

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Middle Upper Grande Ronde Boulder Addition Project

**Project No.:** 1992-026-01

**Project Manager:** Tracy Hauser, EWL - 4

**Location:** Union 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 Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) to conduct aquatic habitat restoration activities along the middle Upper Grande Ronde River located approximately 20 miles southwest of La Grande, Oregon. The proposed restoration activities would occur on United States Forest Service, Wallowa Whitman National Forest (WWNF) lands.

The goal of the proposed restoration project is to improve habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed summer steelhead, spring/summer Chinook salmon and bull trout, and resident redband trout, pacific lamprey and freshwater mussels. The proposed project would place 270 – 300 boulders by helicopter within previously-constructed engineered log jams within the middle Upper Grand Ronde River between River Miles 156 and 158 for structural ballast. Approximately 5 boulders would be placed within each of the 54 jams. Holes would be drilled through the boulders to allow for cable-choker attachments. The WWNF would provide two-hundred boulders from existing WWNF stockpiles and the CTUIR would acquire one-hundred boulders from a commercial source. Boulders would be hauled to designated staging areas located throughout the project area. A designated helicopter landing zone would be located on WWNF land approximately 2 miles east of the project area. Ground-based construction vehicles would use existing access routes. The proposed work would occur during an extension to the in-water-work window of August through October, as approved by federal and state regulatory agencies.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). The proposed activities would also support conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with USFWS on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System, and ongoing efforts to mitigation 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.

/s/ Brenda Aguirre

Brenda Aguirre  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange                      July 21, 2021

Katey C. Grange                      Date  
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:** Middle Upper Grande Ronde Boulder Addition Project

## **Project Site Description**

The proposed activities would occur in the Grande Ronde Subbasin and Warm Springs Creek-Grand Ronde River Subwatershed in northeast Oregon. The legal description for the project site is Township 4 South, Range 35 East, Sections 14, 23 and 26. The project site is located within a canyon area of the Grande Ronde River. The site encompasses 2 miles of the river and up to 300 feet of riparian and upland areas on both sides of the river. The project area follows along WWNF Road 51 and passes the WWNF Spool Cart Campground at about the middle of the project area. There are no designated recreational trails or additional sites within the vicinity of project area including within the flight paths of the helicopter. The elevation of the project site is approximately 3,500 feet. Vegetation consists of upland and riparian forest stands interspersed with areas of grasslands and scrub/shrub. Land use is dominated by forestry and livestock grazing.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: WWNF Archaeologist reviewed the proposed project and determined there were “no adverse effects to historic properties” and that the project fit within the Programmatic Agreement between the WWNF and Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation were consulted – no response. Automatic concurrence was reached 4/29/19.

Notes:

- Heritage resources would be protected via avoidance. An Area to Protect (ATP) would be established around known cultural sites with no activities allowed within the established ATPs.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary soil disturbance would occur during boulder placement; work timing would occur when soils are dry and by helicopter to minimize disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: There is one WWNF-listed sensitive plant species known to exist on the project site: *Carex cordillereana*. The WWNF determined there would be no impact to any known *Carex cordillereana* located at the north end of the Spool Cart Campground; no work is proposed

in the campground. Areas within the project boundary with non-listed plants disturbed as a result of implementation would be planted with native vegetation following project completion.

Notes:

- Locally sourced and genetically appropriate native plant materials would be used for all revegetation efforts connected with project activities. WWNF Invasive Plant, Botany, or Native Plant staff would be consulted for specific guidance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Five WWNF-listed sensitive species are known to exist within the project area: Columbia spotted frog, Western ridged mussel, Columbia pebblesnail, shortface lanx, and California floater. The WWNF determined the project actions would have a beneficial impact in the long term for these species by providing more foraging and breeding habitat through improved fish and aquatic habitat. Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by helicopter, vehicle and equipment construction traffic and noise, but would likely avoid the area during this time and return once the project work is completed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary sedimentation would be generated with instream work. The project would impact about 2 miles of middle Upper Grande Ronde River. The WWNF received authorization from the US Army Corps of Engineers on 4/19/21 via Verification Letter NWP-2021-182 to use the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 Regional General Permit-4 (RGP-4) and associated Oregon Department of Environmental Quality CWA Section 401 Water Quality Certification. The CTUIR would implement terms and conditions of RGP-4 while placing boulders below the ordinary high-water mark at the project stream.

The middle Upper Grande Ronde River contains ESA-listed summer steelhead, spring/summer Chinook salmon and bull trout, and WWNF-listed sensitive species redband trout and pacific lamprey. The WWNF obtained ESA Section 7 coverage for listed species from the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Programmatic Biological Opinion for ARBO II on 11/24/20, and approval to work outside the in-water-work window from both federal and state agencies on 4/13/21. The CTUIR would implement terms and conditions of ARBO II to avoid or minimize potential adverse effects to the listed fish. The WWNF also determined the project actions would have a beneficial impact in the long term for WWNF-listed sensitive species. Non-status fish may be temporarily disturbed by construction traffic and noise, but would likely avoid the area during this time and return once the project work is completed.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would avoid on-site wetlands; the CTUIR would implement terms and conditions of the RGP-4. The project is expected to increase wetland function at the proposed site over the existing conditions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Although ground disturbance is proposed, the work is not expected to have a substantial effect on groundwater and aquifers. The project structures would have a positive effect on groundwater recharge and water quality once the boulder and wood structures have slowed streamflow and raise the water table, thereby creating new wetlands and aquatic habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary (two weeks) road and campground closure during project activities and return to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed. There are multiple other campgrounds in the area to serve as an alternative to the closed campground. No permanent change in land use would occur from the proposed project. The project activities would be consistent with the WWNF land management area designations.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The newly installed boulders, into the existing wood structures, would be visually consistent with adjacent vegetation and the topography of the surrounding area, and would not be located in a visually sensitive area. Any change to the visual quality due to the helicopter and construction vehicles or equipment would be short term and temporary.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from the helicopter and construction vehicles accessing the field site would be short term during construction and would resume to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from the helicopter and construction 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 would result in a temporary road and campground closure during project activities to provide for public and worker safety within the active construction site. All personnel would follow approved safety standards for working near or with a helicopter and project construction equipment.

### **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: All work would occur on WWNF administered lands. No external coordination is needed to implement the proposed activities. WWNF is a project partner; CTUIR and WWNF coordinate regularly on project activities.

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 July 21, 2021  
Brenda Aguirre, ECF-4 Date  
Environmental Protection Specialist