Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Funding for USFS Pacific Northwest Research Station's Willamette fish sampling Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation (RM&E).

Project No.: 2000-012-00

Project Manager: Eric Andersen – EWM-4

Location: Benton, Clackamas, Lane, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, Polk, Yamhill Counties, OR.

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.3 - Research related to conservation of fish and wildlife.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund US Forest Service (USFS) Pacific Northwest Research Station's Willamette fish sampling RM&E. The USFS would sample native and non-native fish in the entire length of the 273-km mainstem Willamette River and the McKenzie River up to Trailbridge Dam. Sampling would be conducted from May to November 2020. Within each sample location, fish would be captured from a boat or by surveyors wading in the rivers using backpack electrofishing equipment and two netters.

Fish communities of the Willamette River have been studied since the early 1900s, but most studies have occurred since 2000. Although 69 fish species, including 36 native fishes and 33 non-natives are attributed to the Willamette River basin, during the initial decadal inventory along the mainstem, 41 species were captured, including 22 native fishes and 19 non-natives. Higher numbers of fish were collected in the upper river, and higher proportions of those fish were native species. However, it is not clear how the fish community in the Willamette River has changed during this past decade.

The proposed action would conduct fish surveys, habitat measurements, and eDNA sampling by evaluating:

1) fish community composition
2) relationships between native and non-native fishes and habitat characteristics.
3) aquatic biodiversity throughout the 273-km mainstem of the Willamette River.

The project would compare current fish community data from previous researcher's data sets to understand potential changes one decade following initial sampling (2011-2013).

There would be brief physical handling of all captured fishes to take their length and weight. All surveys would be done from a boat or while walking in the Willamette River and McKenzie River mainstems.

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/ Luca T. De Stefanis
Luca T. De Stefanis
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Motus

Reviewed by: 5/04/20

/s/ Chad Hamel
Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange Date: *06/25/2020*
Katey Grange
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: Funding for USFS Pacific Northwest Research Station's Willamette fish sampling Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation (RM&E).

Project Site Description

All activities would occur at existing river testing sites associated with the mainstem Willamette River and McKenzie River.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. **Historic and Cultural Resources**	☑	☐
Explanation: There would be no ground disturbing activities, thus the proposed activities would not have the potential to affect historic properties or cultural resources. All work would be carried out from within a boat at existing river sites.		
2. **Geology and Soils**	☑	☐
Explanation: No ground disturbing activities proposed, thus the proposed activities do not have the potential to affect geology and soils. All work would be carried out from within a boat at existing river sites.		
3. **Plants** (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	☑	☐
Explanation: No ground disturbing or vegetation removal activities proposed. All work would be carried out from within a boat at existing river sample sites associated with focusing only on native and non-native fish in the entire mainstem Willamette River and the McKenzie River.		
4. **Wildlife** (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	☑	☐
Explanation: No ground disturbing or other activity that may affect wildlife or wildlife habitat is proposed. Field crews from 1-3 people hiking with backpacks would yield avoidance or minor disturbance through human presence of walking through the woods. There would be no effect on federally- or state-listed sensitive species.		

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

Explanation: This project work concentrates on collecting data related to fish community composition, habitat characteristics, and eDNA sample collection throughout the entire length of the 273-km mainstem of the Willamette River and McKenzie River. There would be brief physical handling of all captured fishes to take their length and weight. There would be no impact to adjacent waterbodies or floodplains because no ground disturbing activities are proposed. All surveys would be done from a boat or while walking in the Willamette River or McKenzie River mainstems. All work would be carried out from within a boat or from the shore at existing river sample sites.

ESA environmental compliance coverage for handling ESA-listed fish (i.e. bull trout, Chinook salmon, and steelhead) would be secured through Section-10 scientific collection permits through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). USFWS Permit (TE-55327D-1) was issued on 5/07/2020 and NMFS Permit #23652 was issued on 06/01/2020.

6. **Wetlands** ☑ ☐

Explanation: No ground disturbing activities are proposed thus the action does not have the potential to impact wetlands. All work would be carried out from within existing sampling sites.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers** ☑ ☐

Explanation: No ground disturbing activities that may affect groundwater or aquifers are proposed.

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

Explanation: Access to field sites is on existing road networks and all activities are compatible with local land use.

9. **Visual Quality** ☑ ☐

Explanation: There would be no installation of equipment for this project. Therefore the proposed action would not impact visual quality because there is no proposed change.

10. **Air Quality** ☑ ☐

Explanation: All work would be carried out from the river mainstems or at the sampling sites and would have no effect on air quality. Any increase in emissions from vehicles accessing river sampling sites would be very minor and short term.

11. **Noise** ☑ ☐

Explanation: All work would be carried out from within existing river sampling sites and would not result in an increase in ambient noise.

12. **Human Health and Safety** ☑ ☐

Explanation: All work would be carried out from within existing sampling sites. Workers carrying the proposed actions of RM&E activities are trained in proper equipment management techniques. This activity is not considered hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public.

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:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: No notification necessary because all work is occurring from a boat floating on the Willamette River or while standing in the river that would be accessed via public lands. The boat would be launched from public boat ramps. Many watershed councils, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Oregon State Police know about the project and the sponsor would continue to have regular conversations with Oregon State Police during the work window of surveys. All work is at existing facilities and field work at established sites that are accessed on existing public roads and adjacent public lands.

Upon completion of the project, field fish guides would be developed. 'Fishes of the Willamette Valley' would be released as environmental education materials for the public and other interested partners.

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

Signed: */s/ Luca T. De Stefanis* Date: *June 25, 2020*
Luca T. De Stefanis
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Motus