

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Swanson Lakes Wildlife Mitigation Area Project Maintenance

Project No.: 1991-061-00

Project Manager: Jennifer Plemons, EWM-4

Location: Lincoln County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance; B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to conduct ongoing maintenance activities as described below on the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Mitigation Area (SLWA) in the upper Columbia River basin. Proposed activities that involve additional or new locations to be disturbed (such as new fences, expanded areas of vegetation management, access road widening, etc.) would require separate analysis and documentation.

Maintain fences and gates

Sixty miles of existing boundary fence and associated gates would be visually assessed for damage and repaired as needed throughout the year. Certain tools commonly utilized for fence maintenance and repair would be a fence stretcher, fence pliers, fence post driver, compressor and jack hammer, wire stringer and wire roller. Supplies would include wire, wood and steel posts, special clips, and special staples.

Maintain extant/restored vegetation and control weeds

Up to 1,000 acres of shrubsteppe and 150 acres of grassland would be maintained throughout the year to support existing and restored habitats. Maintenance activities would include installing mats or mulch, mowing, irrigating, fertilizing, applying herbicides and preventing or reducing animal damage (browse repellents, tree tubes). Herbicide applications would be done by a licensed applicator in accordance with label instructions, and all applications would be documented in a weed management geo-database used by WDFW and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

Maintain roads, culverts, parking areas and signs

Approximately 50 roads, 20 culverts, 7 parking areas and hundreds of signs would be maintained and repaired as needed throughout the year. WDFW would grade or gravel roads and parking areas, mow and apply herbicides on vegetation along roadsides and parking areas, repair collapsed road drainage culverts and reset or replace wooden signs. All grading of roads and

parking areas and culvert repairs would be confined to existing prisms and would not extend to native material below the original fill.

Funding the proposed actions would support ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System (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 (the Northwest Power Act) (16 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; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024), 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.¹

Catherine Clark
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

¹ BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to DOE's own regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021, to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

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: Swanson Lakes Wildlife Mitigation Area Project Maintenance

Project Site Description

The Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area covers approximately 20,900 acres, of which approximately 1,280 acres are leased from the Washington Department of Natural Resources. The Swanson Lakes unit is comprised of channeled scabland, featuring plateaus, buttes, numerous pothole lakes, multiple rim rock lakes and one intermittent stream. The unit supports a mix of species and lies within a shrub steppe habitat in the Columbia Plateau.

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 conducted background research into known cultural resource sites in the project area (WA 2025 021). The archaeologist determined that the proposed actions would have no potential to cause effect on historic and cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some of the proposed activities would cause minor soil disturbance of the top layer of soil, but the effect would be minimal. Road and parking area maintenance, including culvert repairs, would be confined to existing road prisms and parking areas. Replacement and repair of fences would require some light excavation if new posts are needed, but all digging would be in previously disturbed areas. The effects on soil from these activities would be minor and localized.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed or state special-status plant species are present in the proposed project areas. Herbicide would be used in dry conditions for localized treatment of targeted invasive/non-native plants only; proposed activities would inhibit invasive/non-natives and promote native plant species growth. All ESA-listed and state special-status habitats would be enhanced due to the proposed activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed, yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) may be present on the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. Wildlife typically avoids human presence and would be unlikely to be present during project activities. Any wildlife in the area would leave during project actions to avoid WDFW staff. Project activities would have minor, temporary impact

to wildlife due to displacement during activities. Any impact would be short term and temporary. There would be no long term negative effect on ESA-listed wildlife species, and long term effect of maintaining and enhancing the wildlife area would have long term positive impacts on ESA-listed wildlife species. Project-related impacts to ESA-listed species are addressed in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinion with USFWS.

There would be mild negative impacts to non-listed wildlife from some of the proposed project activities. Wildlife would potentially be disturbed by human presence and noise. The effects would be temporary and consistent with typical O&M activities that have been carried out in these areas. There would be no long term negative effect on wildlife, and long term effects of maintaining and enhancing the wildlife area would have long term positive impacts on local and migratory wildlife in the area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or state special-status species are present within waterways on the Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area. No proposed activities would take place in the waterbodies or negatively impact any waterbodies. Habitat restoration such as vegetation management and livestock exclusion maintained by the fence repairs would result in long term benefits for aquatic life, therefore no negative effects are anticipated to waterbodies or fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Based on the USFWS's National Wetlands Inventory, the project area overlaps with multiple freshwater emergent wetlands throughout the wildlife area; however, the proposed actions would avoid all wetted areas, and no excavation is proposed within the wetland areas. Therefore, there would be no impact to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground-disturbing activities would be minimal and occur outside of the streambed and are not likely to intersect groundwater and would have no impact on aquifers. BMPs would be implemented to prevent contamination of groundwater from equipment leaks and spills.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area is currently maintained for a variety of purposes, including habitat and public recreation. No changes to these uses are proposed. Some project activities, such as road and parking area maintenance, would require closing access to the public temporarily to work in affected areas. These closures would be temporary, consistent with past maintenance activities in the area, improve ease of access and public safety, and would have no long term changes to public access and traffic patterns.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any changes to visual quality because of the proposed activities, such as vegetation management, would be minor.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicles and equipment used for some proposed project activities, such as trucks and mowing equipment, would produce some exhaust. This exhaust generation would be temporary, limited in scope, consistent with past O&M activities at project areas, and cause no lasting impacts to the local air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicles and equipment used for some proposed activities, such as trucks and mowing equipment, would produce noise. The noise would be temporary, limited in scope, consistent with past O&M activities at project areas, and would have no long term increase to local noise levels.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work may present a small human health and safety risk associated with working with heavy equipment but is not expected to create 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: WDFW is the manager of the property being maintained and is responsible for the actions considered in this CX.

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