

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Columbia Land Trust Restoration Design Challenges Project

Project No.: 2010-073-00

Project Manager: Anne Creason, EWL-4

Location: Clark and Wahkiakum counties, Washington and Multnomah and Clatsop counties, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.1 Site characterization and environmental monitoring; B3.2 – Aviation activities; B3.3 – Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to provide funds to the Columbia Land Trust (CLT) to work with local and regional partners to complete a number of assessments that would inform future restoration strategies within the Columbia River Estuary. These assessments would occur in Clark and Wahkiakum counties, Washington and Multnomah and Clatsop counties, Oregon.

These assessments include: a reed canarygrass control study on Kandoll Farm and Kerry Island; vegetation data collection; seeding and data management; restoration monitoring; channel development studies; large wood studies in estuarine wetlands; and sediment accretion method validation.

Fieldwork for these projects would begin in spring of 2021 and would be expected to extend through fall of 2026. Methods would consist of walking field sites and utilizing standard field equipment and tools and the use of drones to complete the restoration assessments discussed above.

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

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel September 9, 2020

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: Columbia Land Trust Restoration Challenges Project

Project Site Description

The proposed project fieldwork would occur on the ground within multiple locations in Clark and Wahkiakum counties, Washington and Multnomah and Clatsop counties, Oregon. Site conditions would vary depending on the location, but would generally occur along various field sites within the Columbia River Estuary.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No potential to effect historic properties per correspondence with BPA archaeologist (email dated 8/27/20). The action would be limited to funding on the ground and aerial field assessments along the Columbia River Estuary. There would be no ground disturbance or modifications to structures.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to geology and soils would occur as there is no ground disturbance associated with the ground and aerial field surveys for the proposed project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impacts to ESA-listed, state listed, sensitive, or non-listed plant species known to exist on the sites as there would be no ground disturbance associated with the on the ground and aerial field surveys for the proposed project.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No ESA listed, state-listed, or sensitive wildlife species would be adversely affected by human presence conducting field surveys on the ground or aurally via drone. Wildlife present on the site during field activities may be temporarily disturbed by human presence, but would likely avoid the areas during this time and return once the project work is completed.

However, Critical Habitat for the Columbian white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*) (CWTD) is mapped within the project areas where field monitoring studies would

be completed. Although the project areas may contain CWTD, the projects would have no effect on CWTD or their habitat.

Notes: To ensure no effect to CWTD, the sponsor would ensure the following measures:

- During the fawning period, which occurs from June 1 and July 15, project personnel would be instructed not to approach CWTD adults or fawns at any time and reduce speeds around project sites where CWTD occur to avoid vehicle-deer collisions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project areas are located in the Columbia River Estuary along the Columbia River, its tributaries, and the associated floodplains of these waterbodies. Many ESA-listed fish species are present within the Columbia River Estuary, including: Lower Columbia River Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Upper Willamette River spring-run Chinook salmon, Upper Columbia River spring-run Chinook salmon, Snake River spring/summer run Chinook salmon, Snake River fall-run Chinook salmon, Columbia River chum salmon (*Oncorhynchus keta*), Lower Columbia River coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), Oregon Coast coho salmon, Snake River sockeye salmon, Lower Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Upper Willamette River steelhead, and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and their designated critical habitats.

Although ESA-listed species and their habitats are present within the project areas, there would be no impact to waterbodies, floodplains, and ESA-listed, state listed, special-status species, ESUs, or habitats as a result of the proposed project. There would be no ground disturbance or in-water work proposed as a result of the collection of field data via foot or aerially via drone.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to wetlands would occur as a result of the collection of field data via foot or aerially via drone. Therefore, there would be no ground disturbance as a result of the proposed work.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance as a result of the collection of field data via foot or aerially via drone. Therefore, the work would not affect groundwater or aquifers.

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 consists of various surveys along selected areas of the Columbia River Estuary and data would be collected on the ground and aerially via drone. No ground disturbance is proposed.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed fieldwork conducted on the ground or aurally via drone would have no effect on visual quality. Any change in the viewshed due to field 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 sites during on the ground surveys would be very minor and short term during data collection, but would resume to normal conditions immediately once the fieldwork has been completed. The use of the drone for aerial surveys would have no effect on air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed on the ground fieldwork would not result in an increase in ambient noise as it would be completed by walking project sites and using tools and equipment by hand. The use of the drone for aerial surveys would have no effect on ambient noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work via on the ground surveys or aurally via drone 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 (CLT) would notify nearby landowners prior to commencement of the proposed fieldwork, which would occur in areas where previous work has been completed.

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

Travis D. Kessler, ECF-4
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient CRGT, Inc.

September 9, 2020

Date