

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Quant Ranch Juniper Removal Project

Project No.: 2007-397-00

Project Manager: Allan Whiting, EWL - 4

Location: Wheeler County, Oregon

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 Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWS) to remove western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*) on 160-acres of private ranch in Wheeler County, Oregon. The legal description of the project is Township 10 South, Range 22 East, Section 33 and Township 11 South, Range 22 East, Section 4.

The Quant Ranch Juniper Removal Project seeks to reduce the negative impacts that western juniper imposes on watershed functions. The proposed project's objectives are to remove encroaching juniper trees from upland areas adjacent to Grids Creek, a main tributary to the Lower John Day River, for the benefit of salmonids, specifically Endangered Species Act-listed Mid-Columbia steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). It is anticipated that removal of western juniper in the Grids Creek drainage would allow the water table to recharge and increase water availability to support the native sagebrush steppe ecosystem.

Juniper would be hand cut with chainsaws and piled on site. Piled junipers would be disposed of by the landowner and at the landowner's expense at a later time. The project area would be accessed by existing two-track roads or by foot.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also support BPA's commitments to the CTWS 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/ Israel Duran

Israel Duran
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>November 21, 2023</u>
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: Quant Ranch Juniper Removal Project

Project Site Description

The proposed project site is located in the Service Creek – John Day River watershed approximately 17 miles North of the town of Mitchell in Wheeler County, Oregon. Common vegetation in the project site consists of western juniper, rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*), bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), bunchgrasses (e.g. *Elytrigia dasystachya*, *Festuca idahoensis*), and western yarrow (*Achillea lanulosa*).

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A cultural resource survey was conducted, and consultations with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, Burns Paiute Tribes, and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla River were completed for the area potentially affected by the project. The Oregon SHPO concurred on October 30, 2023, that the project would have no historic properties affected. No other responses were received.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although heavy equipment would not be used and rootwads would not be removed, there would still be temporary impacts to soil due to felling, hauling, and staging of trees. All junipers would be cut and piled on site. There would be no digging or other ground disturbances as part of this process.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ESA-listed or Federal/state special-status species or habitats within proposed work areas. Only mature juniper trees are targeted for removal. Removal of encroaching juniper would help promote beneficial native forbs and shrubs and reduce noxious weeds.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Several Oregon Conservation Strategy species have been identified within the John Day River watershed: great gray owl (*Strix nebulosi*), ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalsi*),

Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), flammulated owl (*Otus flammeolus*), burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), greater sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), Lewis's woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*), white-headed woodpecker (*Picoides albolarvatus*), black-backed woodpecker (*Picoides articus*), pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*), upland sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*), olive-sided flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*), California myotis (*Myotis californicus*), fringed myotis (*Myotis thysanodes*), hoary bat (*Lasiurus seminolus*), long-legged myotis (*Myotis volans*), and pallid bat (*Snytozous palidus*).

Proposed work would follow the conservation measures in the HIP Programmatic Biological Opinion category 3a) Manage Vegetation using Physical Controls. This category includes the conservation measure that old growth juniper of high value to wildlife should not be cut. No Federal or other state special-status wildlife species are found within the project site. Work would avoid and minimize impacts to the breeding and nesting season (May 15-July 15), continuing work activity daily to discourage bird nesting in the treatment area and avoiding removing trees with observed nests until after nesting season. Minor, temporary impacts to local wildlife from human presence, construction noise, and vegetation removal are expected. The treated areas would be able to support native sagebrush-steppe plant species that would be beneficial to local wildlife in the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Work would occur in uplands and avoid water bodies and floodplains. ESA-listed fish species Mid-Columbia River steelhead trout (and designated critical habitat) are present in the project area watershed. No action proposed would physically alter any aquatic habitat site; there would be no adverse physical changes to water bodies, floodplains, or fish from these actions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would not occur within wetlands. No wetlands would be disturbed by the work.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no groundwater or aquifer-disturbing activities proposed for this project; therefore, there is no potential to affect groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Work would occur on private land with permission from the landowner. There are no specially-designated areas within the project site. Ranch activities on the property would continue after project completion; therefore, there is no potential to affect land use or specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Juniper removal would be short-term in nature and visual impacts would be temporary and decrease as new vegetation grows. There would be no long-term impairments, and the work would ultimately improve vegetation conditions and restore the land to a more natural visual appearance that is consistent with historical conditions.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary and minor impacts to air quality via vehicle and chainsaw usage. These temporary impacts would not have long-term impacts to the project site.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Work activities would increase noise above baseline levels for short periods of time, but only during regular working hours until work is completed.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work activities.

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: CTWS has worked with the landowner to plan and coordinate the project and address any landowner concerns.

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

Signed: <u>/s/ Israel Duran</u>	<u>November 21, 2023</u>
Israel Duran	Date
Environmental Protection Specialist	