

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Golden Doe Large Wood Project

Project No.: 2009-003-00

Project Manager: Tori Bohlen, EWU - 4

Location: Okanogan County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

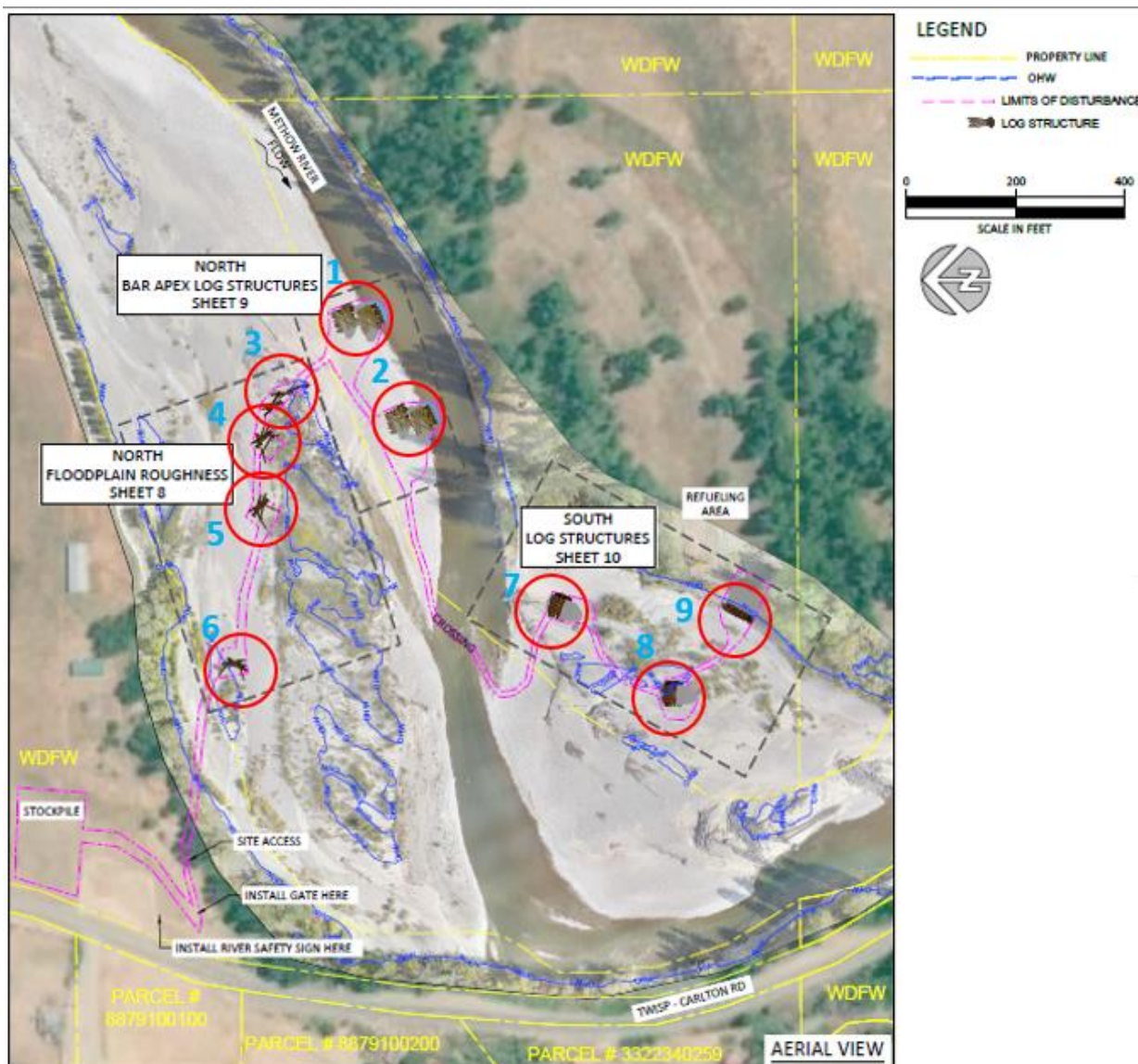
Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund Yakama Nation Fisheries (YN) to enhance instream and floodplain habitat conditions for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed endangered Upper Columbia spring Chinook Salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), threatened summer steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) in the Twisp-to-Carlton Reach of the Methow River near River Mile (RM) 34 on land owned by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WA DNR) in Okanogan County, Washington.

