

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Idaho Salmon and Steelhead Monitoring and Evaluation Studies

**Project No.:** 1990-055-00

**Project Manager:** Russell Scranton

**Location:** Multiple locations in Adams, Blaine, Clearwater, Custer, Idaho, Latah, Lemhi, Nez Perce, and Valley Counties, Idaho; and one location in 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 federally-listed wild Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) when encountered in the Clearwater and Salmon River basins in Idaho and at Lower Granite Dam in Washington.

IDFG would conduct one or more of the following M&E activities at approximately 570 work sites from March through November, as weather permits. Project activities would only include ongoing work; the work would not include the installation of new monitoring equipment, or new ground disturbance.

- Operate and maintain rotary screw traps, hatchery traps, picket weirs, and passive integrated transponder (PIT) arrays
- PIT tag, collect biological data, and take tissue 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

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with National Marine Fisheries Service and United States Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, 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/ Brenda Aguirre  
Brenda Aguirre  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>September 14, 2021</u>
Sarah T. Biegel	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.

**Proposed Action:** Idaho Salmon and Steelhead Monitoring and Evaluation Studies

## **Project Site Description**

Project activities would occur on publicly-owned lands and water ways throughout the Clearwater and Salmon River basins in central Idaho and at Lower Granite Dam in southeastern Washington, and on privately-owned lands at Taylor Ranch in the Salmon River basin. Access would be via existing roads and trails, and occasionally via cross-county travel to remote locations. The overall terrain in the basins and around Lower Granite Dam is predominantly mountainous with several steep river systems. The Clearwater and Salmon Rivers are both tributaries to the Snake River. The Clearwater River joins the Snake River at Lewiston, Idaho and the Salmon River joins the Snake River about 40 miles south of Lewiston. The Lower Granite Dam is located on the Snake River at River Mile 107, about 40 miles northwest of Lewiston. The overall vegetation is predominantly 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: The project activities would occur at existing facilities, fish traps, or PIT arrays. No ground-disturbing activities that may affect historic or cultural resources are proposed; thus, the proposed work would not have the potential to impact historic or cultural resources.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities that may affect geology or soils are proposed; thus, the proposed activities would not have the potential to impact these resources.

### **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. Temporary impacts to vegetation would occur from humans trampling some plants while accessing and working at project sites. Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed and proposed and state special-status Macfarlane's four-o'clock, Spalding's catchfly, and Whitebark pine are present in the Clearwater and Salmon River basins, and Spalding's catchfly is present in the Snake River basin. If species are found at project sites, IDFG would follow all terms and conditions identified in their Federal ESA and state research collection permits to avoid impacts.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary disturbance to area wildlife would occur from increased noise and vehicle traffic during project work. Wildlife would likely avoid these areas during this time and return once the work was completed. Federal ESA-listed and candidate and state special-status species present in the Clearwater and Salmon River basins include the Canada lynx, grizzly bear, northern Idaho ground squirrel, yellow-billed cuckoo, and monarch butterfly. Federal ESA-listed and candidate and state special-status species present in the Snake River basin include the yellow-billed cuckoo and monarch butterfly. If species are found at project sites, IDFG would follow all terms and conditions identified in their Federal ESA and state research collection permits to avoid potential impacts.

#### **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 during instream work. Turbidity would return to back-ground levels once the work was completed. No ground-disturbing activities that may affect floodplains are proposed; thus, the proposed activities would not have the potential to impact floodplains. Federal ESA-listed and state special-status Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout, and their designated critical habitats, are present in the Clearwater and Salmon River basins and at Lower Granite Dam. IDFG would follow all terms and conditions identified in the following federal ESA and state collection permits to avoid impacts.

Notes:

- National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), ESA Section 4(d), 2021 research permits 24258 and 24294 for take of juvenile and adult Chinook and steelhead during trapping in the Clearwater and Salmon River basins.
- NMFS, ESA Section 7, 2021 determination of take permit 25501 for research purposes under the 2020 Columbia River System (CRS) Biological Opinion (BO) for take of Chinook and steelhead during monitoring using PIT arrays above Lower Granite Dam.
- NMFS, ESA Section 7, 2021 determination of take permit 24389 for research purposes under the 2020 CRS BO for take of wild juvenile Chinook and steelhead during sampling at Lower Granite Dam.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), ESA Section 6 Cooperative Agreement, 2021 renewed agreement of 7/22/21 for take of bull trout in Clearwater and Salmon River basins while sampling.
- USFWS, ESA Section 10, 2021-2025 recovery permit TE82106B-1 for take of bull trout at Lower Granite Dam during sampling.
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2021 Washington State Scientific Collection Permits MARSH 21-021 and SMITH 20-274 for research of state and/or federally-listed adult and juvenile Chinook, steelhead, sockeye, and bull trout sampling above Lower Granite Dam.
- Note: IDFG does not issue their office's scientific collection permits for collecting federal/state special-status fish in Idaho.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities that may affect wetlands are proposed; thus, the proposed activities would not have the potential to impact 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 electronic systems.

## 8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities would be compatible with local land use policies and guidelines on public roads and lands, and follow conditions identified in the easement on private lands with the University of Idaho.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur at existing facilities, fish traps, or PIT arrays. No ground-disturbing activities that may affect visual quality are proposed; thus, the proposed activities would not have the potential to impact visual quality.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any increase in emissions or dust from vehicles accessing field sites would be minor and short term.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any increase in ambient noise from vehicles accessing field sites would be minor and short term.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers carrying out the proposed activities would be trained in the proper equipment management techniques. 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. No notification is needed for work at existing and temporary facilities that would be accessed on existing roads and trails on public lands. IDFG would coordinate with the U.S. Forest Service, Salmon-Challis National Forest and follow specific provisions in their special-use permit for the implementation of project activities and access for the Marsh Creek permanent PIT arrays site. IDFG would also coordinate with the University of Idaho and follow conditions in their easement and access agreement for sites at Taylor Ranch.

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 September 14, 2021  
Brenda Aguirre, ECF-4 Date  
Environmental Protection Specialist