Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Slate Creek #3 Log Culvert Removal

Project No.: 1996-067-02

Project Manager: Ryan Ruggiero, EWM-4

Location: Clearwater County, Idaho

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: BPA proposes to fund the Nez Perce Tribe to improve fish passage and fish habitat by removing an old log culvert that provided vehicle access across Slate Creek for an unnamed, unsurfaced logging road. The current structure is a passage barrier to fish, is causing hydraulic scour, and is contributing excessive sediment into Slate Creek.

The project would use a mini excavator to remove the log culvert and reshape the banks to match the upstream and downstream profile once the old culvert is removed. The culvert would not be replaced as the road is no longer in use. The log culvert was part of an old corduroy log road[1] that is now buried in decades of accumulated forest debris and added native road surfacing material. As such, there is some uncertainty regarding the amount of excavation and corduroy road material removal necessary to reach adequate native material for effective and stable reconstruction of this section of the creek.

Depending on the lateral degree of excavation and stream alignments that might result, the project would then install up to seven in-stream structures (given the length of the creek to be affected) to rehabilitate the reshaped creek and its banks. Structures would consist of large woody debris (whole trees or large logs with rootwads attached), beaver dam analogs (BDAs), or post-assisted log structures (PALS). The number, selection, and placement of these structures would be determined once the log culvert and corduroy road material has been removed and the stream banks restructured.

The BDAs and PALs would be full or partial channel-spanning structures comprised of small diameter woody debris (which could include whole trees less than one foot in diameter and 15 feet or less in length), riparian cuttings, and other materials woven between several vertical small-diameter posts. driven vertically into the creek a minimum of 1.5 feet apart. The combined area of impact for all actions would be less than one acre.

Seeding and planting of willow cuttings and containerized plants would be applied on disturbed areas (about 0.15 acre) to accelerate the recovery of the riparian habitat.

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[1] A corduroy road is an historical road construction method whereby small logs were laid laterally across a road's running surface to prevent vehicles from miring in saturated soils.

The project would require use of a mini excavator, hydraulic post pounder, and dump truck to complete the project. All equipment would be staged along existing roads, and no road improvements would be necessary. All proposed work would occur in previously disturbed areas or within the historic floodplain.

Funding the Slate Creek #3 Log Culvert Removal project would benefit Snake River Basin steelhead and thereby fulfill commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp) and support commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 FWS CRS BiOp), while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FRCPS) 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. 839 et seq. These actions also support BPA's commitments to the State of Idaho in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as amended.

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.

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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: Slate Creek #3 Log Culvert Removal

Project Site Description

The project area is located in a privately-owned commercial forest used for timber production, livestock grazing, and a variety of recreational activities. Slate creek is a small sinuous stream, varying from 36 to 48 inches wide and about 10 to 12 inches deep flowing through a narrow (10 to 15 feet wide) herbaceous corridor surrounded by a robust woody riparian plant community. Though timber harvest has occurred in the surrounding conifer forest uplands, no recent logging activity has occurred in the project area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The Nez Perce Tribe Cultural Resources Program completed a cultural resources inventory for the project in spring 2024. No cultural resources were identified. BPA initiated Section 106 consultation with the Nez Perce Tribe and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on September 9, 2024, and determined a finding of **no historic properties affected**. Idaho SHPO concurred with BPA's determination on September 12, 2024. The Nez Perce Tribe Cultural Resources Program responded with their agreement on September 13, 2024.

Conditions: Adhere to BPA's Post-Review Discovery Plan and make the plan available onsite.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary, impacts to soil from increased erosion potential during log culvert and corduroy road log removal and instream log and small wood structure placement. Sediment control best management practices (BMPs) would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during the work. Work areas would be isolated by rerouting water around the work area to minimize erosion and turbidity.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status plants, including Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species, are known to be present. There would be temporary impacts to existing vegetation from heavy equipment excavation during log culvert and corduroy road material removal and stream

channel restoration. Post-construction plantings and long-term monitoring would re-establish native plants and riparian plant communities on disturbed soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status wildlife species or habitats are known to occupy the project area. No habitats would be modified to any degree that might permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from construction activities. Human presence and activity associated with project actions would temporarily disturb and displace nearby wildlife, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Snake River steelhead, though not currently present, are anticipated to use this project area once barriers to their passage are removed in a separate project downstream. Their designated critical habitat, however, is present in the project area. The project is covered under the HIP Biological Opinion under Section 7 of the ESA. The project sponsor would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval, including turbidity monitoring requirements and in-water work timing. No state-listed special-status species occupy the project areas.

Fish salvage during isolation of the construction areas would be stressful on fish and potentially harmful, but the number of fish affected would be few and only from a small area of the creek.

Some aquatic invertebrates and amphibians may be displaced or killed by the excavations for the log culvert removal, but quick re-occupation of these small sites by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following construction is anticipated.

In the long term, the project would enhance fish habitat by eliminating a source of unnatural sediment inputs, improving local habitat conditions for adult and juvenile fish, and would provide access to over one mile of NOAA-designated Critical Habitat for Snake River steelhead.

Notes:

Prior to construction in the waterbody or adjacent wetlands, the sponsor would obtain applicable Clean Water Act permitting.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Streamside and floodplain wetlands are present in the project area and would be disturbed during project activities. These wetland sites would not be eliminated, but rather restored following construction and ultimately increased in area by improved streamside conditions following project completion.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no groundwater withdrawal. There would be some miniscule potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel, fluid drips, or spills from the equipment used for the log culvert removal. Spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater is unlikely. Onsite spill kits would also minimize the potential for spills and drips to be of sufficient quantity to contaminate groundwater.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to project actions (timber production). There would be no land use changes, and no impact on specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually-prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made. Log culvert and corduroy road removal would not change the overall visual character of the landscape along, or as seen from, local roads.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some exhaust and greenhouse gas emissions from the motorized equipment used for log culvert removal and instream log placement, but these are short-term actions, and no long-term source of emissions or exhaust would be created. Vehicles used to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the site would be another potential source of exhaust and greenhouse gases, but this also would be minimal and short-term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some short-term noise impacts from the heavy equipment used for the culvert removal, but this type of noise is consistent with that of routine logging operations in the local area

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicle and excavator operation and working with hand and power tools have their attendant risks to equipment operators, 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 Slate Creek #3 Culvert Removal project is on an abandoned private road and planned in cooperation with the private land owner, who would be notified prior to removal activities.

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

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