

Categorical Exclusion Documentation

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management, Spokane District
Wenatchee Field Office
915 Walla Walla Avenue
Wenatchee, WA 98801

A. Background

BLM Office: Wenatchee Field Office

NEPA Log Number: DOI-BLM-ORWA-W020-2016-0023-CX

Proposed Action Title: Chopaka Hazard Tree Management

Location of Proposed Action: T.40N., R.25E., Section 33, SW1/4, WM, Okanogan County

Proposed Action: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to remove, or fell and leave on site, one hazard tree at the Chopaka Lake recreation site. A hazard tree is any standing live or dead tree, including snags, with evidence of deterioration or physical damage to the root system, trunk, or stem, that is in proximity to people, property, or infrastructure. A recent inventory at the Chopaka Lake recreation site determined that one tree was infected with heart rot, a fungus which causes trees to rot from the inside out. Due to the infected tree's proximity to camp sites and facilities infrastructure, it has been identified as a hazard, compelling BLM's need for the proposed action.

The BLM proposes to cut, prune, or employ other hazard tree management methods for removing or felling the hazard tree within the site. The tree will be removed, with a low stumps left in place. Tree materials will then be cut and piled to minimize ground disturbance. It is estimated the proposed action will take only one day to complete.

B. Land Use Plan Conformance

Land Use Plan Name: Spokane Resource Management Plan (RMP)

Date Approved/Amended: Approved 1987/Amended 1992

The proposed action is in conformance with the 1987 Spokane Resource Management Plan (RMP), even though it is not specifically provided for, because it is clearly consistent with general RMP objectives. The RMP (p. 12) identifies a general management objective to "Manage public lands and keep access routes open for a variety of recreational opportunities/experiences, including both motorized and non-motorized recreation activities." Removing hazard trees at the Chopaka Lake recreation site will provide for recreational opportunities in that area.



C. Compliance with NEPA

The proposed action is categorically excluded from further documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. The proposed action is a kind of action that has been determined to fit within a category of actions that do not individually or cumulatively have significant effects on the human environment. The proposed action falls within category:

516 DM 11.9.C (2) Sale and removal of individual trees or small groups of trees which are dead, diseased, injured, or which constitute a safety hazard, and where access for the removal requires no more than maintenance to existing roads.

This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The proposed action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply, as described below:

a. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on public health or safety.

The proposed project would have a positive yet not significant impact on health and safety. The proposed action is to remove one diseased tree that is a threat to safety. Removing the tree will reduce safety hazards from falling trees or limbs.

b. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.

The proposed action would not result in any adverse or significant impacts to the aforementioned resources because many of them do not occur in the project area. The project area does contain habitat for migratory birds and cultural resources. Impacts would not be significant because only one tree would be removed for safety concerns.

The proposed project would not have a discernible impact on migratory birds. Individuals using the hazard tree identified for removal will be displaced when the tree is removed, but there is suitable habitat adjacent and proximate that is available to meet those same lifecycle habitat requirements. There is a small probability for individual mortality, if there are cavity nesting birds present in the tree, or young that have not fledged. However, loss of an individual or nest, would not constitute a biologically significant impact that could be measured in relation to fluctuations in migratory bird populations.

The BLM first performed cultural resource inventory along the shore of Chopaka Lake, including the recreation site, in 1978; three cultural resource sites were identified and recorded outside and to the north of the Chopaka Lake recreation site. On May 4, 2004, the BLM consulted with the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP), the Colville Confederated Tribes (CCT), and the Okanogan County Historical Society (OKCHS), describing proposed campground upgrade activities, and the disturbance anticipated

to result from those activities. The DAHP concurred with the Area of Potential Effect (APE) on May 10, 2004 and, in their letter of June 3, 2004, the OKCHS expressed no concerns; no response was received from the CCT.

The BLM performed an intensive Class III cultural resources inventory – transects of no more than 15-meter intervals, and 10 shovel probe tests – in the 30 acres that comprises the Chopaka Lake recreation area. Cultural resources were encountered during the inventory; these resources were avoided during project implementation. The archaeologist noted considerable surface disturbance as a result of camping and recreational activities, and recommended periodic monitoring to gauge potential damage to identified resources. No record of such monitoring has been located.

On June 3, 2016, the CCT and DAHP were notified of the BLM intention to immediately remove the hazard tree with a BLM archaeologist present to monitor potential effect to cultural resources. The CCT immediately agreed the tree should be removed; the DAHP concurred June 6, 2016. Although previous inventory can be considered adequate to the current project, site recordation is not up to contemporary standards; site records for identified cultural resources will be updated as part of the project monitoring process.

BLM's Chopaka Lake recreation site is adjacent to BLM's Chopaka Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA). The location of the hazard tree is outside of the WSA, so would cause no significant impact to resources within the WSA.

c. The proposed action would not have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].

Hazard tree management is a necessary management tool used to protect the health and safety of the public and other valuable assets. There is no dispute about the effects of removing a single hazard tree. This action would not have any controversial effects or unresolved conflicts.

d. The proposed action would not have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.

Because the tree will eventually fall on its own, it poses a risk to people and infrastructure if left in place. The proposed action would reduce the risk by controlling when and how the hazard tree is removed. The hazard tree is a small fraction of the existing trees, and other vegetation that is not rated as hazardous will remain in place.

The effects and risks of removing the hazard tree as proposed are well known and do not present a potential for significant effects. Hazard tree removal has occurred year-round on the District to protect life and property and the impacts of their removal are well understood. This action does not involve any unique or unknown environmental risk because the action of removing hazard trees is a common BLM activity that results in little or no environmental risk.

e. The proposed action would not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.

The proposed action will not set a precedent for future action with potentially significant environmental effects, because this action would not authorize future management beyond the scope of the time considered. Hazard tree removal in the Wenatchee Field Office has occurred in the past to protect life and property. This proposed action would continue already well-understood work, and would not cause potential for significant environmental effects.

f. The proposed action would not have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.

The proposed action does not have a direct relationship with any other actions, other than the regularly occurring recreation use in the Chopaka Lake recreation site. Chopaka Lake is a popular recreation destination and there is a BLM campground and other recreation facilities in the project area. The effects of removing this single hazard tree is not significant, as there are many other trees in the nearby area, and will not add any incremental impacts to other known actions occurring within the project area during this timeframe. The BLM did not identify any effects from this project that when combined with other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future work in the project area would result in any significant cumulative effect.

g. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by the bureau.

There are no properties listed or proposed for the National Register of Historic Places present within the project area.

h. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated critical habitat for these species.

The proposed action would have no effect on species listed, or proposed to be listed, under the Endangered Species Act (1973, as amended), or on designated critical habitat. Three federally listed species: Canada lynx (threatened), gray wolf (endangered), and grizzly bear (threatened) have potential to occur in the project area. All of these species tend to be transitory and avoid areas of high human use; such as this developed recreation site. None of these species have been documented in the recreation area. Of these species, only the Canada lynx has designated critical habitat, but it is outside the project area. Therefore, given the low probability of encountering these species and the lack of designated critical habitat, the proposed project is not expected to affect any listed, or proposed to be listed species or their critical habitat.

i. The proposed action would not violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

The proposed action does not threaten to violate any Federal, State, local, or tribal law imposed for the protection of the environment. Removing this hazard tree would not result in any significant impact.

j. The proposed action would not have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).

The proposed action would not disproportionately affect low income or minority populations as none are present in the area of consideration.

k. The proposed action would not limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).

The proposed action would not alter any existing access; therefore, it would not limit access to or use of Indian sacred sites by Indian religious practitioners.

l. The proposed action would not contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).

The proposed action will result in little to no ground disturbance. The felled tree will be left in place or cut and piled. Because any ground disturbance will be minor, the proposal will not create any conditions that are conducive to the introduction or spread of noxious weeds or invasive plant species. Therefore this action would not contribute to the introduction or spread of noxious weeds or non-native species.

D. Signature

/s/ Bryan Mulligan (for)
Linda Coates-Markle
Field Manager

6/6/16
Date

E. Contact Person and Reviewers

For additional information concerning this Categorical Review, contact Mark Williams, Forester, at (509) 665-2117 or Diane Priebe, Outdoor Recreation Planner, at (509) 665-2123.

Note: A separate decision document has been prepared for the action covered by this CX.

Reviewers	Resource	Initials	Date
J.A. Vacca	Wildlife, Special Status Wildlife	JAV	6/3/16
Molly Boyter	Botany, Special Status Plants	mjb	6/3/16
Kat Russell	Historic/Cultural	klr	6/3/2016
Katherine Farrell	NEPA	kf	6/6/16
Chris Sheridan	Fish, Special Status Fish, Riparian	Cds	6/3/16
Mark Williams	Noxious and Invasive Weeds	mw	6/3/16
Diane Priebe	Recreation/Visual	DP	6/01/2016

Chopaka Recreation Area Hazard Trees