Human alterations within the basin have included beaver trapping, gold and silver mining, and valley bottom development for homesteads, orchards, livestock farming, irrigation, and timber harvest, which has reduced the quantity of wood in the watershed and riparian zone, and ultimately reduced the supply of large wood available for recruitment into the Methow River. Levees and bank stabilization have been used within the project area vicinity to protect roads and private lands within the valley bottom. These levees limit the extent of floodplain inundation compared to historical levels. Within the Twisp-to-Carlton reach, nearly a quarter of all streambank contains bank armoring, and several levees and roads disconnect the floodplain from the Methow River. The aforementioned impacts result in a simplified channel relative to historical conditions, with less large wood, lower levels of floodplain connectivity, reduced main channel and off-channel habitat complexity, and higher energy.

The project involves two components; large wood installation and riparian revegetation. Nine new large wood structures would be placed on floodplain surfaces on both sides of the Methow River to promote wood aggradation in the area and create habitat complexity, and native species would be planted in disturbed areas to promote riparian function, increase food production, and improve habitat complexity for target species. Wood structures would be composed of Douglas-fir rootwads and ballasted with native alluvium excavated from the upstream ends of the structures using excavators and Douglas-fir pilings driven vertically into the channel bed with a vibratory pile driver. Haul trucks would be used for transporting wood from the staging areas to installation sites and for installing all mainstem large wood structures. Excavators would be parked on each side of the river and used to pass logs from one side of the river to the other without crossing. The work would be carried out between May 3, 2021, and December 3, 2021, with the majority of the work

implemented between July 1, 2021, and August 15, 2021. A detailed description of the project components follows.

Figure 1. Overview of Golden Doe Large Wood Project



North Bar – Floodplain Roughness Features & Apex Log Structures

Two apex log structures would be placed near the Methow River (piles 1-2 on Figure 1 above). The structures would be composed of logs and timber piles. Construction of the two channel-adjacent log structures would require about 300 cubic yards (cy) of excavation/backfill per pile (600 cy total). The remaining two log structures, set back from the channel, would require about 100 cy of excavation/backfill per pile (200 cy total). Temporary 90-foot cofferdams would be used to isolate the construction activities and would be composed of bulk bags filled with washed gravel or sheet piles driven into the ground with a vibratory pile driver.

Four log structures (piles 3-6 on Figure 1 above) composed of logs and timber piles would be placed in the floodplain to provide stability and roughness up to the 100-year flood event. Excavation would not be required for placement of these log structures, and because they would be installed on a dry cobble bar, no cofferdams would be necessary either.

Slash from the Alder Creek Floodplain Restoration project, which would be implemented concurrently with the Golden Doe Large Wood project near Methow RM 33, would be incorporated into the floodplain roughness and log structures.

South Bar – Log Structures

Three log structures (piles 7-9 on Figure 1 above) would be placed on the south bar. Two of these (piles 7 and 8) would require about 460 cy excavation/backfill (920 cy total). The remaining log structure (pile 9), partially buried in the bank, would require about 350 cy of excavation/backfill. No cofferdams would be necessary for the installation of these structures. Nearby slash and woody debris would be incorporated into the south bar log structures.

Riparian Revegetation

Most of the disturbance from this project would be on unvegetated cobble bars. On the right bank of the project area, some uplands area would be disturbed for the staging/refueling area and the access route down to the river. Disturbed areas would be reseeded with native grasses and shrubs. Small shrubs incidentally removed along the access routes would be salvaged and used to supplement constructed large wood habitat structures. No large trees would be disturbed. Native species would be planted in all disturbed areas to promote riparian function, increase food production, and improve habitat complexity for target species. All of the post-construction planting would be done by hand.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the FCRPS 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. (USC) 839 et seq.).

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/ Mandy Hope

Mandy Hope
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel April 28, 2021

Sarah T. Biegel Date
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: Golden Doe Large Wood Project

Project Site Description

The project area is characterized by northern cascade riparian vegetation such as ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), cottonwoods (*Populus balsamifera*), and willow (*Salix spp*). There are large gravel bars to the north and south of the main channel. These features generally lack stabilizing vegetation. The immediate project area is owned by WDFW and the portion of the project within the ordinary high water mark is under the jurisdiction of WA DNR (River Right-of-Way). The most significant infrastructure at the project area is the Twisp-Carlton Road, located along the western boundary of the project area, and situated on an elevated road prism above the active floodplain. Downstream of the project area, privately-owned rural residences and agricultural fields are located on both banks of the Methow River.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) on August 1, 2019, (BPA Cultural Resources Project Number WA 2019 174) seeking comment from the consulting parties on the area of potential effect (APE). The consultation letter was sent to YN, Washington Department of Natural Resources (WA DNR), WDFW, Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CTCR). Responses were received from the DAHP on August 1, 2019, the YN on August 9, 2019, and the CTCR on August 12, 2019. The DAHP concurred with the APE. The YN noted that the project APE is located in an area considered to have high probability for encountering cultural resources and previously documented archaeological sites in the vicinity, and recommended a cultural resources survey of the proposed APE. The CTCR advised BPA part of the APE for this project may overlap with the location of a significant cultural resource relating to the history of the Methow Tribe, and did not concur with the APE.

BPA sent a follow-up letter to the consulting parties on January 16, 2020, asking for comments on a Section 106 guidance document developed specifically for the Golden Doe project, with the goal of providing additional clarity and transparency in regards to how the Section 106 process would be followed for this project. Responses were received from the WA DNR on January 22, 2020, the CTCR on January 25, 2020, the WA DAHP on January 28, 2020, and the WDFW on February 6, 2020. The WA DNR had no additional comments. The CTCR Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) provided several comments for incorporation into the final document. The WA DAHP requested copies of responses from other consulting parties. The WDFW noted that access to WDFW lands requires a right-of-entry and field research permit.

BPA incorporated the responses and additional information based on conversations with consulting parties, and sent the final Section 106 guidance document and draft research design to consulting parties for comment on May 27, 2020. Responses were received from

the WA DAHP and the CTCR on May 27, 2020, and from the WA DNR on June 16, 2020. The WA DAHP concurred with the documents. The CTCR provided a few minor comments on the research design. The WA DNR had no further comments.

BPA sent the final research design and draft background research document to consulting parties on August 10, 2020. No comments were received from any of the consulting parties.

BPA sent a determination letter to consulting parties on March 12, 2021. In summary, as a result of the field inventory and ongoing consultation, BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in No Historic Properties Affected. Responses were received by the DAHP on March 12, 2021, the CTCR on April 5, 2021, the WDFW on April 5, 2021, and the WA DNR on April 13, 2021. All parties concurred with BPA's determination. No comments were received from the YN.

Notes:

