

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Bowers Rock Floodplain Reconnection

Project No.: 2009-012-00

Project Manager: Eric Andersen, EWM-4

Location: Linn 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:

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to provide funding to the Calapooia Watershed Council to implement a floodplain reconnection project on land owned by Oregon State Parks and Recreation District (OPRD) on a segment of the Willamette River. The proposed work would include reconnecting alcoves and side channels to reactivate the floodplain, removal of three undersized culverts, and replacement with two new culverts to improve channel connectivity and fish passage. These actions would result in long-term benefits for terrestrial and aquatic species and their habitats.

The proposed work would be located within the floodplain of four existing streams known as Coon Creek, Little Willamette River, West Slough, and East Slough. When the Willamette River is flooding (overbank), all these small streams act as side channels. A 40-acre former gravel pit that ponds is located at the site and the gravel pit pond and side channels currently lacks connectivity to the main-stem Willamette River under most flow conditions, which prevents access by juvenile salmonids. The East and West sloughs are lacking connectivity due to three undersized culverts and a low water ford that restricts flow. There is also an infestation of water primrose (*Ludwigia spp.*) throughout the sloughs and the gravel pit pond. The site areas with *Ludwigia* are trapping sediments and reducing available open water habitats.

Specifically, the proposed actions include the following:

- **Realign, Connect, and Create Channel (Upstream Connection):**
 - **Gravel Pit Pond Connection:** The gravel pond's upstream inlet channel would be located to connect with the Willamette River during overbank flow. The inlet channel would route high flows through the gravel pond, increasing floodplain habitat connectivity. The outlet has an existing low area at the northeast corner of the gravel pit pond and this area would be modified by incorporating floodplain roughness. Lowering the outlet would also increase the frequency of pond connectivity through backwatering from Coon Creek and flow-through from the inlet channel.
 - **Inlet**– This work would remove about 7,860 cubic yards of material over about 345 linear feet to form a channel roughly 68 feet wide (in an about 0.5-acre area) to connect the gravel pond with Coon Creek.
 - **Outlet**- An existing low area of the floodplain would be re-contoured by lowering the ground surface elevation by removing about 1,230 cubic yards of material over about 0.3 acre and incorporating floodplain roughness. Re-contouring the outlet would increase the frequency of pond connectivity through backwatering from Coon Creek. Intended to disperse flow, reduce water velocities, and resist scour.

- **Low Water Ford:**
 - An eroding low water ford (i.e. crossing) would be removed, regraded and reseeded to allow for better fish passage within the slough and gravel pit.
- **Remove/Breach Fish Passage Barrier:**
 - Lower water ford, remove culvert at existing crossing at East slough.
 - Ford area would be graded to the channel elevation to improve connectivity and fish passage.
- **Replace Culverts for Fish Passage:**
 - Remove – 18-inch-diameter plastic pipe and shallow earthen fill.
 - Replace - with an 87-inch by 63-inch arch pipe culvert, 28 feet long to improve channel connectivity and fish passage at West slough.
 - Remove – 18-inch corrugated pipe and 6-inch clay pipe/earthen fill.
 - Replace –with an 83-inch by 63-inch arch pipe that is 24 feet long to improve channel connectivity and fish passage at West slough.

Plants and vegetation cover would be removed for project construction, but would be revegetated after project completion. A total of 13.8 acres of floodplain habitat would be replanted. Revegetation work would be completed in three areas; an area dominated by blackberry (5 acres), the outlet channel (4 acres), and the access road (post-implementation) (4.8 acres). Once site prep is completed, 34,500 native trees and shrubs would be planted during winter 2023 (Feb/March) in undulating rows, with 20% trees and 80% shrubs. The species would include big leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*), red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), Douglas spiraea (*Spiraea douglasii*), and willow species (*Salix spp.*). Plants would be two-year-old, bare root stock at a minimum of 18 inches in height. In 2024, the project would receive an inter-planting of 3,450 native trees and shrubs based on assessments of the 2023 planting effort and to supplement plant mortality.

About 3,600 feet of temporary access road would be installed and would go through existing blackberry weeds circling the gravel pit pond. About 2,500 feet of temporary access road would be installed across agricultural land. All road surface width would be 16 feet. After work completion, the temporary roads would be removed and restored. Removed ground surface material would be spoiled adjacent to the road way and revegetated. Equipment storage, vehicle storage, and fueling, servicing, and hazardous materials would be located in the staging, storage, and stockpile areas. These areas would be 150 feet or more from bodies of water, except the natural materials (wood, etc.) that would be stored within 150 feet of waterbodies.

The project implementation would occur between August 15 and October 15, which would be within the in-water work period.

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/ Luca T. De Stefanis
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/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel – ECF -4
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: April 08, 2020

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: Bowers Rock Floodplain Reconnection

Project Site Description

The project site is located near the Willamette River (RM 122-124) at an elevation of 191' to 189' located within Bowers Rock State Park (BRSP), which is managed by Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) and owned by the State of Oregon acting as public land. There is public access to the gravel pit pond through BRSP and from the Willamette River. Recreational uses in the gravel pit pond include fishing, waterfowl hunting, and swimming. Fishing and swimming in the east and west swales are unlikely due to intermittent flows and poor water quality. Waterfowl hunting may have historically taken place in the swales although the proximity of private properties to the east swale likely precludes current hunting activities. The project site and development is informed by the Natural Resource Assessment and Strategic Action Plan for Restoration and Stewardship of OPRD-Managed Properties in the Willamette Basin (OPRD, 2017), which identifies the proposed project in the 10-year work plan for BRSP and identifies BRSP as a high priority for preservation and enhancement (ranked #15 out of 134 sites for habitat value and floodplain function).

The Willamette River is a large perennial river that is heavily regulated for flood control and water supply. The proposed work would be located within the floodplain, which is crossed by four mappable existing streams known as Coon Creek, Little Willamette River, West Slough, and East Slough. Coon Creek is a wall-base channel draining to the Willamette River. Coon Creek has several cold-water refuges and is primarily fed by hyporheic flow when the Willamette River is at low stage. The area has been in a heavily controlled anthropogenic state since the early 1960's. As a result, key habitats for Distinct Population Segment (DPS) and Evolutionary Significant Unit (ESU) Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species are lacking due to sediment filling in, invasive species, and the limited movement of the Willamette River. The project site presently restricts water movement and backwater refuge and is isolated from the main-stem Willamette River preventing access by juvenile salmonids. There is an infestation of water primrose (*Ludwigia* spp.) throughout the sloughs and gravel pit. The site areas with *Ludwigia* are trapping sediments and reducing available open water habitats. The pond was retired before modern fish passage requirements and now support non-native warm water fish, and contribute to stranding.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Explanation:

Consultation Initiated on February 12, 2019.

Consulting parties: Oregon SHPO, OPRD, Siletz Tribe, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

Determination: No Effect on Historic Properties.

Concurrence date: The Determination Letter was sent on February 27, 2020. BPA did not receive any correspondence within 30 days.

In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, work would be stopped immediately and a BPA Archaeologist and Historian would be notified, as well as consulting parties.

2. **Geology and Soils**



Explanation: A temporary excavation of soils and geology during construction. Erosion and sedimentation controls would be in place to prevent off-site migration. After construction, the ground disturbance areas would be stabilized and revegetated.

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



Explanation: No special-status, including Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed, plant species or designated habitat present. Disturbance areas would be primarily in agricultural fields, blackberry thickets, or reed canary grass. There would be disturbance to some native plant communities mainly at the gravel pit pond outlet. The project planting plan would restore the area to a more native vegetation condition than pre-project condition.

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



Explanation: Wildlife would be disturbed by temporary elevated noise levels and the increased presence of workers and construction equipment. Some limited mortality to some wildlife species, such as turtles and amphibians, that cannot move out of the work area may occur. Vegetation clearing and construction activities would occur outside of the bird nesting windows to reduce or avoid impacting nesting birds in the project area. Disturbance areas would be primarily in agricultural fields, blackberry thickets, or reed canary grass habitats. There are no bald eagle or golden eagle nests on the property and one osprey nest. Construction timing considerations would be outside of ground bird nesting season and after osprey have fledged. The work implementation would begin after August 15 and, therefore, would avoid any potential for disturbing nests. The measures listed below would be implemented to reduce the potential for wildlife mortality and disturbance.

