

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** North Fork Touchet (Empey) Floodplain and Fish Habitat Restoration

**Project No.:** 1996-046-01

**Project Manager:** Victoria Bohlen, EWU-4

**Location:** Columbia County, WA

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.20  
Protect/restore/improve fish and wildlife habitat

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to provide funding to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's (CTUIR) restoration activities located along the North Fork Touchet River between river mile 1.7 and 2.6 in Columbia County, Washington. The project would restore naturally functioning channel processes by increasing channel complexity and in-stream habitat diversity, and increasing floodplain and riparian function. BPA funds would contribute toward the purchase of large wood acquisition and construction of engineered wood structures and placement, and long-term vegetation planting and management at the project site. Additional cost-share from Floodplains by Design and Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) would cover costs of bridge replacement, irrigation diversion improvements, riparian plantings, and berm reconstruction.

BPA proposes to fund installation of seven in-stream engineered log jams (ELJs) to promote split-flow conditions onto the newly constructed inset floodplain, provide habitat cover for fish, accumulate and sort sediment, and scour pools. Another 13 ELJs would be installed outside the ordinary high water (OHW) to encourage floodplain roughness and provide refugia for juvenile salmonids during peak flows. Large wood structures would be driven in place using vibratory pile drivers or secured with rock ballast. Rock ballast would be utilized for stability if vertical logs cannot be driven to depths shown in plans. Adaptive management of these structures (addition of wood or ballast in previously disturbed areas) could occur in subsequent years to encourage project success and in response to unforeseen high flow events.

Any ground disturbance adjacent to the wetted channel would be isolated from stream flow. All work near and adjacent to the river would occur during the approved in-water work window, typically July 15th to August 30th. Site restoration measures would include soil decompaction, seeding, and planting of native trees and shrubs at excavation locations. Excavated materials would be disposed of outside the 100-year floodplain and on an adjacent landowner property. On-site adjustments to ELJs, and follow-up plantings could occur in subsequent years dependent upon site conditions and revegetation success.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service and 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 Federal Columbia River Power System (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/ Claire McClory

Claire McClory  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel                      June 4, 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:** North Fork Touchet (Empey) Floodplain and Fish Habitat Restoration

## **Project Site Description**

Throughout this reach of the North Fork Touchet, the vegetation community is made up of a mosaic of riparian plants and trees including cottonwood, alder, and willows immediately bordering the channel. Outside the riparian area, the main vegetation type is grass used for grazing cattle and hay production, and an apple orchard.

Much of the North Fork Touchet is channelized by push up berms and levees that reduce interaction with the natural floodplain. The river is also starved of in-stream diversity such as large pools and downed wood. The North Fork Touchet River is an important steelhead spawning and rearing area, but Chinook salmon were extirpated many years ago. The North Fork Touchet is critical habitat for bull trout, which use this reach for both spawning and rearing.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA determined that the implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no historic properties affected (WA 2021 008). The Colville Tribe concurred with BPA's determination on May 1, 2021. DAHP concurred on May 4 and again on May 17<sup>th</sup> with an updated scope. CTUIR requested that an on-site monitor be present during construction activities.

Notes:

- A cultural resources monitor would be on site during any new ground-disturbing activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary impacts to soil from increased erosion potential during ELJ installation. Sediment control BMPs would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Post construction seeding and mulching would further minimize erosion potential.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status, including Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed, plant species are known to be present. Temporary impacts to existing vegetation during construction of ELJs

are expected. Existing riparian vegetation would be maintained where possible to retain existing shade cover. Post construction seeding, planting, and long-term monitoring and management would re-establish native upland and riparian plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed wildlife species were documented in or adjacent to the project area and no designated upland critical habitat is present. Minor, temporary impacts to local wildlife from construction noise and vegetation removal during ELJ construction are expected. Post-construction native planting and seeding would increase long-term available habitat for local wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project is covered under the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion (BiOp) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Listed fish species include Middle Columbia River steelhead and Columbia River bull trout and their critical habitats. Design plans were reviewed by BPA engineering technical services, and a series of conservation measures were proposed to ensure that the project would benefit ESA-listed fish species. The project was designed to re-establish instream natural roughness and floodplain connectivity.

ELJ installation would contribute toward re-establishment of floodplain connection to areas that have been historically altered by human influence. All work adjacent to the wetted channel would be isolated from the stream flow, and would occur during the approved in-water work window. The CTUIR has applied for a Clean Water Act Nationwide Permit (NWP) for in-stream wood placement and impacts from floodplain restoration. BMPs to avoid or minimize temporary fine sediment impacts during construction would be employed. Site restoration measures would include seeding and planting to re-establish native plant populations.

Notes:

- Project sponsors would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval, including turbidity monitoring requirements and in-water work timing.
- Project sponsors would adhere to terms and conditions outlined under the NWP issued by the Army Corps of Engineers.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no designated wetlands on the property.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor impacts to groundwater during construction excavation within and adjacent to the floodplain. Long-term increase in floodplain access from ELJ installation would benefit groundwater recharge and function.

## 8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is located on private agricultural property. ELJs would contribute toward increased floodplain access, which would remove some portions of the project area from long-term agricultural production, including 15 acres of an existing apple orchard. The project would not limit production from the remaining orchard, and the landowner is supportive of the project.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor changes to visual quality expected from increased floodplain width and long-term increase in riparian and upland vegetation throughout the project area.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the site during construction activities.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in ambient noise during construction. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be during daylight hours and would cease following project completion.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous nor would result in any health or safety risks to the general public.

### **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: CTUIR is working with the existing landowner to conduct work on their property. Adjacent landowners are supportive of the project.

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

Signed: /s/ Claire McClory June 4, 2021  
Claire McClory, ECF-4 Date  
Environmental Protection Specialist