- BPA provided the YN with an Inadvertent or Unanticipated Discovery Plan (IDP) in the event of an unexpected archaeological discovery.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: As the majority of the proposed project would occur on un-vegetated cobble bar, there is very little proposed vegetation clearing, grading, and compaction of soils by heavy equipment along the access route down to the river. Disturbances in this small area may result in short-term, temporary increases in soil erosion and/or elevated suspended sediments in the Methow River. Long-term beneficial impacts associated with restored sediment transport include sediment flushing regimes and improved stability of bar apex islands. Riparian function would also be improved with the installation of native plantings.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ESA-listed plant species present in the project area. Short-term negative impacts to vegetation from heavy equipment use would result in soil being turned and plants being uprooted, buried, or torn apart. Disturbance to plants would only occur when absolutely necessary to reach a site. The project is designed to minimize impacts to native vegetation and the majority of impacts are located on cobble bars. Riparian and upland vegetative communities would be restored through seeding and planting native species in disturbed areas following project implementation. Shrubs removed during construction would be saved to be used during placement of large wood structures. The project would have short-term effects on vegetation from construction actions. Long-term beneficial effects include increased riparian habitats and restored or improved vegetative conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area has the potential to contain habitat for ESA-listed Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) (USFWS Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC), 2021). Canada lynx are unlikely to be present in the project area based on their preferred habitat, which is normally at much higher elevations (above 3,000 feet). Gray wolves are highly mobile and would be able to easily avoid the project area during implementation. Due to the low number of gray wolves in the area (about 160 wolves were recorded across the entire state of Washington), it is extremely unlikely that a den would be present within one mile of the project. Yellow-billed cuckoo are unlikely to be encountered due to their historically low numbers and lack of

preferred habitat. For these reasons, it is anticipated that the proposed action would have no effect on these species.

Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by human presence (sound, movement, shadows) and vegetation removal. These effects would be short term. Improved habitat conditions would result in long-term positive impacts, including increased plant species richness and diversity, increased habitat structural diversity, and increased habitat heterogeneity.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The Methow River is designated Final Critical Habitat for bull trout, steelhead, and Chinook salmon. The proposed action would result in long-term positive impacts to ESA-listed species by providing complex off-channel habitat for all fish species during all flow conditions. Work area isolation would be used in areas with water; no direct effects to salmonids as a result of construction are anticipated. Fish salvage, which could cause a direct effect to fish, would be performed prior to establishing the temporary cofferdams for the side channel excavation.

Notes:

- BPA performed a technical and functional review of the project designs and approved them on February 18, 2021. YN would adhere to the conservation measures required under the ESA consultations with NMFS and the USFWS on BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) to minimize impacts to bull trout, Chinook, and steelhead during project implementation (HIP Activity Categories 2a, 2d, and 2e). These measures include isolating work from waters occupied by ESA-listed fish, designing large wood placements to mimic natural processes and functions, and using a licensed engineer to design large wood installation.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The placement of log structures in the channel may result in minor impacts to groundwater by encouraging greater amounts of water onto the floodplain during high flows. The long-term increase in floodplain access would benefit groundwater recharge and function.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Golden Doe project area is located on the river near Methow RM 34 and is part of the Golden Doe Wildlife area owned by WDFW. The area is regularly used for hunting waterfowl, fishing, and for public river access. This project would have no long-term impacts to any of these public use activities following construction. YN has Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreements in place with WDFW for the construction of this project and continued maintenance (as needed) for five years following construction.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: To the north, south, and east are unoccupied lands. The project area is adjacent to Twisp-Carlton Road to the west and is visible to traffic. Residences to the west, across Twisp-Carlton Road are within visual distance of the project area. During construction, equipment and bare soil may be seen from these residences. These landowners have been notified of the project implementation and do not have any concerns about visual disturbance. The overall visual quality of the area is expected to remain the same, if not improve due to being seeded and planted with native woody riparian vegetation following project completion.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Equipment emissions and upturned dust would result in short-term impacts to air quality. These would be temporary and localized in nature and would not have long-term impacts on air quality. Implementation of the proposed action is not expected to generate long-term or short-term violations of state air quality standards.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The use of heavy equipment during project implementation would result in temporary, localized noise increases. These increases would not substantially impact the surrounding environment.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The potential health and safety risks to workers and the public during construction would not be greater than a standard construction project and would be short-term. Adequate signage and other routine safeguards for worker and public safety would be applied to minimize these effects.

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 landowners adjacent to the project area were notified by a letter mailed in June of 2020. Some landowners asked to meet in person or by phone as a follow-up to the letters. This outreach was conducted by the YN and WDFW.

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

Signed: /s/ Mandy Hope April 28, 2021
Mandy Hope, ECF - 4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing