

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Latah SWCD Site Maintenance on Privately-Owned Restoration Sites

Project No.: 2008-604-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz – EWM-4

Location: Latah County, ID

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 Latah Soil and Water Conservation District (Latah SWCD) to perform maintenance at previously restored sites on private lands, including Racetrack Meadow, Tee-Colby Meadow, and Nora Creek Meadow. Maintenance activities would include fence repair and vegetation management. Fence repair would include replacing or securing broken or damaged wires, fence panels, and wooden spans; tightening loose wires; securing fences with t-posts; adding/replacing fence stays; replacing vertical fence posts; removing downed trees across fences; replacing wire with removable panels at stream crossings; and adjusting or replacing broken gates.

Vegetation maintenance would include selective replanting to replace mortalities in previously planted areas, seeding, installing or repairing protective temporary fencing as needed, spreading mulch, and mechanical weed control. All plants and materials would be transported to the project areas via 4x4 truck and/or ATV. Planting would be conducted by Latah SWCD field crews using hand tools such as shovels, gas-powered augers, and water-jet stingers to install plant cuttings. Latah SWCD would plant a diverse mix of native trees, shrubs, forbs, and grasses to provide soil stability and increase ground coverage to prevent weed encroachment, to provide future shade and wood recruitment, and to increase wildlife and pollinator habitat. Weeds would be removed by hand or with weed eaters.

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 State of Idaho 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.

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
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

Proposed activities would occur in tributaries (Corral Creek and Nora Creek) of the Potlatch River at existing restoration sites in Latah County, Idaho. The Potlatch River watershed is part of the Palouse Prairie ecosystem of Northern Idaho and Eastern Washington. This area is comprised of loess-covered basalt plains with deeply incised canyons running off the upland regions. Racetrack and Tee/Colby meadows are located just north of Helmer, ID. Nora Creek Meadow is about 12 miles to the southwest, along Highway 8 near Nora, ID. Riparian conditions along the creeks have been affected by extensive logging, agriculture, and grazing land uses. Over forty percent of the basin is now devoted to farming and ranching. The current built environment includes roads and fences. The limiting factors for steelhead habitat within the Potlatch River basin include high water temperatures, flashy stream flows, low summer base flows, lack of complexity in stream composition, barriers to migration, and sedimentation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Racetrack, Tee/Colby, and Nora Creek Meadows project sites and proposed actions were the subject of cultural resource consultation with Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (IDSHPO) and relevant tribes at the time of the original restoration implementation. In addition, BPA conducted a new consultation in 2024, since initial consultation for some of the sites was several years old. BPA made a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties on April 22, 2024, for the sites and proposed actions. BPA received concurrence from the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office on May 17, 2024. No comments or responses were received from the relevant tribes within the consultation period.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Fence repair and planting/vegetation maintenance tools would be limited to shovels or mechanized hand tools. No heavy equipment operations (e.g., bulldozers, excavators) would be used, so there would be no large-scale soil displacement, soil mixing, or other mechanical soil disturbance. Weed removal would be by mechanical means only (hand pulling and weed eating). Minor and temporary ground disturbances would occur as part of the proposed actions but would not impact the geology and soils. Proposed treatment areas have been previously disturbed by work during implementation of original restoration activities. The proposed actions would be intended to improve habitat conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), which is ESA-listed as Threatened, has the potential to be in the Nora Creek and Racetrack Meadows project areas; however, there is no designated critical habitat in the project area. The project's potential impacts to Spalding's catchfly are covered under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Biological Opinion under Section 7 of ESA (HIP BiOp). Relevant HIP conservation measures pertaining to project activities would be applied to minimize impacts. Effects would be minor and consistent with the not likely to adversely affect determination in the HIP BiOp.

There are no state special-status plant species documented in any of the project areas. Minor and temporary vegetation disturbances associated with site access, ground disturbance, and weed treatment would occur as part of the proposed activities but would have short-term effects on vegetation. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects from repairing fencing to keep cattle out and restored or improved vegetative conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), an ESA Candidate species, has the potential to be present in the project area, but there is no critical habitat designated for the species. There are no other Federal or state special-status wildlife species or their habitats known to occur in the project area. Wildlife present during project activities may be temporarily disturbed by human presence and noise, but effects would be temporary and removed when the crews leave. Improved habitat conditions would result in long-term positive impacts, including increased riparian plant density, diversity, and habitat structure.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project's potential impacts to federally-listed species would be covered under BPA's HIP BiOp. Federally-listed Snake River Basin steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) are present in the Potlatch River watershed and critical habitat has been designated for steelhead and Snake River Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*). There are no other federally-listed or state special-status species in the project area.

The proposed actions would take place near, but not in, any water bodies. No changes to the existing conditions of streams would occur. Short-term impacts on listed and non-listed fish in the project area would be disturbance from human presence, noise, and possible sediment runoff from the site. Conservation measures would be implemented to minimize potential effects. Project actions would improve floodplain interaction of creeks in the project areas and restore native riparian vegetation for the benefit of aquatic species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the hydrology within the project area, and any activities within or near wetlands would be limited to methods with little to no ground disturbance. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur. Effects on wetlands would be temporary and limited to repair to existing fencing, additional plantings, and the removal of undesirable vegetation to improve conditions for native wetland species. This would have the long-term effect of improving the quality of local wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater are proposed. No herbicide use is proposed. The proposed actions would have no impacts to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change and no impact to specially-designated areas would occur as a result of this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality and the project would be returning the area to a more natural vegetative condition.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to the air quality of the environment from dust and exhaust due to vehicle use for site access and vegetation management actions as a result of this project. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from 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. All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and 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 Latah SWCD has landowner permission to access and implement proposed actions at sites on private lands. Access would be coordinated on an annual basis with landowners.

Signed:

Jacquelyn Schei, ECF - 4
Environmental Protection Specialist