

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Gasline, Simcoe, and Milk Creek Vegetation Planting

Project No.: 1997-056-00

Project Manager: Jesse Wilson – EWL-4; Dave Lindley – Yakama Nation Fisheries

Location: Klickitat, Washington

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: BPA proposes to fund the Yakama Nation to plant native vegetation at three sites (Gasline, Simcoe, and Milk Creek sites) in the Rock Creek watershed of the Klickitat River basin. Plantings would include 4- to 8-inch plugs or small bare root trees and shrubs no more than 12 inches in diameter that could be planted manually with hand tools. A total of 475 trees and shrubs would be planted on the three sites, totaling approximately 10 acres in area. Species would be a mix of native willow, cottonwood, rose, spirea, snowberry, and hawthorne. Planting would take place in the early spring and late fall and would be revisited in subsequent years to monitor plant survival, replant as needed, and control weeds by manual removal and mulch until the plants are established. The work would address altered riparian condition and water temperature which are limiting habitat factors for steelhead in the Rock Creek watershed.

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 Sharp

Carolyn Sharp
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

July 19, 2023

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date

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: Gasline, Simcoe, and Milk Creek Vegetation Planting

Project Site Description

The Simcoe and Milk Creek sites are located along Upper Quartz Creek and an unnamed tributary to that creek in the upper Rock Creek watershed, about 20 miles northeast of Goldendale, Washington. The Gasline site is located directly along Rock Creek, six miles upstream from the Columbia River on Yakama Nation lands. Land cover in the lower basin is predominantly shrubland intermixed with grasslands. Land use in these areas is primarily grazing. The upper basin is forested. Resident rainbow, anadromous steelhead, and dace are the dominate fish species in the basin.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On April 3, 2023, BPA made a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties (WA 2020 227) and consulted with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Nez Perce Tribe, and the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation for the two planting sites located on state land (Simcoe and Milk Creek). BPA also consulted on the same date with a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties with the Yakama Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office regarding the planting site located on tribal lands (Gasline). On April 3, 2023, DAHP concurred with BPA's determination of no adverse effect. Yakama Nation requested avoidance of two sites in the Simcoe Springs planting area determined not to be historically eligible. A 10-meter buffer would be identified and flagged for avoidance around the boundary of the archaeological site prior to the initiation of riparian enhancement work. No riparian enhancement or other ground-disturbing work would be conducted within this buffered area.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some ground disturbance during planting would occur where plants were placed. Any impacts to soils as a result of the project would be short term. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects from stabilized soils due to the improved vegetative conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no federally-listed or state special-status species documented in the project area. The project would have short-term effects on vegetation from planting, fencing, and screening actions due to digging and human trampling of some vegetation while working at, and accessing, work sites, but in the long term, there would be beneficial effects from restored or improved vegetative conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no state-sensitive or federally-listed species or their habitats known to occur in the project area. Planting additional trees and shrubs within the riparian area would involve removing minimal existing vegetation. Some disturbance to non-listed wildlife during project activities may occur due to human presence. Any impacts would be short term. Improved habitat conditions would result in long-term positive impacts, including increased riparian plant density and diversity, and habitat structure.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change or impact to water bodies, floodplains, or fish is expected from these actions. ESA-listed steelhead are present in the project area. Planting would not impact habitat or water quality and would have no effect on these species. Planting of riparian vegetation would improve habitats for ESA-listed fish in the long term by providing shade to moderate stream temperatures, cover for protection from predation, and substrate that supports production of prey species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands located at the project sites (USFWS National Wetlands Inventory). As a result, there would be no effects on wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no groundwater withdrawal. There would be no potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills since no heavy equipment would be used. There would be no effect.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No project action would change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to these actions. There would be no land use changes, and no impact to specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities do not propose changes to visual quality; the riparian plantings would be visually consistent with existing riparian conditions. The project area is not within a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Driving of vehicles to access project sites would produce emissions, but the amount would be minimal and short-term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The only noise sources would be from humans working on the sites, and the use of vehicles to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the project sites. All noise sources would be of low intensity and short term.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All workers would use best practices to ensure health and human safety.

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 has obtained written permission from the landowner to access the site and implement habitat restoration actions upon it. All access would be along public roadways. No other external coordination is required.

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

Signed: /s/ Carolyn Sharp July 19, 2023
Carolyn Sharp Date
Environmental Protection Specialist