

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Libby Reservoir Mitigation Restoration and Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation (RM&E) Project

Project No.: 1995-004-00

Project Manager: Cecilia Brown, EWM-4

Location: Lincoln County, Montana

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources; B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) to conduct fish mitigation restoration and research, monitoring, and evaluation (RM&E) activities within the Libby Reservoir and surrounding rivers and lakes within the Kootenai Subbasin of the Columbia River Basin. The proposed activities would inform conservation actions and serve as partial mitigation for impacts to resident fish populations and the food web that supports these fish and their habitat from the construction and operation of the Libby Dam.

Restoration: MFWP would conduct fish restoration activities that alleviate limiting factors to native fish populations and their habitat by reclaiming critical spawning, rearing, and over-wintering habitats. Current restoration efforts would involve ongoing revegetation of Therriault Creek riparian vegetation to improve fish habitat.

Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation: MFWP would conduct status and trend monitoring and evaluation of the efficacy of previously completed restoration/mitigation projects; collect, analyze and interpret spatial distribution, seasonal movement, population trend and growth, absolute and relative abundance indices, and genetic and life history information needed for the conservation and recovery of native fish, including the ESA-listed endangered Kootenai River white sturgeon, threatened bull trout, Westslope cutthroat trout, interior redband rainbow trout, and petitioned burbot; and evaluate the efficacy of the Kootenai River Ecosystem Project being conducted at the Montana/Idaho border. Techniques to be employed would include activities such as redd counts and surveys, electrofishing, hydroacoustic analysis, radio tagging, entrainment monitoring, core sampling, and gill netting.

Funding these actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the U.S. 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:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

May 19, 2021

Date

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: Libby Reservoir Mitigation Restoration and Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation (RM&E) Project

Project Site Description

The project area is located in Lincoln County, Montana. The Libby Dam is located on the Kootenai River near the town of Libby and the reservoir behind the dam, Lake Kooconusa, extends 90 miles upstream into British Columbia, Canada. The dam and reservoir are owned and operated by the Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District. Libby Dam, Lake Kooconusa, and associated facilities provide for flood control, hydropower, recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, and water quality. The project activities would occur within Lake Kooconusa, Kootenai River, and its tributaries throughout the Kootenai Subbasin on publicly (Army Corps of Engineers) and privately owned lands.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Therriault Creek Restoration Project MT SHPO concurrence on no historic properties affected was received on 10/1/19. Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and Kootenai Tribe of Idaho were consulted – no response. All proposed activities were evaluated and determined to have no potential to affect cultural resources or historic properties on 1/4/21.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new ground-disturbing activities proposed; no geology or soils disturbed.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Spalding's catchfly (Endangered Species Act-listed threatened) and whitebark pine (state special-status species) generally occur in the project area, but there would be no effect with the conditions listed below.

Notes:

- Project activities would not alter listed or special-status species habitat.
- Listed and special-status species are not likely to be present at, or near, locations of project activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Canada lynx (ESA-listed threatened) and its critical habitat, grizzly bear (threatened), and yellow-billed cuckoo (threatened) generally occur in the project area, but there would be no effect with the conditions listed below.

Notes:

- Project activities would not alter listed species habitat.
- Listed species are not likely to be present at, or near, locations of project activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Minimal water body or floodplain disturbance would occur; erosion control measures would be used. Kootenai River white sturgeon (ESA-listed endangered) and bull trout (threatened) and critical habitat occur in the project area. Conditions to avoid impacts would be followed.

Notes:

- MFWP would follow terms and conditions identified in their Section 10 permit (TE210255-2) from the USFWS for authorized activities in support of Kootenai River white sturgeon recovery. Permit is valid from 6/13/16 - 6/12/21. MFWP would renew permit for an additional five years, through 6/12/26. Permitted activities include: survey, collect/capture, handle, tag, biosample, hold, transport, and release.
- MFWP would follow terms and conditions identified in their Section 6 Cooperative Agreement (Blanket Permit PRT-704930) with the USFWS for authorized activities in support of bull trout recovery. MFWP would submit a list of projects to USFWS annually for approval of the cooperative agreement. Authorized activities include: survey, collect/capture, handle, tag, biosample, hold, transport, and release.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed in wetlands; activities would not have the potential to impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed that involve groundwater or aquifers; activities would not have the potential to impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All proposed activities would comply with land use regulations; there would be no change to land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All proposed activities would comply with visual quality standards; there would be no change to visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All proposed activities would comply with air quality standards; there would be no change to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All proposed activities would comply with area noise standards; there would be no change to noise levels.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: MFWP workers carrying out the proposed activities would be trained in the use of, and comply with, equipment safety standards. Proposed activities are not considered hazardous nor would they result in any health or safety risk 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: 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: Land ownership in the project area is public and private. MFWP would coordinate implementation of work activities and access to worksites with private landowners.

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 May 19, 2021
Brenda Aguirre, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist