

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Smolt Monitoring by Non-Federal Entities

**Project No.:** 1987-127-00

**Project Manager:** Russell Scranton, EWL-4

**Location:** Walla Walla, Columbia, Whitman, Asotin, Skamania, Klickitat, Chelan, and Benton counties, Washington; Wallowa County, Oregon; and Idaho and Clearwater counties, Idaho.

**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 continue funding the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) for ongoing work as a part of the Smolt Monitoring Program (SMP) in the Columbia River Basin. The SMP provides data on movement of salmonid smolts out of the major drainages and past the series of dams on the Snake and Columbia Rivers.

Indices of migration strength and migration timing would be provided for the sampled runs at key monitoring sites at fish traps or dams associated with tributaries to the Columbia and Snake rivers in Washington, Oregon and Idaho. In addition, marked smolts from hatcheries, traps, and dams would provide measures of smolt speed and in-river survival through key reaches. Fish quality, descaling, and gas bubble trauma measures would be taken on samples of Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) sockeye salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*) and steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) collected at the monitoring sites to provide an indicator of health of the run. Incidental observation of bull trout would also be recorded during SMP activities. These data would be used for in-season operational decisions relative to flow and spill management, particularly during periods when spill is being provided to improve smolt passage at dams. Fishway dewaterings and fish salvage operations would also occur as needed for operation and maintenance (O&M) of the fish passage structure.

Wild and hatchery smolts would be marked with glass-encapsulated PIT tags that are 11-12 mm in length and have a unique code to identify individual fish. These PIT tags are implanted into the fish's body cavity using a hand-held syringe, and they are generally retained and function throughout the life of the fish. Gas bubble trauma would be consist of microscopic exams on Chinook salmon and steelhead. Fish sampling/research activities would be completed by hand and would not impact any waters of the U.S. or create any ground disturbance.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service's Biological Opinion on the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) of the Columbia River System (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with U.S. Fish

and Wildlife Service on the O&M of the CRS. These actions would also support ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System (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/ Travis D. Kessler

Travis D. Kessler

Contract Environmental Protection Specialist

Salient CRGT, Inc.

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel

Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange                      February 25, 2021

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: Smolt Monitoring by Non-Federal Entities**

## **Project Site Description**

All activities would occur at either existing hatchery facilities, fish traps, or dams associated with tributaries to the Columbia and Snake rivers in Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BPA archaeologist determined the project would have no potential to affect historic properties. No ground disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed work.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impacts to geology and soils would occur as there would be no ground disturbance associated with the proposed fieldwork.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impacts to ESA-listed, state-listed, sensitive or non-listed plant species known to exist on any of the proposed field sites as there would be no ground disturbance associated with the proposed fieldwork.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, state-listed, sensitive wildlife species, or designated critical habitat would be affected by the project as there is no ground disturbance proposed or temporary disturbance in locations containing wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance or in-water work proposed as a result of the proposed fieldwork. Therefore, there would be no impact to waterbodies, floodplains, or habitats as a result of the proposed project.

PIT tagging wild-origin anadromous salmonids is a common and wide-spread activity within the Columbia River basin. Since these activities support ongoing commitments under the 2020 NMFS Columbia River System BiOp (2020 CRS BiOp), NMFS annually issues a Determination of Take Memorandum describing the maximum number of individual ESA-listed fish that may be tagged in a given year—the number of fish tagged in support of the SMP is well below that threshold.

Bull trout captured at the dams are covered under the USFWS BiOp (dated July 24, 2020) on the proposed operations and maintenance of the fourteen multiple use dam and reservoir projects in the Columbia River System located in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, and its effects on bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and designated critical habitat in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Bull trout captured at tributary traps would be covered under USFWS Section 10 permits and Section 6 recovery agreements. Annual reporting of bull trout observation and take would be reported in accordance with the BiOps, permits, and recovery agreements.

## 6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities would occur as a result of the proposed work. Thus, the action would not have the potential to impact wetlands.

## 7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance:

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

## 8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not impact land uses or specially-designated areas. Access to the field sites would be from existing road networks and all activities would be compatible with local land uses.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed fish sampling fieldwork would not have any effect on visual quality.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small increase in emissions would occur from vehicles entering and exiting the fish facility. However, this increase would be very minor and short term.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed fish sampling fieldwork would not result in an increase in ambient noise within the project area.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers carrying out fish sampling/research activities are trained in proper techniques to carry out the work in a safe and effective manner. The proposed work would not be considered hazardous nor would it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. Field crews working near hatchery facilities, fish traps, or dams associated with tributaries to the Columbia and Snake rivers in Washington, Oregon and Idaho would take water safety precautions, such as wearing life vests as appropriate.

### **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: No notification – All work is located at existing facilities where fish sampling/research activities have occurred in the past.

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

Signed: /s/ Travis D. Kessler February 25, 2021  
Travis D. Kessler, ECF-4 Date  
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist  
Salient CRGT, Inc.