

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce Action Effectiveness Monitoring

**Project No.:** 2010-004-00

**Project Manager:** Anne Creason, EWL-4

**Location:** Multnomah, Columbia, and Clatsop counties, OR; Pacific, Wahkiakim, Cowlitz, and Clark counties, WA

**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 Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce (CREST) to work with local and regional partners to complete a number of assessments as part of the Columbia Estuary Ecosystem Restoration Program's (CEERP) Level 3 Action Effectiveness Monitoring and Research (AEMR). The AEMR would inform future restoration implementation and action effectiveness in Multnomah, Columbia, and Clatsop counties, Oregon and Pacific, Wahkiakim, Cowlitz, and Clark counties, Washington.

Level 3 AEMR would be conducted at multiple BPA-funded restoration sites in the Columbia River Estuary. The monitoring would include: photo points, water surface elevation, water temperature, sediment accretion, and available elevation datasets.

Fieldwork for these projects would begin in the spring and would be expected to extend through the fall each year. Methods would consist of walking field sites and utilizing standard field tools by hand. Protocols would consist of installing and maintaining water level loggers; collecting water level and water temperature data; and performing sediment accretion monitoring and photo point monitoring per the standardized monitoring protocols found in Protocols for Monitoring Habitat Restoration Projects in the Lower Columbia River and Estuary (Roegner, et. al. 2009). Monitoring points and data logger locations would be permanently marked in the field and recorded with a Global Positioning System (GPS) to allow for the collection of data in future years.

There would be very minimal ground disturbance associated with the maintenance of installing water surface elevation and temperature loggers and one-inch-diameter PVC pipes approximately two-and-a-half feet deep associated with accretion monitoring. For water surface elevation and temperature monitoring, existing one-inch-wide T-posts would be pulled from the ground when they are removed for construction and re-installed approximately two feet deep into new locations within channels.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These actions would also support conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species



# 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:** Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce Action Effectiveness Monitoring

## **Project Site Description**

The proposed project fieldwork would occur on the ground within multiple locations in Multnomah, Columbia, and Clatsop counties, Oregon and Pacific, Wahkiakim, Cowlitz, and Clark counties, Washington. Site conditions would vary depending on the location, but would generally occur along various BPA-funded restoration sites in the Columbia River Estuary.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archeologist determined that the project would have no potential to affect historic properties. There would be very minimal ground disturbance associated with the maintenance of removing and installing T-posts for water surface elevation and temperature loggers and installing PVC pipes associated with accretion monitoring, and these activities would be limited to the stream channel.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Little impact to geology and soils would occur as there would be very minimal ground disturbance associated with the maintenance of removing and installing T-posts for water surface elevation and temperature loggers and installing PVC pipes associated with accretion monitoring.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be little impact to non-listed plant species and no impacts to ESA-listed, state-listed, or sensitive plant species as there would be very minimal ground disturbance and associated vegetation disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, state-listed, or sensitive wildlife species would be adversely affected by human presence conducting field surveys on the ground. Wildlife present on the site during

field activities may be temporarily disturbed by human presence, but would likely avoid the areas during this time and return once the project work is completed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project areas are located in the Columbia River Estuary along the Columbia River, its tributaries, and the associated floodplains of these waterbodies. Many ESA-listed fish species are present within the Columbia River Estuary, including: Lower Columbia River Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Upper Willamette River Spring-run Chinook salmon, Upper Columbia River spring-run Chinook salmon, Snake River spring/summer run Chinook salmon, Snake River fall-run Chinook salmon, Columbia River chum salmon (*Oncorhynchus keta*), Lower Columbia River Coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), Oregon Coast coho salmon, Snake River sockeye salmon, Lower Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Upper Willamette River steelhead, and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and their designated critical habitat.

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 and there would be no sediment run off to adjacent waterbodies.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be very minor ground disturbance within wetland areas associated with the maintenance of removing and installing T-posts for water surface elevation and temperature loggers and installing PVC pipes associated with accretion monitoring. However, this disturbance would create very small non-invasive holes in the soil that are approximately one-inch in diameter and not result in a measureable impact to wetlands or waters of the U.S.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be very minimal ground disturbance that would occur with the maintenance of removing and installing T-posts for water surface elevation and temperature loggers and installing PVC pipes associated with accretion monitoring. Therefore, the work would not affect 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 work would consist of walking field sites and utilizing standard field tools by hand.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The installation of T-posts and PVC pipe would cause a minimal, but unnoticeable, change in the visual quality of the field sites where they would be installed.

## 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

Explanation: The proposed work would not result in a measureable increase in ambient noise. Field measurements would be taken by hand using hand tools. Occasional noise would occur from driving T-posts or PVC pipe into the ground, but would not be loud enough to cause an issue for the general public or adjacent landowners.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not hazardous, and it would not result in any health 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 sponsor (CREST) would notify nearby landowners prior to commencement of the proposed fieldwork, which would occur in areas where previous work has been completed and has landowner support.

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

Signed: /s/ Shawn Skinner March 8, 2021  
Shawn Skinner, ECF-4 Date  
Environmental Protection Specialist