

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Snake Basin Steelhead Assessments (Update to CX issued June 14, 2023)

Project No.: 2010-057-00

Project Manager: Russell Scranton

Location: Asotin, Clearwater, Idaho, and Valley Counties, ID

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.3 Research Related to Conservation of Fish, Wildlife and Cultural Resources.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (Bonneville) proposes to fund the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) and Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) to conduct research designed to assess the status of Chinook salmon and steelhead in the Snake, Salmon, Clearwater, Imnaha, and Grande Ronde river basins. This CX is an update to the CX issued on June 14, 2023 to clarify the beneficial effects to ESA-listed species.

Researchers would capture, handle, mark, tag, tissue-sample, and then release adult Chinook salmon, adult steelhead, juvenile Chinook salmon, and juvenile steelhead. This research would include seasonal operations at existing temporary picket weirs, juvenile rotary fish traps, and instream PIT tag detection systems (IPTDS). As part of the research activities, any take will be consistent with applicable permits and the definition of take under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and applicable regulations. Despite short-term adverse impacts from capture and handling, the overall impacts would be beneficial to the ESA-listed species.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments (Term and Condition 1.j.i) under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp).

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/ Dan Gambetta
Dan Gambetta

Concur:

<u>/s/ Katey Grange for</u>	<u>June 21, 2023</u>
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.

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Project Site Description

All activities would occur within the Snake, Salmon, Clearwater, Imnaha, and Grande Ronde river basins.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance; therefore, historic or cultural resources would not be impacted by the proposed activities.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance; therefore, geology and soils would not be impacted by the proposed activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) is a flowering plant listed as threatened in Asotin, Idaho, and Clearwater Counties, but there are no documented sightings or history of prior occurrence for these species in the project areas and; therefore, no effect to Spalding's catchfly would occur from the proposed activities.

MacFarlane's four-o'clock (*Mirabilis macfarlanei*) is another flowering plant listed as threatened in Idaho County, but there are no documented sightings or history of prior occurrence for these species in the project areas and; therefore, no effect to MacFarlane's four-o'clock would occur from the proposed activities.

Whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) is a conifer found in Idaho, Valley, and Clearwater Counties, but there are no documented sightings or history of prior occurrence for these species in the project areas and; therefore, no effect to Whitebark pine would occur from the proposed activities.

While there may be minor impacts to plant species during activities from human use of the area from walking through plant populated areas, this would be temporary and the overall effect to plant species would be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) is listed as threatened in Clearwater, Valley, and Idaho Counties, but suitable habitat is not located within or near the project sites, and; therefore, no effect to Canada lynx would occur from the proposed activities.

Northern Idaho ground squirrel (*Urocitellus brunneus*) is listed as threatened in Idaho and Valley Counties, but suitable habitat is not located within or near the project sites, and; therefore, no effect to Northern Idaho ground squirrel would occur from the proposed activities.

Yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) is listed as threatened in Asotin County. There are no documented sightings or history of prior occurrence for this species in the project areas, and; therefore, no effect to yellow-billed cuckoo would be expected.

The gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) is listed as endangered in Asotin County, but suitable habitat is not located within or near the project sites and no sightings or history of prior occurrence have occurred in those areas; therefore, no effect to gray wolf would occur from the proposed activities.

The project activities may temporarily disturb other wildlife due to human presence within the project areas, but overall there would be low effect to wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: NMFS has granted CRITFC and NPT a Section 10 Scientific Research Permit 1134-8R for take of ESA-listed Snake River spring/summer-run Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) and Snake River Basin steelhead (*O. mykiss*). These permits shall be renewed on a yearly basis. The researchers are not proposing to kill any of the fish they capture, but a small number of individuals may be killed as an inadvertent result of the activities. Despite short-term adverse impacts from capture and handling, the overall impacts would be beneficial to the ESA-listed species.

In addition, the USFWS has granted CRITFC and NPT a Section 10 permit (TE001598-7) for potential incidental impacts to bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*). These permits shall be renewed on a yearly basis. Non-listed fish may be temporarily disturbed due to project activities. There is no ground disturbance planned; activities would not impact or change waterbodies or floodplains.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance; therefore, wetlands would not be impacted by the proposed activities.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance; therefore, groundwater and aquifers would not be impacted by the proposed activities.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The temporal nature of these activities would not impact or change land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The temporal nature of these activities would not impact or change visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The temporal nature of these activities would not impact or change air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Noise levels would be slightly increased, but only during normal working hours and within range of background noise levels.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Training and safe working conditions are provided for the researchers.

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: NA

Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation: NA

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: NA

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: NA

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: The IPTDS and weir site at Sixmile Creek are within the Nez Perce Tribal lands Hiñawita Wildlife Conservation Area. The project sponsor has coordinated with the NPT project manager for use of the area. The IPTDS site at Lawyer Creek is within the city limits of Kamiah, Idaho and the sponsor coordinated with city officials for use of that area as well.

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

Signed: /s/ Dan Gambetta

Dan Gambetta
Environmental Protection Specialist

June 21, 2023

Date