

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Asotin County Conservation District - Water Developments and Farmland Conversion (2019-12, 2019-21, 2019-23) (Updated)

**Project No.:** 1994-018-05

**Project Manager:** Matthew Schwartz, EWM-4

**Location:** Asotin County, Washington

**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) purposes to fund Asotin County Conservation District (ACCD) to convert farmland to wildlife habitat, and develop livestock water sources on three parcels (as noted by their identification number). The purpose of this work is to minimize the impacts of livestock on riparian zones and create additional habitat and cover for wildlife species.

(2019-12) The proposed existing fallow-stage wheat production field conversions to perennial grass coverage would involve the application of glyphosate (Roundup) to control weeds, and direct seeding of perennial grasses with a Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)- created seed mix (disturbance would be limited to 0.5 – 2" of the top of the plow zone). The perennial coverage would provide habitat and forage for wildlife species for a minimum of 5 years.

(2019-21) The proposed spring development would improve water collection by excavating the collection area surrounding a current cistern to determine where the water is, capturing the water using tile line (perforated pipe), and routing the water from the collection area to the cistern. The project would use a small excavator to dig out the collection area near the current cistern to determine the water location and replace the tile line that runs from the collection area to the cistern. A small bulldozer would be used to recover disturbed soil and the work would disturb about 1.1 acres of area. Equipment would access the spring using an improved road which travels approximately 0.4 miles from existing buildings to the spring location.

(2019-23) The proposed well development would include a water well, buried water lines, three cattle watering points, and two water storage tanks. One water well would be installed using heavy equipment with approximately 2,200 feet of 1 ¼ inch-diameter water pipeline. Half of the water pipe would be buried to a depth of 2 feet using a trencher or backhoe. The other half of the pipeline would be placed on the ground surface due to steep terrain. Three cattle troughs with 3000 gallon to 5000gallon capacity water storage tanks and solar pumps would be installed on concrete, dirt, or gravel platforms using heavy equipment and hand tools as terrain permits. All of the well development components would result in approximately 1 acre of ground disturbance.

Funding the proposed activities would support conservation of Endangered Species Act-listed species considered in the 2020 Endangered Species Act consultations with both the National



# 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.

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## **Project Site Description**

2019-12: private land, farmland, historically wheat production being transitioned to pasture land, topographically high and flat.

2019-21: private land, rangeland, dominated by upland grasses with shrubs throughout and no riparian vegetation immediately surrounding the spring. The spring is on the northwest side of the somewhat steep sided draw. The draw has an unnamed tributary to Tenmile Creek flowing out of it.

2019-23: private land, rangeland, dominated by upland grasses and small shrubs throughout, steep ravines, approximately 200 ft from the Snake River.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: (2019-12) The conversion of farmland to perennial grasses would be occurring within the footprint of the original agricultural fields; thus, BPA determined that there would be no potential to affect historic or cultural resources.

(2019-21) A BPA Archeologist conducted National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 consultations with the Washington State Department of Archeology and Historic Presentation (WA DAHP), the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla, and the Confederated Tribes of the Yakama Nation. BPA determined that the implementation would result in no historic properties affected (WA 2020 036). No comments were received from any of the consulting parties; therefore, BPA assumed concurrence with our effects determination.

(2019-23) In coordination with BPA, NRCS assumed the role as agency lead for Section 106 coverage. NRCS determined that the implementation would result in no adverse affects to historic properties.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: (2019-12) Soils within the farmland conversion project would be similarly impacted as previous activities. Disturbance would be limited to 0.5 to 2 inches of the top of the plow zone. No new ground disturbance would be occurring.

(2019-21) Removal and replacement of the spring would cause ground disturbance on approximately 1.1 acres; erosion control measures would be implemented to minimize impacts.

(2019-23) Installation of the well would disturb approximately 1 acres of soils; erosion control measures would be implemented to minimize soil from traveling offsite.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status species are present at any of the proposed project areas. Approximately 6 acres of farmland would be converted to a perennial grasses mixture. Approximately 2 acres of vegetation would be disturbed associated with the removal and replacement of both water development sites. Disturbed sites would be seeded and revegetated according to NRCS guidelines.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status wildlife species or habitat would be impacted by the proposed activities. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by construction noise during implementation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The farmland conversion activities would occur in fields upland of all water bodies and floodplains in the area. Therefore, the proposed project would result in no impact to these resources.

The spring development would take place in an upland habitat approximately 150 ft from an unnamed intermittent tributary of Tenmile Creek. Therefore, the proposed project would result in no impact to these resources.

The well development would take place in an upland habitat approximately 200 ft from the Snake River in upland habitats. All project activities would occur away from the river and no other waterbodies are in the project areas. Therefore, the proposed project would result in no adverse impact to these resources. There would be long-term benefit to nearby waterbodies and associated fish, including nearby ESA-listed fish (steelhead, sockeye, fall Chinook, and bull trout), by reducing livestock intrusion in riparian areas, which would result in an improvement in water quality.

### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands would be disturbed by any of the proposed activities.

### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The farmland conversion and spring development would have no impact to groundwater and aquifers.

The well development would not exceed more than 5,000 gallons a day. The state of Washington has determined that withdrawal of groundwater does not require a permit for stock-watering as long as that withdrawal is less than 5,000 gallons a day. In this case the well would not exceed that. The landowner would follow all state mandated guidelines for well operations. Based on this, the proposed well would be not likely to impact groundwater or aquifers in this area.

## **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing farmland would be converted into wildlife habitat changing the land use for that project area. All other project areas would continue to be used for livestock grazing activities. Projects would occur on private property.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Farmland conversion and water developments would be similar to existing structures and fields. These proposed activities would not be noticeably different from previous activities in the project areas. Already existing access roads would be used to prevent added disturbance.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary, small amounts of dust and vehicle emissions would be generated during implementation.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary construction noise would be generated during local approved daylight hours.

## **12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No known soil contamination or hazardous conditions and no adjacent CERCLA sites.

### **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: Asotin County Conservation District has coordinated with the landowners and would continue to work with Landowners to obtain final project agreements and access onto private property prior to project implementation.

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

Signed: /s/ Catherine Clark April 23, 2020  
Catherine Clark, ECF-4 date  
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist  
Motus Recruiting and Staffing, Inc.