

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Grande Ronde Model Watershed Gauging Station Operation

Project No.: 1992-026-01

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser, EWL-4

Location: Union and Wallowa Counties, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.3 – Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to provide funds to the Grande Ronde Model Watershed (GRMW) for the collection of stream flow measurements on 12 Grande Ronde Basin Gauging Stations to characterize flow in both the Grande Ronde and Imnaha subbasins in Union and Wallowa counties, Oregon.

These stream flow gauges are intended to inform and provide data for the following:

- Irrigation water management;
- Fisheries management;
- Long-term flow and trend analysis;
- Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and Senate Bill (SB) 1010 water quality management plan effectiveness;
- Subbasin plan implementation;
- Restoration project development; and
- Provide essential information regarding cumulative effects response to conservation in the Grande Ronde Basin (GRB).

Stream flow characteristics, including headwater contribution, land management influence, and basin outlet data, would all be selectively collected in a network of flow gauges within the Grande Ronde Basin. Production partners include GRMW and Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD).

Multiple sites would be surveyed throughout the region, including areas on the Grande Ronde River, Meadow Creek, Five Point Creek, North and Main Forks of Catherine Creek, Bear Creek, Lostine River, Wallowa River, and 5 USFS sites.

Stream flow gauging fieldwork would be expected to occur from mid-summer through fall. Methods would consist of walking the stream and utilizing stream flow gauging tools by hand to capture flow measurements. This would generally involve removing debris from references and cutting brush and grasses that have grown up around control measuring points. The work would be completed by hand or with small powered equipment, such as weed whackers. Periodic repairs would be made during low water periods, commonly in late summer or fall, to fix damage to orifice

pipe, or secure new sensors to the stream bottom. This would involve minimal stream bottom manipulation consisting of the movement of rocks by use of hand tools. Anchoring of sensors would be accomplished with steel stakes or rebar. To be successful in most rocky bottoms, a hole is predrilled for the stake with a hammer drill.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These proposed activities also fulfill commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp).

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/ Travis D. Kessler

Travis D. Kessler
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient CRGT, Inc.

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

August 19, 2020

Date

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: Grande Ronde Model Watershed Gauging Station Operation

Project Site Description

The collection of stream flow measurements would occur on 5 gauging stations in Wallowa County and 7 stations in Union County, Oregon. Site conditions would vary depending on the location, but would occur along selected reaches of rivers and streams within the Grande Ronde Basin including: Grande Ronde River, Meadow Creek, Five Point Creek, North Fork Catherine Creek, Main Fork Catherine Creek, Bear Creek, Lostine River, and Wallowa River.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No potential to affect historic properties per correspondence with BPA archaeologist (email dated 8/11/20). There would be very minimal ground disturbance associated with the project. The majority of the project work would consist of the collection of stream flow measurements from a series of stream flow gauges, which would not create any ground disturbance. Occasionally, minimal ground disturbance would occur to complete periodic repairs to fix damage to orifice pipe, or secure new sensors to the stream bottom. This work would consist of the movement of rocks on the stream bottom via hand tools and stakes, or rebar would need to be driven into the stream bottom to anchor sensors.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Very minimal impacts to geology and soils would occur to complete periodic repairs to fix damage to orifice pipe, or secure new sensors to the stream bottom. This work would consist of the movement of rocks on the stream bottom via hand tools and stakes would be driven into the stream bottom to anchor sensors. The majority of the project work would consist of the collection of stream flow measurements from a series of stream flow gauges, which would not create any ground disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impacts to ESA-listed, state-listed, sensitive, or non-listed plant species known to exist on the site. Minimal ground disturbance would occasionally occur to complete periodic repairs to fix damage to orifice pipe, or secure new sensors to the stream bottom. This work would consist of the movement of rocks and anchoring sensors in the stream bottom with steel stakes or rebar.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, state-listed, or sensitive wildlife species have been documented in or adjacent to the project area, and no designated critical habitat is present. Wildlife present on the site during field work activities would likely avoid the area during this time and return once the field work is completed.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Snake River spring run Chinook salmon, Snake River Basin steelhead, and Columbia River bull trout and their critical habitat are mapped within the waterbodies where gauging stations would be monitored. Although ESA-listed species and their habitats are present within the project areas, there would be no impact to waterbodies, floodplains, and ESA-listed, state-listed, special-status species, ESUs, or habitats as a result of the proposed project.

There would be very minimal ground disturbance proposed to complete periodic repairs to fix damage to orifice pipe, or secure new sensors to the stream bottom. This work would consist of the movement of rocks and anchoring sensors in the stream bottom with steel stakes or rebar. On the occasion that stakes would need to be driven into the stream bottom, fish would likely swim upstream or downstream of the worksite to avoid the area until the project work is completed. The majority of the project work would consist of the collection of stream flow measurements by hand from a series of stream flow gauges, which would not create any ground disturbance.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to wetlands would occur as a result of the collection of stream flow data. The collection of stream flow data would occur in selected streams or rivers outside of wetland areas.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be very minimal ground disturbance that would occasionally occur during periodic maintenance of moving rocks by hand and driving stakes or rebar 18 to 24 inches into the stream bottom with hand tools to anchor sensors. Therefore, the work would not effect groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur for the proposed project. The project consists of the collection of stream flow data along selected reaches of rivers and streams within the Grande Ronde Basin.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The collection of stream flow data would have no effect on visual quality. Any change in the viewshed due to field 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 vehicles accessing the field sites would be very minor and short term during data collection, but would resume to normal conditions immediately once the fieldwork has been completed.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed work would not result in a measureable increase in ambient noise. Stream flow measurements would be taken by hand using hand tools. Occasional noise from hand driving stakes or rebar into the stream bottom to anchor sensors would occur to allow for the collection of stream flow data. This noise would only occur on an occasional basis if stakes are needed to be driven into the stream bottom, and would not be loud enough to create an issue for the general public or nearby landowners.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions.

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 GRMW would notify nearby landowners prior to commencement of the proposed fieldwork, which would occur in areas where previous work has been completed.

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

Signed: /s/ Travis D. Kessler August 19, 2020
Travis D. Kessler, ECF-4 date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
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