

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Idaho Salmon & Steelhead Monitoring and Evaluation Studies

Project No.: 1990-055-00

Project Manager: Russell Scranton – EWP-4

Location: Multiple locations in Adams, Blaine, Clearwater, Custer, Idaho, Latah, Lemhi, Nez Perce, and Valley counties, Idaho; and one location is Whitman County, Washington

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 continue funding Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to monitor and evaluate (M&E) the status and trends of wild Chinook salmon and steelhead, and bull trout when encountered, in the Salmon and Clearwater River basins in Idaho and at the Lower Granite Dam in Washington. BPA's proposed funding would fulfill ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the development and operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System on fish and wildlife in the 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. (USC) 839 et seq.). These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with both NMFS and USFWS on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System.

IDFG would conduct one or more of the following M&E activities at approximately 570 work sites throughout the Salmon and Clearwater River basins, and in Washington at the Lower Granite Dam. M&E activities would occur March through November, as weather permits. The project activities do not include installation of new monitoring equipment or ground disturbance.

- Operate and maintain rotary screw traps, hatchery traps, picket weirs, and passive integrated transponder (PIT) arrays
- PIT tag, collect biological data, take tissues samples from fish captured at traps and weirs
- Conduct snorkel surveys, ground and aerial redd counts, and carcass surveys
- Monitor stream temperature at selected sample sites
- Sample juvenile and adult spring/summer Chinook salmon and steelhead at Lower Granite Dam

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/ Brenda Aguirre

Brenda Aguirre

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange November 5, 2020

Katey C. Grange

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.

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Project Site Description

Project activities would occur on publicly owned lands and water ways throughout the Salmon and Clearwater River Basins in central Idaho and at the Lower Granite Dam in Washington, and on privately owned lands at Taylor Ranch in Idaho. Access would be via existing roads and trails, and occasionally via cross-county travel to remote locations. The terrain in both basins is mountainous with several steep river systems. The Salmon and Clearwater Rivers are both tributaries to the Snake River. The Salmon River joins the Snake 40 miles south of Lewiston, ID, and the Clearwater River joins the Snake at Lewiston. Vegetation is predominately forest and grasslands. Climate is relatively dry with cold winters and short growing seasons. Major land uses are forest, irrigated cropland, range land, and rural residential.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA Archaeologist reviewed the M&E activities and determined that these types of activities do not have the potential to cause significant effects to historic properties (M. Teoh, 10/20/20).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities do not propose ground disturbance. Activities would not disturb geology or soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities do not propose ground disturbance or removal of vegetation, Activities would not disturb plants, including Federal/state special-status species and habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities may cause minor, temporary disturbance to wildlife, including Federal/state special-status species and habitats where present, due to increased noise and vehicle traffic, and human presence.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project activities would have minor effects to water bodies; limited to temporary, low level turbidity. There would be no net rise in floodplain elevations. Project activities would have an effect on fish and their habitats; Endangered Species Act-listed Snake River Chinook salmon and steelhead, and bull trout and their designated critical habitats are present in the Salmon and Clearwater River basins and at Lower Granite Dam.

Notes:

- IDFG would adhere to all applicable terms and conditions identified in the following federal ESA and state collection permits.
 - ✓ National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Section 4(d) annual research permits for take of Chinook and steelhead in the Salmon and Clearwater basins; permits 23441 and 23512 issued 3/27/20.
 - ✓ NMFS Section 7 annual determination of take for research purposes under the 2019 Columbia River System Biological Opinion for take of Chinook and steelhead at the Lower Granite Dam; determination of take 12-20-IDFG-72 issued 2/26/20.
 - ✓ U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Section 6 Cooperative Agreement annual renewal for take of bull trout in Salmon and Clearwater basins; agreement renewed 6/26/20.
 - ✓ USFWS Section 10 multi-year recovery permit for take of bull trout at Lower Granite Dam; permit TE-82106B-0 for 2016 - 2021.
 - ✓ Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife annual Scientific Collection Permit at Lower Granite Dam; 20-060 issued 2/24/20.
 - ✓ Note: IDFG does not issue their offices scientific collection permits for collecting Federal/state special-status fish in Idaho.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities do not propose work within wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities do not propose new wells or use of groundwater; spill prevention measures would be present on site during filling of propane tanks to operate PIT array electron systems.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities do not propose changes to land use and would not alter land uses.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities would impact small amounts of area at monitoring sites such as traps, weirs and PIT arrays; project activities do not propose changes to visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities would generate small amounts of dust or vehicle emissions due to travel to access the sites.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would generate minor, temporary increases in noise due to vehicle traffic and human presence during project activities. Operational noise would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: IDFG would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety. Any activities involving hazardous materials would be disposed of at a designated hazardous waste facility.

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: Project activities would occur on public and private lands and would not cause impacts to surrounding landowners. IDFG has coordinated with the U.S. Forest Service; specific provisions requested would be implemented for project activities involving installation of temporary traps and weirs, and permanent PIT arrays. IDFG also has an easement and access agreement on Taylor Ranch with the University of Idaho.

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

Signed: /s/ Brenda Aguirre November 5, 2020
Brenda Aguirre, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist