

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: MSRF Large Wood Staging Areas Project

Project No.: 2010-001-00

Project Manager: Joe Connor, EWU-4

Location: Okanogan County, 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: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation (MSRF) to temporarily stage large wood materials on land owned by MSRF to be used for aquatic restoration projects on the Methow River to benefit Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish.

MSRF would temporarily stage materials in two locations immediately adjacent to one another within 17.5 acres of their property. Materials, including habitat logs and similar material would be brought in by truck, unloaded and stacked using heavy equipment and stored until they can be used for implementation of aquatic restoration projects. The staging areas have direct access from State Route 20 and other existing roads. Staging would not require excavation or long-term fill placement. The proposed staging areas are within areas of fill placed after levee construction in the project area in 1972/73 by Okanogan County and the Army Corps of Engineers. The existing fill is approximately at a depth of 6 feet (1.8 meters) over river wash cobbles. Portions of the proposed staging areas have been used as staging for similar materials for previous aquatic restoration projects near the project areas. Implementation of the proposed staging areas would begin late September, 2023.

The proposed activity would support the conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. The proposed activity also supports 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 (the Northwest Power Act) (16 USC (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/ Brenda Aguirre

Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
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.

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Project Site Description

The project area is located one mile north of Twisp, WA along the Methow River between River Miles 40 and 42. The project area consists of levee fill material and disturbed floodplain cobbles. Vegetation type and land use in the area consist of riparian cottonwood forest and agricultural pastureland. The surrounding upland area is rural residential, shrub steppe, and agricultural pastureland. The valley bottom is largely a rural residential landscape with some agricultural fields and riparian forest stands and small towns. The project area has been altered by human disturbances. Road and levee construction, and riparian clearing have altered community structures; exotic species are abundant.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist conducted National Historic Preservation Section 106 consultation with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN), Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (CCT) and Washington Department of Archaeology (DAHP). BPA determined that implementation of the proposed activities would result in no historic properties affected (WA 2022 191). DAHP concurred with BPA's determination on August 3, 2023. The 30-day consultation period ended September 3, 2023. No additional comments were received from other consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed staging areas are within areas of fill placed after levee construction and on disturbed floodplain cobbles. The existing fill is approximately at a depth of 6 feet (1.8 meters) over river wash cobbles. Delivery and stockpiling of woody material would not disturb previously undisturbed soils. The project area is topographically flat; however, erosion control measures and revegetation would be implemented to prevent erosion or off-site sediment delivery into riparian areas or the Methow River.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status species or habitats are present in the project area. The area consists of fill material and disturbed floodplain cobbles and supports minimal low-quality vegetation consisting of non-native grasses and invasive species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status wildlife species have been documented in, or adjacent to, the project area and no critical habitat is present. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by the heavy equipment and vehicle noise and increased traffic during locally approved daylight hours.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed steelhead, Chinook and bull trout are present in the Methow River adjacent to the project area. All work would be conducted above the ordinary high-water mark. No in-water work would take place, and no removal of riparian vegetation would occur. Best Management Practices including silt fences and spill management would be implemented to prevent sediment and/or hazardous materials from reaching the river or riparian areas. There would be no effect on ESA-listed or sensitive fish species, non-listed coho salmon and a suite of resident fishes. The project area is not within a water body or the 100-year floodplain. The staging areas are in a levee-protected area and isolated from flows that are well above the 100-year flood flow.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands present in the project area, which includes the access routes.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater is proposed; spill prevention measures would be present on site.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change in land use and no work in specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have minor effects on visual quality during delivery and placement of the large wood due to the presence of heavy equipment and associated vehicles. The project area is not in a visually sensitive area and there would be no change in the visual quality of the environment as a result of the staged large wood material.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Delivery and placement of the large wood would generate a small amount of dust and emissions from heavy equipment and associated vehicles. Dust and increases in emissions would be minor and short term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would not result in an increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from heavy equipment and associated vehicles would be short term and temporary.

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.

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 project would occur on land owned by MSRF. MSRF has been in coordination with the neighbors and other stakeholders, and they are supportive of the project.

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

Signed: /s/ Brenda Aguirre
Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist

September 11, 2023
Date