

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Continued funding to CRITFC for the monitoring of Snake River spring Chinook in the Grande Ronde Subbasin (*update to CX issued on October 12, 2021*)

Project No.: 2009-004-00

Project Manager: Tracy Hauser – EWL-4

Location: Union and Wallowa Counties, Oregon

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 Columbia River Inter-Tribal Commission (CRITFC) in the Grande Ronde Subbasin for the development of a long-term monitoring program in Catherine Creek and Upper Grande Ronde watersheds supporting listed Snake River spring Chinook salmon (*Onchorhynchus tshawytscha*). Snake River spring Chinook are key to the viability of the major population group of the Grande Ronde Subbasin. This CX has been updated to reflect the support for conservation of ESA-listed species in consultations with US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

This program would involve assessment of standard fish habitat conditions and a variety of other monitoring aims including: assessment of abundance, distribution, and growth of juvenile salmonids and other fish species; development of water temperature models; development of low flow models; mapping of current and potential natural riparian vegetation; life cycle modeling; modeling of fish/habitat relationships and macroinvertebrate/habitat relationships using various statistical procedures; analysis of land use impacts on aquatic habitat conditions; and development of a database of restoration activities.

The work would be focused on spawning and rearing areas (current and potential) throughout the watersheds and fieldwork would involve the measurement of a suite of characteristics using a modified version of the Columbia Habitat Monitoring Program (CHaMP) protocol, which consists of classifying channel unit type (pool, riffle, run); measuring stream channel dimension (width, depth, length); counting pieces of large woody debris; measuring water temperature and measuring substrate size. In addition, benthic macroinvertebrate species composition and biomass, and fish abundance, size distribution, and fish growth would be measured using snorkeling and snorkel-herding. Biological sampling methods would include snorkel surveys to estimate abundance of juvenile salmonids and benthic macroinvertebrate sampling using a kick net. There would be no handling or tagging of fish.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with National Marine Fisheries Service and USFWS 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/ Israel Duran

Israel Duran
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient/CRGT

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange January 27, 2022

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.

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Project Site Description

All activities would occur within the Catherine Creek and Upper Grande Ronde watersheds in Grande Ronde Subbasin in Union and Wallowa Counties, Oregon.

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 activities do not have the potential to affect historic properties or cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed. Thus, the proposed activities do not have the potential to affect geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Howell's spectacular thelypody listed in Union County, but occurs only in Baker-Powder River Valley and does not occur within the same watersheds as project activities. No ground-disturbing or vegetation removal activities are proposed. Thus, there would be no impact to Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plants as a result of the proposed work.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing or other activity that may affect wildlife or wildlife habitat is proposed. Thus, there would be no impact to ESA-listed wildlife as a result of the proposed work.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Fish research on hatchery-origin and wild-origin anadromous salmonids is a common and wide-spread activity within the Columbia River basin. NMFS informal consultation on listed Snake River Chinook and Snake River steelhead. (I/NWR/2010/02208) completed on February 16, 2021. USFWS informal consultation for bull trout and bull trout critical habitat (01EOFW00-2021-I-0535). There would be no impact to adjacent waterbodies or floodplains because no ground disturbing activities are proposed.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed. Thus, the action does 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, there would be no impact to groundwater and aquifers as a result of the proposed work.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access to field sites is on existing road networks and all activities are compatible with local land uses. Thus, there would be no impact to land use and specially-designated areas as a result of the proposed work.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change to the viewshed from the proposed work. Thus, there would be no impact to visual quality as a result of the proposed work.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would have no effect on air quality. Any increase in emissions from vehicles accessing field sites would be very minor and short term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would not result in an increase in ambient noise. Thus, there would be no noise impacts as a result of the proposed work.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. Thus, there would be no impacts to human health and safety as a result of the proposed work.

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 would be completed at existing facilities or at mobile facilities accessed on existing roads on public lands.

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

Signed: /s/ Israel Duran

Israel Duran, ECF-4
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Salient/CRGT

January 27, 2022

Date