

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Upper Methow Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) Array Installation

**Project No.:** 1996-040-00

**Project Manager:** Mary Todd Haight, EWU - 4

**Location:** Okanogan County, WA

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.20 Protection of Cultural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Habitat

**Description of the Proposed Action:** The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund Yakama Nation Fisheries to implement the Upper Methow Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) Array Installation project on state-owned land located along the upper Methow River in Okanogan County, Washington.

An array consists of multiple PIT tag antennas in one or two rows that span the river and collect directional PIT tag data from migrating fish. Information collected from this project would be used to assess population status and trends of salmonids and effectiveness of habitat improvement projects, and/or to monitor and evaluate hatchery programs. Data collected would also be used to better understand migration patterns and timing of salmonid populations. Methods and technology used in this project are the standard for PIT interrogation systems operated in freshwater river systems throughout the Columbia River Basin.

The proposed array system would consist of ten, 25-foot by 3-foot flat panel antennas consisting of 3-inch high-density polyethylene pipe. The antennas would be arranged in two channel-spanning rows of five, oriented perpendicular to water flow. Along with each antenna, there would be a cylindrical waterproof pod that houses the reader. Each pod would measure 17 inches in height by 8 inches in diameter and would be positioned 6 feet downstream from the associated antenna. The footprint of each row would be 380 ft<sup>2</sup>, for a total area of 760 ft<sup>2</sup>. The antennas and reader pods would be secured to the river bottom by attaching them to minimally invasive cabled duckbill earth anchors. The antennas would be secured to the anchors via straps. A thermoelectric generator stationed on the nearby bank and above the high-water mark would supply power to the system through cables secured at the downstream end of the antennas.

General onsite maintenance would include the removal of debris that might have collected on the antennas or cables. Major maintenance would include the replacement of broken or lost antennas and the replacement of broken cables. Reasonable attempts to recon downstream reaches of the Methow River would be made to locate and remove debris from damage events.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These proposed activities also fulfill commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp), 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.

Shawn Skinner  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel  
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:** Upper Methow Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) Array Installation

## **Project Site Description**

The site is on the upper reaches of the Methow River at river mile 62.2. The floodplain consists of wide bars with sparse patches of willow and young black cottonwood. The adjacent upland area consists of patches of forest and grassy meadows. The forest is made up of Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga mezesii*) and Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) with an understory consisting of grasses and various shrubs like serviceberry (*Amelanchier spp.*), wild rose (*Rosa spp.*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) and *Aster spp.*

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no historic properties affected on June 29, 2024 (WA 2024 102). BPA consulted with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation (Yakama Nation), Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), and Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). Concurrence was received from Washington DAHP (July 2, 2024). BPA did not receive concurrence from any of the other consulting parties within 30 days.

Notes:

- In the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities, work would be stopped immediately and a BPA Archaeologist and Historian would be notified, as well as consulting parties.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term soil disturbance from in-stream antenna placement. All work would be done with hand tools to minimize the impact. The generator for the PIT tag array would sit atop the ground, resulting in no soil disturbance.

### **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. Clearing the access road would require removal of some brushes and grasses. Streamside equipment may require minor disturbance to nearby plants that are hindering installation, but no broad-scale vegetation removal is proposed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal or State special-status wildlife species are known to be present. Minor, short-term disturbance to local wildlife would occur due to noise associated with installation and human presence.

#### **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 Methow 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.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project impacts would be minor because the construction area and footprint are quite small; therefore, little to no impact to wetlands would occur.

#### **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 changes would be made. The PIT tag arrays would be placed on the river's bed, below the surface of the water. The generator would be placed on the bank of the river but would not impact the overall visual quality.

#### **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term impact to air quality from vehicle emissions during installation

#### **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term increase in ambient noise from construction vehicles and PIT tag array installation.

## 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: The project would occur on land owned by WDFW. All work would occur in coordination with WDFW.

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

Signed:

Shawn Skinner  
Environmental Protection Specialist