Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Coyote Creek Northeast Wetland Restoration

Project No.: 2011-004-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss, EWM - 4

Location: Lane 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 improve fish and wildlife habitat at the Coyote Creek Northeast (CCNE) property in Lane County, Oregon. Funding for this work 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 Federal flood control and hydroelectric facilities in the Willamette River Basin.

The CCNE management area is part of a network of more than 8,500 acres of managed wildlife area surrounding the Fern Ridge Reservoir. The property was flattened and leveled over the last century to improve conditions for annual ryegrass cultivation. This had a profound effect on the vernal pools and wet prairies that historically provided habitat for a wide variety of waterfowl, songbirds, and other wildlife in the area. ODFW, in partnership with Ducks Unlimited, the Long Tom Watershed Council, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), would restore historical habitat conditions on the CCNE property by constructing two shallow berms and revegetating the area to create new seasonal wetlands.

Shallow borrow pits would be dug, the material from which would be used to create two berms. These berms and the depressions created from the borrow pits would help to retain water during the spring and summer by capturing the water flowing from higher ground to the east, which currently flows uninterrupted across the property. This would create seasonally wetted pools for nesting waterfowl and habitat for other wildlife, similar to historical conditions of the property. The berms would be between 1 and 3 feet tall with gentle slopes and be consistent with the historical planform of surrounding areas prior to leveling. Extra spoils from the borrow pits would be used to fill a network of agricultural ditches that cross the property.

Following earthmoving, ODFW would revegetate the area. Several different mixes of native wet and prairie forbs and grasses would be used to develop appropriate vegetation for the expected conditions of each part of the property. Areas disturbed by earthmoving would be seeded immediately following completion of the construction with species of plants that are typically found

in vernal pools and seasonal wetlands. Upland areas outside the pools would be seeded with grasses and forbs more common in those habitats. Seeded areas would be monitored to ensure successful growth of desirable species and invasive and noxious weeds removed.

All earthmoving would occur after bird nesting season has concluded in mid-August, and would be finished by the end of October. Seeding disturbed areas would be finished by the end of November. Upland areas would be seeded through the autumn of 2024. Access to the work areas is along existing roadways. All materials and equipment would be staged at the project area.

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/ Thomas DeLorenzo
Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel *July 10, 2023*
Sarah T. Biegel 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: Coyote Creek Northeast Wetland Restoration

Project Site Description

The CCNE property is owned and maintained by ODFW as part of the Fern Ridge Reservoir mitigation program. Much of the surrounding area historically hosted an extensive and diverse network of wet prairie and upland prairie-savanna habitat straddling a number of small streams that fed into the Long Tom River, a tributary to the Willamette River. This prairie provided habitat for a number of resident and migratory wildlife species, including wintering waterfowl like Canada geese (*Branta canadensis*) and mallard duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*). By the late 19th century, the area was increasingly being used for agricultural production, which required leveling and draining these seasonally wetted areas. The property was farmed for annual ryegrass cultivation from at least 1930 until ODFW acquired it in 2015. Since purchasing the property, the agricultural fields have been left fallow with the long-term goal of restoring the pre-agricultural conditions at the property.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA cultural resources staff reviewed the proposed actions and identified an Area of Potential Effects (BPA CR No. OR 2022 130). On July 21, 2022, BPA determined that the proposed actions would result in no historic properties affected and initiated consultation with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Confederated Tribes of the Grande Ronde Community of Oregon, and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. SHPO assigned the project to SHPO Case No. 22-1182 but did not otherwise respond. No other responses were received. The consultation period ended on August 22, 2022, with no responses received.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Earthmoving would disturb the soil in the project area. Borrow pits would be dug to a depth of up to 2 feet and the materials used to construct the water-retaining berms. While there would be short term-effects from these actions, the long term effects would be to restore the historical planform of the property. Historical wetland vegetation would improve soil retention and quality. ODFW would also reserve all topsoil from excavated areas and re-apply it to disturbed areas after earthmoving is completed to retain the quality of the existing topsoil following construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Kincaid's lupine (*Lupinus oreganus*) has been documented in Lane County (USFWS; Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool). While populations of Kincaid's lupine have been recorded on other units of the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area, it has not been observed at the CCNE property. ODFW conducts routine surveys of the properties for Kincaid's lupine and records all populations of the plant so that it can be avoided during projects on the properties. Additionally, Kincaid's lupine is typically found in dry upland prairie and ecotones between grassland and forest, not the lower-lying wetted fields of the project areas. The proposed actions would therefore have no effect on Kincaid's lupine.

No other separately listed Oregon state-listed endangered species have been observed in the project area (Oregon Department of Agriculture; Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate Plant List).

Non-listed plants would be affected by some project actions. Wetland restoration actions would require excavation of borrow pits and constructing berms, which would remove some vegetation. These effects would be localized to the areas of earthmoving activity and mitigated by replanting native species of grasses and forbs following construction. The long-term effects of the project would be to restore typical wetland vegetation in the area, improving conditions for native plants.

Notes:

Wetland restoration project actions would conform to the limitations and proscriptions in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program programmatic biological opinion (HIP4 BiOp) (HIP PNF #2023028). These include all general project conservation measures in addition to the species-specific conservation measures for projects that take place in the range of Kincaid's lupine included in the HIP4 BiOp.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphys marmoratus*), streaked horned lark (*Eremophila alpestris strigata*), northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), and Fender's blue butterfly (*Icaricia icarioides fenderi*) have the potential to be found in Lane County (IPaC). Of these species, only streaked horned lark has been observed on the Fern Ridge Wildlife Area properties. Streaked horned lark is typically found in upland grassland and savanna and does not usually make nests in the wetter regions like the project area. Streaked horned larks have been observed nesting on the upland Coyote Creek properties since 2017, but these nest locations are monitored by ODFW staff and would be avoided. Project actions are also scheduled to begin only after nesting season to further reduce the potential to impact birds in the area. There may be some negative impacts to any streaked horned larks present near the project area from noise from equipment and human presence during excavation, but these effects would be temporary, limited in scope, and cause no loss of habitat or take of the species. The proposed actions would therefore be not likely to adversely affect streaked horned lark, consistent with the determination in the HIP4 BiOp.

No separately listed Oregon state-listed endangered species have been observed in the project areas (ODFW Fish and Wildlife Division).

Non-listed wildlife would be affected by noise and human presence during project activities. Work would be done using small machine equipment, such as skid steers and trucks, which would create noise and potentially disturb wildlife in the area. These effects would be temporary, localized, and cause no lasting impacts to wildlife in the area. The long-term

effects of restoring the historical conditions of the properties would provide for increased natural habitat for wildlife, especially nesting waterfowl.

Notes:

- Wetland restoration project actions would conform to the limitations and proscriptions in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program programmatic biological opinion (HIP4 BiOp) (HIP PNF #2023028). These include all general project conservation measures in addition to the species-specific conservation measures for projects, which take place in the range of streaked horned lark included in the HIP4 BiOp.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No streams or waterbodies are present on the CCNE property. Coyote Creek, the closest stream to the project site, is located nearly a mile to the west, while the Fern Ridge Reservoir is more than 2 miles northwest of the property. It is very unlikely that earthmoving and seeding would have any appreciable effect on these distant waterbodies. No fish in these waterbodies would be impacted by project activities.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The CCNE property historically hosted a large number of seasonal wetlands. These wetlands were largely destroyed by agricultural practices that flattened and drained the property to make it more amenable to ryegrass cultivation. Project activities would restore the historical wetlands to the area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no new wells or groundwater use proposed. Wetland restoration activities would increase the retention of water during winter and spring and effect the local water table. While this would change the groundwater conditions as they currently exist, the project actions would restore the historical hydrology to the area as it existed prior to the property being altered for agriculture.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Since ODFW acquired the property in 2015, the CCNE property has been used for wildlife habitat and public recreation, such as for bird watching and hunting. While the property would be closed to the public during project activities, this closure would be temporary and no long-term changes to the use of the property are proposed. Moreover, the long-term effects of restoring historical wetlands to the property would be to increase the available habitat for waterfowl and improve the recreational quality of the property.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor effects on the visual quality of the property. The CCNE property is currently a relatively featureless and uniform remnant agricultural field, and wetland restoration would return this field to its historical conditions and planform. These effects would be noticeable, but minor, and consistent with the historical quality of the surrounding area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be generation of exhaust emissions from equipment (trucks, skid steers, etc.) used for project actions. This exhaust would be temporary, limited in scope, and cause no long-term changes to air quality at the properties.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be increases in local noise caused by equipment (trucks, skid steers, etc.) used for project actions. This noise would be temporary, limited in scope, and cause no long-term noise increases at the properties.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All workers would use best practices to ensure health and human safety. All machinery and equipment would be operated solely by trained personnel.

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: ODFW owns the CCNE property. No external coordination is required.

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

Signed: */s/ Thomas DeLorenzo* *July 10, 2023*
Thomas DeLorenzo Date
Environmental Protection Specialist