Note:

- Should an active eagle nest be identified, work would not occur between January 1 and August 15 near active eagle nests.
- The project team would walk the travel corridors to identify turtles, amphibians, or reptiles located in the project access areas. Encountered wildlife would be avoided and relocated during construction.
- The project team would modify construction work areas to minimize areas where concentrations of wildlife are identified.

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



Explanation: Effects to water bodies and fish would be minimal; limited to temporary, low level turbidity. There would be no net rise in floodplain elevations. Actions would have no effect or be classified as low to medium risk to species according to the BPA's ESA Section 7 consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service for BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP). Project sponsors would obtain applicable Clean Water Act permits and authorizations, as needed, to minimize impacts to waterbodies.

Note:

- The project sponsor would obtain all applicable US Army Corps of Engineers (Regional General Permit (RGP-6) and Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL) Fill-Removal permits prior to initiating work in waterbodies.
- The project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP Biological Opinion, RGP-6, and DSL Fill-Removal permit.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: Wetland plant and vegetation disturbance would occur at two crossing locations, #1 and #2, both crossings are located on the West Slough. The existing crossings are located in freshwater forested/shrub wetland and freshwater emergent wetland, respectively.

#1 Crossing: The WS-1 crossing would be improved by removing existing road bed material and replacing the material with coarser material to create an armored crossing. The crossing would have a low flow notch to improve connection between the adjacent pond and outlet channel. The crossing would be approximately 160 feet long and approximately 26 feet wide. The wetland impact area would be approximately 4,160 sq. feet (0.1 ac) and impacts would be to freshwater forested/scrub wetland.

#2 Crossing: The WS-2 crossing would be improved by removing existing undersized culvert and installing a larger diameter culvert. The crossing road surface would be approximately 120 feet long by 14 feet wide. The culvert would 28 feet wide. The wetland impact area would be approximately 1,680 sq. feet (0.04 ac) and impacts would be to freshwater emergent wetland.

There would be no wetland impacts for the other project components.

Travel routes pass through upland areas that are not classified as wetlands on the National Wetlands Inventory map.

Note:

- The project sponsor would obtain and adhere to all applicable US Army Corps of Engineers (RGP-6) and DSL Fill-Removal permits prior to initiating work in delineated wetlands.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: The maximum excavation would be 10 feet on the pond inlet channel. The pond summer time water surface elevation is about the same as the bottom of channel elevation so the excavation would not affect groundwater or aquifers. The excavation would probably go about 3-4 feet deeper than a scoured channel that is currently located where the proposed inlet channel would be located. No new wells or use of groundwater proposed.

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



Explanation: Some changes to land use would occur where habitat features exclude or modify existing uses to improve fish and wildlife habitat. The land use at the project site is within the specially-designated area of Bowers Rock State Park and is managed by Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD). The Specially Designated area would be improved by the project meeting goals of habitat enhancement identified in the OPRD Natural Resource Assessment and Strategic Action Plan for the Willamette Basin.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: Some temporary changes to visual quality could occur in the immediate project area, but the changes would be returning the area to a more natural state and would be consistent with the visual quality of the surrounding area. The construction contractor would also be responsible for operating a water truck during construction to address dust to reduce visual impairment.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of emissions associated with increased vehicle traffic or potential vegetation removal during construction or implementation of habitat protection, restoration, and improvement actions. The construction contractor would also be responsible for operating a water truck during construction to address dust.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Minor, intermittent noise during construction or implementation of habitat protection, restoration, and improvement actions.

12. Human Health and Safety



Explanation: All projects are required to use best management practices to protect worker health and safety. Any activities involving hazardous materials would be disposed of at a designated hazardous waste facility based on heavy equipment operator's not existing materials in the environment.

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, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: The park would be closed during construction and signage would be installed prior to construction. OPRD negotiated work hours and construction schedule with the neighbors. There have been meetings with the neighbors to provide information on the project design and to address concerns.

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

Signed: /s/ Luca T. De Stefanis
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Date: April 8, 2020