

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Indian Creek Connectivity Project

Project No.: 1992-026-01

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser, EWL-4

Location: Union 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 provide funds along with Hancock Timber Company and Trout Unlimited (TU) to the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) for restoration activities in an area of the historical floodplain along Indian Creek approximately 4.7 miles east of Imbler, in Union County, Oregon. The proposed restoration activities would occur on private land.

The project would improve fish passage and habitat conditions for ESA-listed fish species as well as other species of fish and wildlife. Improvements would be accomplished by restoring adult and juvenile fish passage at two existing barrier sites; increasing channel complexity; increasing quality and quantity of habitat; improving sediment sorting and routing; increasing floodplain connectivity and frequency of inundation; increasing suitable adult holding and spawning habitat; and increasing area suitable for juvenile summer and overwinter rearing. Accomplishing this goal would benefit ESA-listed species including Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Snake River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), and Columbia River bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*).

Restoration actions for the project would consist of the removal of three existing barriers in the lower and middle sections of the project area, and the restoration of floodplain topography in the lower, middle, and upper sections of the project area. The lower barrier consists of a concrete weir and two channel spanning logs. Following the removal of the lower barrier, approximately 95 feet of channel would be regraded to a slope of three percent. The east floodplain would be reconnected by removing an existing berm between the concrete diversion and hillslope. The berm is approximately 40 feet long, 15 feet wide, and three feet tall. The barriers at the middle site include a full spanning concrete weir, which was constructed as part of the hydropower facility, and a five foot culvert that remains as part of a former road crossing. Following the removal of the weir and culvert, approximately 155 feet of channel would be regraded to a slope of approximately two percent. These barrier removals would require dewatering the stream and fish salvage measures, which would include the construction of bypass channels at the lower and middle sites and would be approximately 200 feet in length.

The restoration of floodplain topography in the middle section of the project area would include removing artificial fill along the east bank adjacent to the five-foot culvert and removal of artificial

fill on the right bank that was placed when the pumphouse was constructed. The work that would occur in the upper section of the project area consists of the excavation of the downstream end of the alcove and associated berm to allow high flows to exit the alcove and be directed to the east floodplain of Indian Creek. Resulting cut volumes would be approximately 70 cubic yards (cy), 395 cy, and 28 cy for the lower, middle and upper sections of the project area, respectively. Spoils composed of mostly fine-grained silts would be disposed of locally outside of the floodplain and along adjacent hillslopes. Clean gravels, cobbles, and boulders would be deposited within areas designated for fill or within incised portions of the main channel. Any excess spoils would be hauled to an approved offsite location.

Approximately 22 large woody debris (LWD) structures would be proposed using four types of structures that include: channel spanning; bar apex; deflector; and three-log cross structures. Partial burying, and/or addition of ballast boulders and spoils would be used on structures to provide stability against buoyancy and mobility in the areas upstream of potential risks, such as bridges. Plantings would include the use of native grasses, shrubs, and tree species to mimic the surrounding landscape. This vegetation would be planted along disturbed channels and streambanks and include live stakes and 1-gallon container plants. Disturbed areas would be seeded with a mix of several native species, which include both riparian and upland species.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These proposed activities also fulfill commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp).

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/ Travis D. Kessler

Travis D. Kessler
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient CRGT, Inc.

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>September 3, 2020</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: Indian Creek Connectivity Project

