

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Yakama Action Effectiveness RM&E

Project No.: 2017-003-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz, EWM-4

Location: Okanogan County, WA

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 the Upper Columbia Monitoring Project (UCM), a research project administered by the Confederated Bands and Tribes of the Yakama Nation.

Funding the proposed activities helps BPA meet its obligations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by supporting conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with both NMFS and USFWS on the O&M of the Columbia River System and Bonneville's commitments to the Confederated Bands and Tribes of the Yakama Nation under the 2018 Columbia River Fish Accord Extension agreement, as amended, 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.).

The UCM aims to monitor the fish responses to habitat restoration projects within the Upper Columbia River Basin. To do so, the project has proposed several biological sampling events and the use of Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags to study fish movement.

PIT Tagging/Biological Sampling

The target species for all of the sampling events are juvenile Upper Columbia River spring Chinook (*O. tshawytscha*) and Upper Columbia River steelhead (*O. mykiss*). The biological sampling would consist of three components: juvenile fish density and abundance, juvenile fish size and growth, and juvenile fish movement and survival. When present, monitoring of non-target species and life history stages would be conducted. This includes opportunistic sampling and PIT tagging of bull trout (*S. confluentus*). The sampling would be conducted using both snorkel surveys and size and growth sampling.

Seasonal snorkel surveys would be conducted to monitor fish density and abundance in the treatment and control reaches. Using the methods described by Thurow (1994), four snorkelers and one bank tender would move upstream and enumerate fish by species and life-stage. Snorkel surveys would be conducted at night when the water temperature is less than 9°C.

Size and growth sampling would be conducted following the snorkel surveys in treatment and control reaches. Fish would be collected through snorkel herding (snerding) or electrofishing. Electrofishing would be used if the habitat is not conducive to snerding. During each sampling event up to 1,000 each of juvenile Chinook and steelhead would be collected and the fish fork length and weight would be measured. Each fish would be scanned for a PIT tag and up to 300 untagged fish of each species would be marked with a unique PIT tag during each sampling event. The handled and PIT tagged fish would be allowed to recover for 24 hours in a live-box prior to release. Following release from the live-box, the box would be scanned for any shed tags.

Biological sampling would be conducted in the treatment and control reaches three times each year. The three sampling periods would be summer (July through August), fall (October through November), and winter/spring (February through March). Sampling would be conducted for three years with additional years of sampling contingent upon funding beyond 2022. The full UCM project includes an additional three consecutive years of sampling and then every five years for 15 years.

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/ Shawn Skinner

Shawn Skinner
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange November 16, 2020

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.

Proposed Action: Yakama Action Effectiveness RM&E

Project Site Description

Biological samplings would be conducted in one treatment and two control reaches. The treatment reach would be the site of an Upper Columbia Habitat Restoration Project, which is anticipated to begin in the summer of 2021. This treatment site is located at approximately river mile 4.2 to 4.6 of the Chewuch River. One of the control reaches would be located approximately 2 miles upstream of the treatment reach at river mile 6.2 to 6.6 of the Chewuch River and the other control reach would be located approximately at river mile 1.9 to 2.1 of the Twisp River.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground-disturbing activities, thus the proposed actions would not have the potential to affect historic properties or cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground-disturbing activities, thus the proposed actions would not have the potential to affect geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal or State special-status plant species are within the project site. There would be no ground-disturbing or vegetation removal activities, so the proposed actions would not have the potential to affect plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal or State special-status wildlife species are within the project site. Minor, temporary impacts to local wildlife from human presence and noise during sampling.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish species (Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout) and their designated critical habitats are present in the Chewuch River and Twisp River. No action proposed would physically alter any aquatic habitat site; there would be no adverse physical changes to water bodies, floodplains, or fish from these actions. ESA coverage for handling ESA-listed fish was secured through Section-10 scientific collection permits through the USFWS (Permit MCFWCO-15) on November 11, 2020 and NMFS (Permit 23765) on October 6, 2020. The Yakama Nation would follow all permit terms and conditions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground-disturbing activities, thus the proposed actions would not have the potential to affect wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed actions have no potential to impact groundwater.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would not impact or change land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term impact to air quality from vehicle emissions to access the sampling sites.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term increase in ambient noise during use of vehicles and from human presence.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work activities.

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: Proposed actions would occur on Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife lands and private lands. All landowners have been previously notified and would be notified again before any work is started.

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 November 16, 2020
Shawn Skinner, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist