Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Rattlesnake Gulch Fish Passage Project

Project Manager: Jesse Wilson, EWU-L

Location: Klickitat 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 the Yakama Nation Fisheries to implement a fish passage improvement project near the confluence of Swale Creek and Rattlesnake Gulch Creek in Klickitat County, Washington. The work would benefit Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Mid-Columbia steelhead.

The project would include the removal of two culvert crossings (approximately 155 cubic yards) that have been identified as velocity and height barriers to fish passage, limiting access to about 3 miles or more of habitat upstream in Rattlesnake Gulch tributaries for native steelhead. The culverts would be removed with an excavator and replaced with two clear span (no footings would be located in the streams) concrete bridge crossings. Just downstream of the tributary culverts, a small, 2-foot high dam made of mortared rock (approximately 91 cubic yards) on Rattlesnake Gulch Creek would also be removed with an excavator.

After the removal of the culverts and rock dam, salvaged fluvial material and boulders would be added to approximatey 125 linear feet ofthe creek bed to regrade the channel to improve natural flow characteristics. Two large in-stream engineered wood structures would be placed downstream of where the two channels converge, anchored along the streambanks to re-direct water flows and create two pools that would improve habitat conditions for migrating steelhead and rainbow trout. Additional trees with rootwads would be placed in the creek near the engineered wood structures. After project completion, all disturbed surfaces would be revegetated. Annual adapative management work at the project site could include additional riparian and upland vegetation plantings, in-stream wood placements, and maintenance of installed wood structures to ensure project success.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also support Bonneville's commitments to the Yakama Nation in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as amended, 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/ Carolyn A. Sharp
Carolyn A. Sharp
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

KATEY GRANGE
Digitally signed by KATEY GRANGE
Date: 2023.06.21 11:54:12 -07'00'

Katey C. 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: Rattlesnake Gulch Fish Passage Project

Project Site Description

The project is located on private property in south central Washington. Lover's Lane Road, a private road, crosses two tributaries to Rattlesnake Gulch Creek (unofficial name) with two culverts, approximately 900 ft upstream of Rattlesnake Gulch Creek's confluence with Swale Creek. The existing channels are deeply entrenched and disconnected from the historic floodplain, which is now a terrace upwards of 8 feet above the ordinary high-water elevation. The two tributaries converge roughly 50 feet downstream of the culverts forming a larger channel. An existing spring also discharges near the confluence of the tributaries. The stream is ephemeral and flows vary greatly throughout the year. The spring flow was the only flow observed at the project site during field work performed on November 3, 2021. The riparian community consists of an overstory mix mainly composed of oak and Ponderosa Pine. The riparian corridor is extremely narrow due to channel incision, disconnection from the historic floodplain, and low rates of lateral adjustment. There are some mature alders growing along the streamside, but the dominant vegetation near the channel margins is willow. Shrubs and herbaceous vegetation make up ground cover along the channel margins.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA determined that the project would result in no historic properties affected on April 6, 2023, and consulted with the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (BPA tracking # WA 2021 258). On April 7, 2023, DAHP concurred with BPA's determination. No other responses were received from consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Culvert and dam removal would would result in excavation of 241 cubic yards of material, but the long-term effects would be positive and outweigh any short-term negative effects. Temporary erosion control measures would be employed until the site is stabilized following construction. Disturbed areas will be decompacted, recontoured and replanted to achieve similar or improved conditions. Re-grading the channel would reestablish stream processes and floodplain interaction, and the seeding and planting of riparian vegetation would help maintain the stream conditions and reduce erosion in the future.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ESA-listed or state-listed plant species present at the project site. As a result, there would be no effect on listed plant species. Effects on non-listed plants would be minor as the dominant vegetation along the channel margins that may be disturbed by project activities is willow, which would regenerate naturally within the next 2-3 years. Further, post construction seeding and planting would re-establish native riparian plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or ESA-listed wildlife species are documented in or adjacent to the project area and no critical habitat is present. Local wildlife may be temporarily disturbed or displaced by construction noise. It is likely that species would avoid the area during construction and return once project work is complete.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation:Project activities would temporarily disrupt the stream corridor and floodplain, though flows would be low to non-existent in the tributaries and Rattlesnake Gulch Creek during the time of construction in late summer/early fall. Steelhead(threatened) and rainbow trout (non-listed) are known to use the project area . The project is covered under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion under Section 7 of ESA with Project Notification Form number 2023034. Avoidance and minimization measures would be identified in the project Sponsor's Clean Water Act Section 404 Nationwide Permit (NWP) further reducing impact to waterways.The project would result in long-term improvement to fish habitat in the Swale Creek basin.

Notes:

- Project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval.
- Project sponsor would adhere to all avoidance and minimization efforts identified in the NWP 27 (Aquatic Habitat, Restoration, Enhancement and Establishment Activities) permit issued for this project.
- Instream work would be conducted during the established work window determined by WDFW.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not take place within or around wetlands, and therefore no potential to affect wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or uses of groundwater are proposed. Project activities would potentially cause minor effects to groundwater. Restoring the historical grade of the stream would result in the floodplain retaining more groundwater than it currently does. However, this effect would be limited to restoring the historical conditions of the site before the channel became incised.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing land use would not change as a result of these activities. Traffic disturbance and delays would be limited to local residential traffic.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no adverse effects to the visual quality of the environment as a result of this project. A bridge would be slightly more visually prominent than a culvert, but would not change the overall visual character of the landscape. Replacement of a man-made rock dam with woody instream structures and other natural materials would return the visual quality of the stream channel to more natural riparian conditions.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary exhaust caused by machinery used during project activities. This exhaust would cause no long-term changes to local air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary increase in noise during daytime construction activities due to vehicles and equipment use. This noise would cause no long-term impacts.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety. All heavy machinery would be operated solely by licensed and trained personnel. Roadwork activities would be coordinated with local landowners who may be affected by temporary road closures.

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: The project is located on private property and Lovers Lane Road is a private road accessing that private property. The sponsor has obtained permission from the landowners to access the site and conduct habitat restoration actions upon it.

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

Signed: */s/ Carolyn A. Sharp* *June 21, 2023*
Carolyn A. Sharp, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist