

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Nonnative Fish Suppression in the Pend Oreille Subbasin

Project No.: 2007-149-00

Project Manager: Carlos Matthew

Location: Bonner County, ID; Pend Oreille County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):

B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund a portion of the Kalispel Tribe's ongoing nonnative fish suppression and/or eradication efforts in areas of the Pend Oreille subbasin in northeastern Washington and northwestern Idaho where native populations are declining or have been extinguished. This project is a Kalispel Tribe cost-share in partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG). BPA would continue funding for this program to mitigate for the altered hydrology caused by the operation of Albeni Falls Dam. These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the United States 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.).

Nonnative fish species impact native westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*) and Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) populations throughout the Pend Oreille subbasin via competition for resources, hybridization, and predation. Activities conducted under the Kalispel Tribe's fish suppression program would include the following:

- **Fish suppression:** Fish suppression efforts are intended to result in reduced, depressed or potentially eliminated populations of nonnative species. Suppression of lake trout (*S. namaycush*) in Upper Priest Lake and northern pike (*Esox lucius*) in the Pend Oreille River would be accomplished by way of electrofishing, netting (gill, fyke, seine), trapping (weir, light-minnow, minnow) or angling. Removal of eastern brook trout (*S. fontinalis*) in Saucon Creek and Mill Creek would be accomplished using electrofishing techniques.
- **Collection and analysis of brook trout tissue samples:** Samples collected during fish removal in Saucon Creek and Mill Creek would be analyzed to compile fish distribution data that would be used to develop management strategies for future nonnative fish species suppression activities.

- **Collection of environmental DNA (eDNA) samples:** eDNA would be extracted from active project areas, potential project areas, and suspected locations where a nonnative species has established and could impact native fish species. Data collection would involve pumping five liters of water through a small, filtered sample cup at designated sample sites.

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/ Mandy Hope

Mandy Hope
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel March 4, 2021
Sarah T. Biegel 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: Nonnative Fish Suppression in the Pend Oreille Subbasin

Project Site Description

All activities would occur at field sites associated with the Pend Oreille River and its tributaries Saucon Creek and Mill Creek in northeastern Washington, and Upper Priest Lake in northwestern Idaho.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities would not have the potential to affect historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbing activities are proposed; thus, the proposed activities 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 ground disturbing or vegetation removal activities are proposed; thus, the proposed activities would not have the potential to affect plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The actions would all occur in water and therefore would not have the potential to affect terrestrial wildlife. Noise generated by vehicles driving to and from worksites would be low and would not be expected to affect nesting birds. Foot traffic noise when working in or hiking to worksites would be negligible.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Portions of the Pend Oreille River lie within the 100-year flood zone, as mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The proposed action would not involve placing structures in floodplains. No anadromous fish species are present due to anthropogenic blockages. ESA-listed bull trout are present in the Pend Oreille River and its tributaries. The

Kalispel Tribe obtained an ESA Section 10 permit (TE844478-8) from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for authorized activities in support of bull trout recovery. The permit is valid from 6/6/18 through 6/5/23. Authorized activities include: survey, collect/capture, handle, tag, biosample, hold, transport, release, and salvage.

Bull trout are present in Upper Priest Lake. An ESA Section 6 Cooperative Agreement between USFWS and IDFG covers interactions with threatened and endangered species while carrying out activities for the benefit of endangered and threatened fish, wildlife and plants, including habitat acquisition and maintenance, propagation, live trapping, and transplantation, and regulated taking. USFWS has indicated that recovery activities may continue under the ESA Section 6 agreement while BPA conducts consultation on its funding action for these activities (USFWS Memorandum 01EIFW00-2016-TA-0274-R0001).

To ensure minimal effects to native fish species during suppression efforts in Upper Priest Lake, placement of nets in and around the primary inlets and outlet of the lake would be avoided to reduce by-catch of bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Any westslope cutthroat trout encountered during removal of eastern brook trout in Saucon and Mill Creeks would be returned no more than 100 meters downstream of the capture location. All netting used for capturing, handling, and holding of fish, including the incidental capture of bull trout, would be composed of a fine mesh, knot-free material that would minimize injury to the fish. Handling of all listed species would be done as quickly as possible to minimize the risk of injury and mortality. To prevent the spread of invasive and nonnative species, all equipment, clothing, and boots would be cleaned before arriving at a project area. Surveyors would take precautions to avoid stepping in areas that may be potential redd locations for resident or fluvial bull trout.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access to field sites would be accomplished using existing roads, or possibly on foot. No ground disturbing activities are proposed; thus, the action would not have the potential to impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbing activities that may affect groundwater or aquifers are proposed; thus, the action would not have the potential to impact these resources.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Field sites would be accessed via existing road networks and boat launches. All activities would be compatible with local land use on public roads, public lands or Kalispel Tribal lands.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not impact visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any increase in emissions from vehicles accessing field sites would be very minor and short term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any increase in ambient noise from vehicles accessing field sites would be very minor and short term.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers carrying out the proposed action 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: 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 both public and private. Private land is owned by large timber companies. Public landowners are the Colville National Forest (U.S. Forest Service (USFS)) and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WADNR). Water bodies would be accessed using existing public roads (USFS, Washington Department of Transportation, Pend Oreille County), public boat launches (USFS, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Pend Oreille County) as well as tribal boat launches (Kalispel Tribe). Periodically, landowners would be contacted for access to worksites behind gates.

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

Signed: /s/ Mandy Hope March 4, 2021
Mandy Hope, ECF
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing