

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Freshwater Mussels Research Program (Update to previously issued Categorical Exclusion on May 1, 2018)

Project No.: 2002-037-00

Project Manager: Deborah Docherty, EWM-4

Location: Multiple counties (see text below)

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B 3.3 Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) to implement the Freshwater Mussels Research Program. The program proposes to (1) artificially propagate freshwater mussels for reintroduction into the Umatilla River basin and (2) monitor and evaluate the program. Major components of the action appear below. This CX is being updated to include the current Accords commitments.

Mussel Surveys: CTUIR proposes to conduct foot surveys to identify remaining freshwater mussel populations, chiefly in the Umatilla River and tributaries. Additionally, surveys may occur in all counties in CTUIR Ceded Territory in Oregon (Baker, Grant, Morrow Malheur, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Wheeler, and Gilliam Counties), Washington (Asotin, Benton, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla, Franklin, and Klickitat Counties), and Idaho (along the border of Canyon, Payette, Owyhee and Washington Counties). Initial survey work would identify sites with mussel presence and potential restoration areas. Follow-up surveys would include quantitative sampling of population size or demographics.

Broodstock Collection: Gravid adult female mussels from the genera *Anodonta*, *Gonidea*, and *Margaritifera* would be collected by hand while snorkeling or wading from various locations on CTUIR ceded land. Female *Margaritifera* or *Anodonta* will be transported CTUIR's Water and Environmental Center (WEC) wet lab in Walla Walla, Washington. Viable glochidia (larvae) would be extracted from *Gonidea* females by non-lethal methods, and the females returned to their original locations. The non-lethal genetic sampling would involve gently swabbing the foot tissue of the mussel or it would include inserting a sterile needle into a portion of the foot and gently extract less than 70 microliters of hemolymph. All mussels would be placed back in to the sediment in the river or holding tank.

Mussel Propagation: Larval mussels would be grown on host fish at CTUIR's existing WEC wet lab in Walla Walla. To avoid exposure to pathogens, mussels would be kept in clean well water. Mussels would be reared in Walla Walla at the WEC facility. Some of the mussels would be reared in cages in rivers or hatchery facilities (same silo cages used in survivorship trials).

In Situ Survivorship Trials: Propagated juveniles would be placed in the Umatilla basin either in marked quadrats or in small mussel silo cages (diameter 10-12 inches, height 6-8 inches). Silos will be deployed from May to October. The CTUIR proposes to release 10s or possibly a few hundred of any freshwater mussel species into the Umatilla subbasin; however, exact numbers are impossible to predict due to the novelty of mussel cultural methods.

Mussel Salvage and Translocation: Mussel salvage and translocations would occur prior to construction of planned restoration projects or other actions that involve channel dewatering. CTUIR proposes to collect mussels and relocate them to an in-basin site containing similar habitat, following freshwater mussel Best Management Practices (Blevins et al. 2017). CTUIR would evaluate the condition of translocated mussels periodically.

These actions would support Bonneville's commitments to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation under the 2020 Columbia River Fish Accord Extension agreement, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the FCRPS 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. (USC) 839 et seq.)

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/ Catherine Clark

Catherine Clark
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Motus Recruiting and Staffing, Inc.

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Katey C. Grange</u>	<u>September 10, 2021</u>
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

Mussel surveys, broodstock collection, and mussel salvage and translocation would take place within the wetted perimeter of various streams within the Columbia basin. In situ survivalship trials will also take place within the wetted perimeter of streams, chiefly in the lower and middle Umatilla River. Propagation activities will all take place inside of existing facilities, either at the WEC lab in Walla Walla, Washington or at the mussel culture facility in Mission, Oregon.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Based on the information provided for the proposed project, BPA determined that this undertaking is a type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties, assuming such historic properties were present.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Earth disturbance would be minimal, limited to minor sedimentation when walking in rivers or streams.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not remove or disturb vegetation. Therefore, no effect on plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would increase noise and visual disturbance only minimally above ambient levels, and would not disturb earth or vegetation. Therefore, negligible effects on wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The effects to waterbodies would be minimal, limited to temporary, low-level sedimentation while walking in rivers or streams. Listed fish occur in the affected area; however, in a Biological Opinion dated Feb. 28th 2018, National Marine Fisheries Service determined that the action would not jeopardize listed fish due to the low numbers of mussels released and the low potential for disease transmission or parasitism. Likewise, in a letter of concurrence dated May 1st 2018, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred that the action is not likely to adversely affect listed bull trout. In-stream work would cause brief, temporary disturbance to listed fish, but not to the level of causing injury or death. The action could potentially have a beneficial effect on water bodies and fish, because mussels filter pollutants from the water column. However, this effect would be low, due to the low number of mussels released.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no wetlands present in proposed locations.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not result in an increase in groundwater use and would not change the hydrological regime. Therefore, these actions would not affect groundwater recharge.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Land use would not change. The project is not located in a specially designated area or Wild and Scenic River.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Effects to visual quality would be negligible. There is no new construction, disposal of spoils, or removal of vegetation. The only potential visual impact would be the placement of mussel silos, which measure at most 12 inches wide by 8 inches tall and would be installed with no ground disturbance. This would be a negligible, temporary visual impact.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A negligible amount of temporary dust and vehicle emissions could be generated during proposed work.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action does not involve any new construction or new use of heavy equipment. Therefore, there would be a negligible increase in ambient noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions are not likely to mobilize previously undisturbed soils. Therefore, the actions would not uncover contaminated earth, fuel or chemical leaks, or disturb underground storage tanks.

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: Where projects are on public land, work would be done in coordination with land managers. On private land, CTUIR would access protect areas and perform work only after obtaining landowner approval. No special permissions required for work on the Umatilla Reservation.

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

Signed: /s/ Catherine Clark September 10, 2021
Catherine Clark, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Motus Recruiting and Staffing, Inc.