

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Yakama Nation's Middle Tepee Creek Low-tech Process-based Restoration Project

**Project No.:** 1997-056-00

**Project Manager:** Jesse Wilson, EWL

**Location:** Klickitat 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 Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (YN) Fisheries to implement a low tech process-based habitat restoration project along a 5-mile-long segment of middle Tepee Creek within the Yakama Nation Reservation, about 10 miles northeast of Glenwood, Washington. Low tech process-based restoration activities would include two types of hand-built structures, beaver dam analogs (BDA) and post assisted log structures (PALS).

The proposed project would include in-stream placement of small hand-built BDAs and PALS to improve stream processes in a degraded reach of middle Tepee Creek. BDAs are temporary, channel spanning permeable structures constructed by hand using small posts and locally available woody material and sediment. BDAs would encourage ponding, increase floodplain connectivity and groundwater recharge, and expand wetland and riparian areas. PALS installation would include placement of wood posts into the stream bed by hand or with the use of a hydraulic post pounder. PALS would encourage debris and sediment recruitment, promote scour pools, and widen channels. PALS would be a mix of channel spanning, attached to the streambanks, or placed mid-channel. About 100 PALS and 50 BDAs would be installed across the extent of the project area, having approximately 3 to 5 PALS in combination with BDAs would be constructed every 300 feet of stream length. The structures would accumulate wood debris and amplify natural hydrologic, geomorphic, and biological stream processes over time.

The project area would be accessed on foot and via small machinery (such as ATVs) using unmaintained roads and skid paths present from past forest management activities. Vehicle staging and refueling would occur at least 150 feet from Tepee Creek. All in-channel work would occur during the approved in-water work window (typically July-October 15), or in the dry and with approval from Yakama Nations biologists. Following construction, all work areas would be returned to pre-construction conditions or better. Riparian plantings or native seed mix would be used to reestablish areas disturbed during construction and to improve middle Tepee Creek riparian area and floodplain.

To help facilitate adaptive management Yakama Nation staff would utilize an adaptive management framework to support adaptive management decisions based on requirements outlined in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) Handbook. Common maintenance or phased restoration actions would occur at the scale of individual structures within the project area would include lateral extension of structures through additional wood, increase structure height through additional wood, plugging gaps through additional wood, additional posts to existing structures, repair of minor breaches, building new structures (up to 20% of original structures), and removing structures if causing harm. Project implementation and adaptive management work would occur in multiple phases and for up to 10 years as restoration targets are met and self-sustaining natural processes are established.

These actions would support conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with National Marine Fisheries Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River Fish System and Bonneville's commitments to the Yakama nation under the 2022 Columbia River Fish Accord Extension agreement, while also supporting 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.

Catherine Clark  
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:** Yakama Nation’s Middle Tepee Creek Low-tech Process-based Restoration Project

## **Project Site Description**

The project is located on Yakama Nation Reservation land in south central Washington. Middle Tepee Creek is a tributary to White Creek in the Klickitat River subbasin. The project area begins at approximately 1.8 miles upstream from the confluence of White Creek and Tepee Creek and extends about 5 miles upstream. The project area has been used for commercial timber harvest and cattle grazing, which has reduced floodplain connectivity, riparian vegetation, and streamflow over time. Middle Tepee Creek is typically dry from July to October each year.

Plant communities in the vicinity of the project generally consist of upland lodgepole and ponderosa pine, and limited woody riparian vegetation, mainly young alders, along the margins of the incised channel.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Yakama Nation on February 5, 2023. On August 7, 2024, BPA sent a determination letter stating that the project would result in no historic properties affected (WA 2023 058). The Yakama Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) concurred on August 12, 2024.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary impacts to soil would occur from increased erosion potential during BDA and PALS installation. Work would occur in the dry to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Post construction seeding and planting would minimize long term erosion potential.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or ESA-listed species are known to be present. Existing vegetation could be crushed or killed during hand installation on BDAs and PALS. Post construction seeding and planting would re-establish native riparian plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status or ESA-listed wildlife species are documented in or adjacent to the project area and no critical habitat is present. Local wildlife may be temporarily disturbed or displaced by increased construction noise and human presence. It is likely that species would avoid the area during construction and return once project work is complete.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Equipment access and construction activities would take place during the dry season when flows are not present. Avoidance and minimization measures identified in the project Sponsor's Clean Water Act Section 404 Nationwide (application number NWS-2024-150) would be applied, further reducing impact to waterways.

ESA-listed fish include middle Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and its critical habitat are present in the project area. Work would occur during no flow periods. The project is covered under BPA's HIP Biological Opinion under Section 7 of ESA. The project would result in long term improvement to fish habitat.

Notes:

- Project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP conservation measures.
- Project sponsor would adhere to all avoidance and minimization efforts identified in the Clean Water Act permit issued for this project.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands present in the project area.

#### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Stream bed is likely to be dry during construction. Long term improvement to groundwater recharge potential is expected as natural stream processes improve over time.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is in a remote part of the Yakama Nation Reservation that is minimally utilized. Temporary, negligible disruption to road access and use during construction would occur. No long term changes to land use are proposed.

#### **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is not proposed to occur within a visually sensitive area.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in vehicle emissions and dust from a small number of vehicles accessing the site during construction would occur. No long term impacts to air quality.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary increase in noise from hydraulic post drivers, hand tools, and vehicles during daytime construction activities would occur over short periods of time during the day. No long term impact to noise.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work may present a small human health and safety risk associated with utilizing a hydraulic post pounder, but is not expected to create a hazard to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions. All personnel would use best management practices to protect workers' 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 project is within the boundaries of the Yakama Nation Reservation. Yakama Nation Fisheries would obtain necessary approvals to conduct work on tribal property.

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

Signed:

Catherine Clark  
Environmental Protection Specialist