

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Grand Coulee Dam/Lake Roosevelt Fall 2019 Operations

**Project Manager:** E. James – PGP-5; R. Petty – PGP-5

**Location:** Ferry, Stevens, Lincoln, Okanogan, and Grant counties, Washington

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B3.1 Site Characterization and Environmental Monitoring; B4.4 Power Marketing Services and Activities; B4.5 Temporary Adjustments to River Operations

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (Bonneville) proposes to respond to low inflow conditions at Lake Roosevelt, the reservoir behind Grand Coulee Dam, by refilling it to an elevation of 1283 feet later than in a typical year. Due to anticipated low streamflow conditions in 2019, downstream operational constraints, and changes in power supply, Bonneville needs the flexibility to provide an adequate, efficient, economical, and reliable power supply. Bonneville may achieve this flexibility by delaying refill at Lake Roosevelt from the end-of-September elevation of 1283 feet to sometime in October. Although this flexibility would result in a shift in timing for refilling Lake Roosevelt, the overall flow volume would remain unchanged between August 31 and November 1. During this time, Bonneville's power-marketing services and activities, including operations of related generating projects, would remain within normal operating limits and within the longstanding existing operating constraints of the Columbia River System.

Bonneville markets and transmits the power generated by Grand Coulee Dam in accordance with Bonneville's statutory directives. To fulfill its obligations to meet power customer loads (power demand) and help assure the Pacific Northwest has an adequate, efficient, economical, and reliable power supply, Bonneville staff coordinates closely with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (the operator of Grand Coulee dam) to keep the operations of Grand Coulee dam within normal operating limits. These operations are managed consistent with other project purposes and Columbia River System-wide operating constraints, including operations to support Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish, such as listed salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon.

There are several operational constraints on Lake Roosevelt. These include the August 31 draft objective of meeting a reservoir elevation of 1278 feet from the 2019 NOAA Fisheries Columbia River System Biological Opinion and drawing down an additional 0.5 feet (to a reservoir elevation of 1277.5 feet) for the implementation of the Lake Roosevelt Incremental Storage Release Program. In addition, in September and October, the agencies typically fill the reservoir to maintain an elevation at or above 1283 feet by the end of September. During typical years, the end-of-August draft objective is 1280 feet in accordance with the biological opinion, which, with the additional Lake Roosevelt Incremental Storage Release Program, results in 0.27 million acre feet (MAF) of storage space refilled above Grand Coulee dam. Drier streamflow forecast conditions, however, trigger the need for an additional two-foot drawdown at the end of August, which necessitates fill to 0.43 MAF while also meeting downstream minimum-flow requirements and other system constraints. Under such conditions, low natural runoff may cause Bonneville to purchase additional power to meet load or forego selling power when prices increase. Adding to that potential need under these conditions is the possibility of unexpected power supply disruptions (e.g., generator outages or disruptions to gas pipeline

supply) or complications with the ability to fill Lake Roosevelt due to downstream minimum flow requirements.

The 2003 Mainstem Amendments to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's (Council) Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program included guidance for Grand Coulee operations that would refill Lake Roosevelt to 1283 feet in August. Subsequent biological opinions included end-of-August elevation objectives that impacted the ability to refill by the end of August, so this elevation was moved to later in the season. The Council recommended this operation to protect and enhance kokanee access to spawning habitat that could otherwise be blocked. This guidance resulted in Bonneville's funding of the Barnaby Creek Culvert Mitigation project. Constructed in 2011, this culvert replacement has enabled kokanee passage down to a reservoir elevation of 1257 feet and allows kokanee to access spawning areas even when Lake Roosevelt's September elevation is below 1283 feet.

Bonneville would fund the Spokane Tribe to monitor and evaluate the potential for habitat changes in Lake Roosevelt and certain tributaries during the proposed operation by collecting data on velocity and flow, habitat characteristics, water temperature, and elevations. The Tribe would collect this data using standard data collection methods through the installation and use of field instruments such as submersible data loggers and side-scan sonar.

**Findings:** In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) of the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (57 Federal Register (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 Code of Federal Regulations 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/ Jeffrey J. Maslow  
Jeffrey J. Maslow  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange  
Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: September 27, 2019

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

Grand Coulee Dam is located in Grant and Okanogan counties, Washington. Lake Roosevelt, which is the reservoir behind Grand Coulee Dam, and the tributaries where proposed monitoring would occur extend into Ferry, Stevens, Lincoln, Okanogan, and Grant counties, Washington.

## Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. <b>Historic and Cultural Resources</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to historic or cultural resources.</p> <p>In addition, because the proposed data collection would involve minimally intrusive methods, it would not have the potential to affect historic and cultural resources.</p>		
2. <b>Geology and Soils</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to soils and geologic resources.</p> <p>In addition, because the proposed data collection would largely involve in-water monitoring activities, it would have little to no effect on geology and soils.</p>		
3. <b>Plants</b> (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to plants, including ESA-listed or special-status species.</p> <p>In addition, because the proposed data collection would largely involve in-water monitoring activities, it would have little to no effect on plants and no effect on ESA-listed or special-status plants.</p>		
4. <b>Wildlife</b> (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to wildlife, including Federal/state special-status species and habitats.</p> <p>In addition, because the proposed data collection would largely involve in-water monitoring activities, it would have little to no effect on wildlife, and no effect on Federal/state special-status species and habitats.</p>		

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish**

(including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to water resources and fish, including Federal/state special-status species and habitat.

In-stream habitat monitoring may result in minimal, temporary disturbance due to human presence or noise to resident fish. Because habitat for bull trout is unlikely to be present at the proposed monitoring locations, there would be no effect to bull trout or their designated Critical Habitat.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to wetland resources.

In addition, because the proposed data collection would involve minimally intrusive, in-water methods, it would have little to no effect on wetlands.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to groundwater or aquifers.

In addition, because the proposed data collection would involve minimally intrusive methods and would not involve excavation that would intersect groundwater, it would not affect groundwater or aquifers.

8. **Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to adjacent land uses.

In addition, because the proposed data collection would largely involve in-water monitoring activities, it would not have the potential to affect land use and specially-designated areas.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to visual resources.

In addition, the installation of data loggers may result in a temporary negligible change to visual quality in some locations where data loggers are visible from above the surface.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to air quality.

In addition, the use of boats and vehicles for proposed data collection activities may result in temporary emissions and a localized minor reduction in air quality from operating motor engines during data-collection efforts.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of noise effects from dam operations.

In addition, operation of motor engines in boats and vehicles during the installation of data loggers and operation of side-scan sonar boats to collect data would result in localized minor noise increases that would be consistent with other boat noise generated in the area.

## 12. Human Health and Safety



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, no change is expected in the level of effects from dam operations to human health and safety.

In addition, proposed data collection efforts would adhere to the best management practices to protect human health and safety, and therefore would not result in an increased risk to human health and safety.

### **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, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

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### **Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination**

Description: Bonneville coordinates extensively with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation on the operation of Grand Coulee Dam, and with the Spokane Tribe in funding data-collection efforts to monitor and evaluate operational impacts on Lake Roosevelt and its tributaries. Because operations would remain within normal system operating limits, there would be no change in the level of effects experienced by upstream and downstream landowners.

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

Signed: /s/ Jeffrey J. Maslow  
Jeffrey J. Maslow, ECP-4  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Date: September 27, 2019