

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: GAWA Sign Installation

Project No.: 2011-004-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss – EWM-4

Location: Polk 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 fund the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to install an informational sign at the Gail Achterman Wildlife Area (GAWA) in Polk County, Oregon. Funding for this project partially fulfills commitments made by BPA in the 2010 “Willamette River Basin Memorandum of Agreement Regarding Wildlife Habitat Protection and Enhancement between the State of Oregon and the Bonneville Power Administration” and is part of ongoing efforts to mitigate for the impacts to fish and wildlife from the construction and operation of the Federal flood control and hydroelectric facilities in the Willamette River Basin.

The sign would display information about the history of GAWA and the wildlife that can be found on the property to inform visitors to the wildlife area. The sign would be located near the edge of the wildlife area in a previously disturbed area which hosted a gravel quarry prior to the establishment of the wildlife area. The signboard would be 60 inches wide and 38 inches tall, with two posts extending roughly 36 inches down from the sign and into the ground. Post holes between 12 and 18 inches deep would be dug in which to secure the sign. The sign would be installed using hand equipment (shovels, hand augurs) and small machinery (ATVs, trucks).

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.

Thomas DeLorenzo
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.

Proposed Action: GAWA Sign Installation

Project Site Description

GAWA is a roughly 270-acre wildlife area located on the banks of the Willamette River just outside Independence, Oregon. The property contains roughly 260 acres of riparian forest, wetland, and a 12-acre historical gravel quarry. A sizable portion of the wildlife area partially submerges during high springtime flows of the Willamette and hosts extensive habitat for migratory salmon species, such as Chinook (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) and steelhead (*O. mykiss*).

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed actions and determined that the project would have no effect on historic and cultural resources (BPA CR No. OR 2022 088). Consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon was initiated on September 6, 2022. SHPO acknowledged receipt of the determination and no other responses were received. The response period ended on October 6, 2022.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor excavation would be required for the post holes for the sign. These holes would be small in diameter and depth and cause no large-scale changes to the geology of the area. Moreover, the sign would be located in an area which previously hosted a gravel quarry and in which the ground has already been heavily disturbed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Kincaid's lupine (*Lupinus sulphureus*) and Willamette daisy (*Erigeron decumbens*) may potentially be found in Polk County (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool). These species tend to be found in upland prairie and are not typically found in wetter, riparian forests and wetlands like GAWA. Moreover, ODFW staff regularly survey wildlife areas for the presence of species of concern and no populations of either species have been recorded at GAWA. There would therefore be no effect on either species from the installation of the sign.

Oregon state-listed peacock lockspur (*Delphinium pavonaceum*), coast range fawn lily (*Erythronium elegans*), thin-leaved pea (*Lathyrus holochlorus*), and Nelson's checkermallow (*Sidalcea nelsoniana*) may potentially be found in Polk County (Oregon Department of Agriculture). ODFW staff regularly survey wildlife areas for species of concern and no populations of these species have been identified where the sign would be located. There would therefore be no effects on these species from the installation of the sign.

A small amount of excavation would be needed for the postholes for the sign. This would remove any vegetation in the area near the postholes. The sign would be placed in a heavily-disturbed area which historically hosted a gravel quarry and lacks extensive complex vegetation beyond limited grass cover. Effects on non-listed plant species would therefore be highly localized and minor.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis*), marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*), and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) have the potential to be found in Polk County (IPaC). ODFW staff regularly survey wildlife areas for the presence of species of concern and none of these species have been observed at GAWA. There would therefore be no effect on ESA-listed wildlife species.

No Oregon state-listed wildlife species are present (ODFW).

Non-listed wildlife species would be temporarily disturbed by human presence and noise while installing the sign, but the effects would be mild. The sign footprint is small and would not represent a major effect on local wildlife habitat. Noise from the installation would be temporary and cause no long-term disturbances to local wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although GAWA is situated near the Willamette River, the sign would be installed in the uplands of the wildlife area and would not have any effect on water bodies, floodplains, or fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: While GAWA hosts extensive wetlands, the sign would be placed outside of these wetlands in an old gravel quarry. There would therefore be no effects on wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or groundwater use are proposed, and hydrologic conditions would remain functionally identical to current conditions.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No changes to land use or ownership are proposed. GAWA is publicly accessible and the sign would help inform visitors about the local wildlife and history of the wildlife area, improving the qualities of the area for activities like bird watching. Because of the small footprint, no changes to access of the overall wildlife area would be required during installation.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The sign would alter the current visual quality of the area, which is currently a largely unimproved wildlife area. The sign is relatively small, and it would serve to inform the public about the qualities of the habitat and local wildlife, increasing the public's appreciation of the aesthetic quality of the wildlife area. Effects would therefore be low.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some exhaust generated by vehicles used to access the project site, but the effects would be extremely minor and temporary. No long-term changes to local air quality would occur.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some noise generated by vehicles used to access the project site, but the effects would be extremely minor and temporary. No long-term changes to local noise levels would occur.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best practices to ensure human 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: GAWA is owned by ODFW. BPA holds a conservation easement on the property. No outside coordination would be required.

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

Signed:

Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Protection Specialist