Project Site Description

The proposed project would occur between river miles (RM) 5.4 to 7.0 of Indian Creek within the Grande Ronde Basin 4.7 miles to the east of the town of Imbler in Union County, Oregon (Sections 12, 13, 18, and 19, Township 1 South, and Range 39 and 40 East). Topography within the project area is generally located in a v-shaped valley that is moderate to steeply sloped, with flatter areas occurring within the existing floodplain. Vegetation in the project area consists of a mixture of trees, shrubs, and herbs along the riparian and floodplain areas of Indian Creek. The project consists of the removal of three existing fish passage barriers that are currently blocking the passage of anadromous species. The land is owned by a private timber company.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA consulted with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), and the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) with a no historic properties affected determination. SHPO concurrence was received on July 14, 2020 (SHPO Case No. 20-0309).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The excavation of side channels would permanently disturb soils on the project site. Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be implemented to prevent soils from eroding outside of the work site during the removal of the three barriers, regrading of channels, construction of bypass channels, and restoring floodplain topography. Riparian areas along newly graded/constructed channels would be planted with coyote willow (*Salix exigua*) and red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*). All disturbed areas within the upland areas would be restored with a native seed mixture consisting of great basin wildrye (*Leymus cinereus*), Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), tufted hairgrass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*), blue wildrye (*Elymus glaucus*), bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*), mountain brome (*Bromus carinatus* var. *marginatus*) and big leaf lupine (*Lupinus polyphyllus*). These proposed plantings would minimize fugitive sediments from entering surface waters.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although ground disturbance is proposed, there are no ESA-listed, state listed, or sensitive species known to exist on the site. Riparian areas with non-listed plants disturbed as a result of implementation would be planted with coyote willow and red osier dogwood following project completion. Upland areas would be seeded with a native seed mixture discussed in Section 2 “Geology and Soils.”

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, state listed, or sensitive wildlife species have been documented in or adjacent to the project area, and no designated critical habitat is present. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by construction traffic and noise, but would likely avoid the area during this time and return once the project work is completed.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project would impact approximately 0.17 acres along 2,894 lineal feet of Indian Creek to complete the fish passage and restoration actions. TU obtained a Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permit under the Regional General Permit (RGP) 6 (NWP-2020-244) from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on August 19, 2020, and a General Permit (62725-RF) from the Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL) on August, 19, 2020. Since the project was permitted under the RGP-6, it is covered by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) under a CWA Section 401 Water Quality Certification for the Reissuance of Regional General Permit #6 with Modifications for Bonneville Power Administration Funded Habitat Improvement Projects – USACE #NWP-2011-127-1 on April 6, 2018.

Although the project would impact Indian Creek, it would improve fish passage and habitat conditions for ESA-listed fish species as well as other species of fish and wildlife. This strategy would create more habitat function and value to the ecosystem than the current function of Indian Creek in the immediate vicinity of the project area.

The project is covered under the HIP IV BiOp under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. Listed fish species include: Snake River spring Chinook salmon, Snake River steelhead, and Columbia River bull trout. Although the project is considered to be medium risk under HIP, a series of conservation measures were proposed to ensure the project would be a benefit to ESA-listed fish species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: A total of 0.06 acres of wetland located in the historical floodplain of Indian Creek would be impacted to construct the proposed fish passage and restoration actions. As discussed above, TU obtained both Section 404 and 401 permits to allow for the work to occur as proposed. The project is expected to be self-mitigating, and would allow for a net increase in wetland function and value to the proposed site over the existing site.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although there would be significant ground disturbance as a result of the removal of the three barriers, regrading of channels, construction of bypass channels, and restoring

floodplain topography, the work is not expected to have a significant effect on groundwater and aquifers. The floodplain connectivity project would have a positive effect on groundwater recharge function and water quality once the new hydrological inputs are able to spread across the floodplain and raise the water table, thereby creating new wetlands and aquatic habitat.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur for the proposed project. The project is located on private land.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have a moderate effect on visual quality within the project site as the fish passage barriers block views upstream and downstream of the project area. The newly regraded channels, construction of bypass channels, restored floodplain topography, and large wood structures would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and the topography of the surrounding area, and would not be located in a visually sensitive area. Any change to the viewshed due to construction vehicles or equipment would be short term and temporary.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the field site would be very minor and short term during construction, but would resume to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short term and temporary 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 does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions, no CERCLA sites, and no changes to electric or magnetic fields as a result of the proposed project.

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 sponsor (TU) would notify the landowner of the construction schedule to ensure the project meets the proposed objectives.

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

Signed: /s/ Travis D. Kessler September 3, 2020
Travis D. Kessler, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient CRGT, Inc.