. Stream crossings would be restored by the removal of stream crossing structures, restoration of the natural stream gradient, placement of boulder weir structures to prevent headcutting, and reshaping streambanks. Vegetation plugs, shrubs, and/or slash would be placed on the disturbed soil to assist in the reestablishment of native vegetation.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These proposed activities also fulfill commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp). Additionally, the proposed activities are consistent with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program as authorized by the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act.

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/ Zachary Gustafson

Zachary Gustafson
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
SalientCRGT

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

September 9, 2020

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 of South Fork Salmon River Passage Restoration Project

Project Site Description

The project area consists of Nez Perce Tribal Ceded Territory, which includes portions of the Boise and Payette National Forests, land owned by NPT, and within conservation easements held by NPT on privately-owned land. Project actions would take place in the South Fork Salmon River and Big Creek watersheds in riparian and wetland habitats surrounded by grazing and agricultural uses, and forested hillslopes and mountains previously mined and harvested for timber.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Seeding and planting of cuttings (inserting cuttings directly into the soil with no digging); and hand-pulling, mowing, or applying herbicides for the control of invasive plants would have no potential to affect cultural resources.

Planting and vegetation maintenance and removal sites involving ground disturbance are within locations of previously-completed habitat restoration projects for which BPA conducted historic and cultural resource surveys and consultations. BPA determined no historic properties would be affected.

NPT conducted historic and cultural resource surveys and consultation for planting sites along Forstrum Creek. BPA concurred with NPT's determination of no effect to historic properties.

Payette National Forest (PNF) staff conducted historic and cultural resource surveys and consultation for road maintenance and improvement actions within PNF. BPA concurred with PNF's determination of no adverse effect to historic properties.

Boise National Forest (BNF) staff conducted historic and cultural resource surveys and consultation for road decommissioning actions within the BNF. BPA concurred with BNF's determination of no adverse effect to historic properties.

Notes:

- NPT and BNF to ensure forest archaeologist is present to monitor all ground-disturbing activities in the BNF.
- In the event of an inadvertent discovery, stop work in the vicinity and immediately notify the BPA environmental lead, a BPA archaeologist, appropriate BPA project staff, interested Tribes, Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, and the appropriate county, state, and Federal agencies.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Plantings and vegetation removal and maintenance would cause no or minimal disturbance to soils. Herbicide impacts to biological components of soils would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels.

Compact tracked equipment with low ground pressures would be used to conduct road maintenance, improvement, and decommissioning actions. Soil disturbance is anticipated from the moving of tracked equipment, sculpting/recontouring surface soils, excavation within the existing roadbed, and stream crossing restoration.

Notes:

- Implement sediment and erosion control best management practices (BMPs) immediately after clearing and prior to initiating ground-disturbing activities to prevent erosion and runoff.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Macfarlane's Four-O'Clock and Spalding's Catchfly are listed as Threatened in Idaho County, ID. There are no known populations or suitable habitat for these or other Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed plant species in the project areas.

The Whitebark Pine is listed as a Candidate species in Idaho and Valley counties, ID. There are no known occurrences of this or other candidate, sensitive, or watch plant species in the project areas.

All herbicide application is proposed using backpack sprayers with minimal potential for drift or runoff to non-target vegetation.

Temporary, short-term impacts to vegetation from construction activities associated with road maintenance, improvement, and decommissioning would be mitigated by post-construction native revegetation efforts.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Canada Lynx and Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel are listed as Threatened, and North American Wolverine is listed as Proposed Threatened in Idaho and Valley counties, ID. There are no known populations or suitable habitat for these or other Threatened, Endangered, or Proposed terrestrial wildlife species in the project areas.

Herbicide treatments would be small spot treatments of individuals or clusters of target plants, which would be highly localized and thus not substantially impact any one animal's home range.

No plants identified for herbicide treatment are used preferentially for habitat purposes by native species. Some animals may be exposed to applied herbicides through contact with, or ingestion of, treated vegetation, but application would be conducted in accordance with label restrictions, which would be too low of toxicity to be of harm.

