

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Hepton Levee Planting

**Project No.:** 1990-044-00

**Project Manager:** Lee Watts, EWM-4

**Location:** Benewah 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:** The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to provide funding to the Coeur d'Alene Tribe for containerized planting and seeding on a levee repair project in Benewah County, Idaho, on Coeur d'Alene Tribe Reservation land, along the St. Joe River in Township 46N, Range 2W, Section 7.

The levee was breached in 1997. It was repaired in the winter of 2023-2024 using non-federal funds. This proposed action would be one of the final tasks in this repair project. The planting site would be approximately 1.7 acres in the area. Grass seeding and mulching would be applied atop the repaired levee (approximately 0.9 acre) and one-gallon containerized plants of native riparian shrubs and trees would be planted along the sloping banks (approximately 0.8 acre) at eight foot spacings.

This action supports ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System 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.

Robert W. Shull  
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Reviewed by:

Carolyn Sharp  
Supervisory 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.

**Proposed Action:** Hepton Levee Planting

## **Project Site Description**

The project is located in the repair site of a breach in a man-made dike separating the St. Joe River from reclaimed farmland (formerly a shallow, flooded lake prior to the dike repairs). No natural landscape exists in the repair site, though adjacent un-repaired dike sections support native riparian vegetation such as willow, cottonwood, and alder on the banks of the dike, and grasses and forbs along the top. The repair site to be planted is composed of imported off-site material.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The plantings would be located in fill that originated off site that was used to repair a breach in a man-made levee, and the planting depths would not exceed the depth of that offsite-derived fill. BPA determined that the plantings proposed on this site is a type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties, assuming such historic properties were present.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Soils would be impacted wherever containerized plants would be planted by the digging of holes 1 to 1.5 feet deep in an 8-foot by 8-foot grid on the sloping banks of the dike. This would equate to about 1 square foot of disturbance for every 64 square feet, which is less than 1.6% of the area. This degree of impact would be very low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No vegetation would be impacted since the current condition is bare land. Vegetation would be re-established by this action. No plant species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act are present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No vegetated wildlife habitat would be impacted, and the current bare ditch-top condition provides minimal habitat value to only a few species (e.g. waterfowl resting). There would, however, be some disturbance of wildlife occupying adjacent vegetated

habitats (e.g., songbirds and small mammals) by the temporary presence and activity of humans doing the planting. This could temporarily displace them from their preferred habitats during planting (a day or two); they would likely re-occupy the site once human activity has ceased. No wildlife species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act are present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no flowing waterbodies, floodplains, or fish affected by this project. All actions would be applied to barren upland areas.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the sites to be planted. There would be no effect.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no groundwater withdrawal and no use of heavy equipment. There may be some miniscule potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills from the transportation equipment used in this action, but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater is unlikely. Although there would be some minimal ground disturbance as a result of the project, the work would not affect groundwater and aquifers.

## **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no specially-designated areas in the project area and no change in land use would occur as a result of the proposed project. The project would not change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to project actions.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made. The plantings would ultimately produce a condition in the dike repair site consistent with the visual character of the other (non-project) sections of the dike.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some exhaust and greenhouse gas emissions from the motorized equipment used to access the project site, but this would be short-term only. No long-term source of emissions or exhaust would be created.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some short-term noise impacts from the vehicles used to access the planting site, but this type of noise is consistent with that of the residential activities across the river and with the common farming operations in the larger area.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicle operation and working with hand tools have their attendant risks to workers, but there would be no condition created from this action that would introduce new human health or safety hazards or risk into the environment. No condition created by this action would increase the burden on the local health, safety, and emergency-response infrastructure.

### **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 dike repair site is on tribal-owned land within the Coeur d'Alene Reservation. The Tribe is the sponsor of this project and the party that will implement it. They will be aware of the implementation schedule for this project.

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

Signed:

Robert Shull  
Environmental Protection Specialist