No habitats would be modified to the degree that would have the potential to permanently displace medium to large resident wildlife; though some small reptiles, amphibians, or mammals may be displaced or killed by operations of the compact tracked equipment used for road maintenance, improvement, and decommissioning.

The operation of vehicles and equipment associated with project actions are planned to take place after migratory birds have completed nesting and fledging. All construction and human activity associated with the project actions could cause temporary, short-term disturbance to, and displacement of, nearby wildlife, 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 with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed steelhead and Bull Trout and their critical habitat are present in the mainstem and tributaries throughout the South Fork Salmon River and Big Creek watersheds. Stream crossing restoration could cause temporary, short-term impacts to fish and fish habitat such as increased downstream turbidity and decreased water quality. Temporary disturbance and displacement of individual fish in downstream tributaries could occur during construction activities, but is not anticipated to result in take, or long-term impacts to fish or fish habitat. Habitat conditions for fish and aquatic species are expected to improve in the long-term from project actions as riparian areas are revegetated, and sediment inputs are reduced.

No aquatic habitats would be adversely modified in the long term by project actions. Some aquatic invertebrates or amphibians may be killed or temporarily displaced if stream crossing restoration is required as part of road maintenance, improvement, and decommissioning, but quick re-occupation following construction by members of the same classes of animals is anticipated.

Planting and vegetation management and removal actions, including herbicide application, would be classified as low risk to ESA-listed species according to BPA's ESA Section 7 consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP). Herbicide use would be reported to BPA within 30 days of project completion for inclusion in annual reporting to the USFWS and NMFS.

Notes:

- All stream crossing restoration activities would be conducted when streams are dry. Should road construction require in-water work, the sponsor is responsible for obtaining necessary permits and ensuring terms and conditions of said permits are followed.
- Do not allow petroleum products, sediment, or other deleterious materials to enter any stream, wetland, water body, or drainage conveyance.
- Ensure spill containment and cleanup materials are readily available at project sites, staging areas, and in construction vehicles and equipment.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Removal, fill, or disturbance of wetlands and native vegetation within wetland areas is not anticipated from activities within project areas. Activities within or near wetlands would be limited to vegetation maintenance and removal of invasive weeds and non-natives using methods with little to no ground disturbance. Herbicide treatments are not planned to occur in, or in the vicinity of, wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or withdrawal of groundwater is planned for the project areas.

Potential impacts to groundwater and aquifers from herbicide treatments would be minimized by application in accordance with manufacturer's specifications.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

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

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually prominent vegetative, landform, or structural changes would be made. Road decommissioning would remove roads from portions of BNF and PNF, and therefore restore native vegetation and a natural look consistent with the existing habitat in these locations.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary, short-term impacts from small amounts of dust and vehicle emissions would occur during project actions.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary, intermittent noise from construction activities would occur during daylight hours. Road decommissioning would limit future motorized vehicle access to portions of Boise and Payette National Forests and therefore result in lower, more natural ambient noise levels following construction completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project actions are not anticipated to create conditions that would increase the burden on the local health, safety, and emergency-response infrastructure.

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: Project actions proposed by the NPT within the South Fork Salmon River and Big Creek watersheds would be implemented by tribal members, employees, or contractors on private lands, conservation easements held by the NPT on private lands, or properties owned and managed by the NPT. Private land owners are aware of and have been cooperating with the NPT on restoration actions at these sites. Prior to initiating project activities, the NPT would notify and coordinate with those same private land owners.

Road maintenance, improvement, and decommissioning actions within the Boise and Payette National Forests are part of each Forest's routine annual road maintenance activities for which formal public scoping was conducted, which included presentations to County Boards of Commissioners, public notification and comment solicitation, and public comment response.

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

Signed: /s/ Zachary Gustafson September 9, 2020
Zachary Gustafson, ECF-4 date
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