

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Wind River Watershed Steelhead Monitoring Project

**Project No.:** 1998-019-00

**Project Manager:** Verl Miller, EWM-4

**Location:** Skamania County, WA

**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 (BPA) proposes to continue funding the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to conduct long term monitoring activities for the purpose of collecting status and trend information for Endangered Species Act (ESA) Threatened Lower Columbia steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). The specific activities necessary to achieve this purpose would be operating an adult trap at Shipherd Falls fish ladder, conduct adult passive integrated transponder (PIT) tagging, conduct snorkel or angling and spawning ground surveys, operate juvenile rotary screw traps at four locations within the Wind River basin, and conduct juvenile PIT tagging.

WDFW would conduct snorkel or angling surveys on approximately 18 miles of the mainstem Wind River from Dry Creek to Shipherd Falls. Survey crews of two to three would snorkel river sections of roughly two to three miles in length by floating downstream and counting adult steelhead as they pass. Hook and line angling would be conducted in segments between ½ mile to 2 miles in length. The captured fish would then be examined and tagged. Equipment utilized would consist of wet suits or dry suits, masks, snorkels, waders, communication devices (i.e. cell phones, GPS), and life vests.

WDFW would conduct ground-based presence surveys on the Lower Wind River below Shipherd Falls to the lower two miles of the Little Wind River. These surveys would be used to estimate steelhead spawning escapement that are not accounted for by the adult trapping at Shipherd Falls. One person would walk the section of the river visually recording spawning sites and live fish observations.

USGS would operate and maintain a series of PIT tag antennas at key locations within the Wind River basin. Tracking of PIT tagged steelhead in tributaries would provide migration parameters and contribute to an ongoing long term monitoring effort in the Wind River Basin. USGS and WDFW would also conduct sampling of Lower Columbia River steelhead during the summer and fall in headwater areas of Trout Creek and the upper Wind River. USGS sampling would be done with backpack electrofishing at sampling sites twice per year. WDFW sampling would occur at rotary screw traps which would be deployed annually at four locations (Table 1). Fish would then be PIT tagged following guidelines outlined in the PIT Tag Information Systems (PTAGIS) PIT Tag

Marking Manual. Fish would be allowed to recover from anesthesia in aerated buckets and released at the same point of capture. Recaptures of PIT-tagged steelhead through subsequent sampling in stream, at smolt traps operated by WDFW, and detection at the network of instream PIT tag interrogation systems, and Columbia River sites would provide data to inform life-cycle models and identify population constraints.

Location Name	Lat	Long
Lower Wind River Screw Trap	45.726462	-121.794149
Trout Creek Screw Trap	45.803903	-121.941526
Panther Creek Screw Trap	45.771539	-121.849232
Upper Wind River Screw Trap	45.874887	-121.978476

**Table 1: rotary screw trap locations**

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These proposed activities also support ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power Systems 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.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> BPA is aware of the November 12, 2024, decision in *Marin Audubon Society v. Federal Aviation Administration*, No. 23-1067 (D.C. Cir. Nov. 12, 2024). To the extent that a court may conclude that the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA are not judicially enforceable or binding on this agency action, BPA has nonetheless elected to follow those regulations at 40 Code Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) §§ 1500– 1508, in addition to the US Department of Energy’s NEPA implementing procedures at 10 C.F.R. Part § 1021, to meet the agency’s obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

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Catherine Clark  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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Katey C. Grange  
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:** Wind River Watershed Steelhead Monitoring Project

## **Project Site Description**

The proposed project would occur within or along the Wind River watershed in Skamania County, WA. The Wind River watershed does not have a hatchery program and has limited hydrosystem impacts so it serves as a reference population for understanding hydrosystem and hatchery impacts on steelhead throughout the Columbia River Basin. Monitoring would occur on both private and public lands, including lands managed by the State of Washington (Shipherd Falls fish ladder) and the U.S. Government (Gifford Pinchot National Forest).

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action has been evaluated by a BPA archeologist (WA 2025 006) and was determined to have no potential to cause effect to cultural resources or historic properties.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Limited ground disturbance associated with these actions would be from vehicle use accessing sites via preexisting trails and access routes. No new access routes would be utilized. Therefore, there is little to no potential to affect geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project action may involve limited crushing of vegetation with foot along rivers, but it would not involve removing vegetation, vegetation management, or substantially impacting vegetation in work areas. Therefore, there is no potential to affect state special-status or ESA-listed plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary disturbance of normal wildlife behavior could occur from elevated noise and human presence at the various field sites. However, the proposed actions would be temporary (no more than a few hours at each site) and would be largely consistent with human activity and natural processes typical of the sites. Wildlife species that could be

present in the area would likely be habituated to this level of activity. The proposed actions would not result in adverse modification to suitable protected species habitat. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no effect on special-status wildlife species or habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: USGS has a Section 10 Scientific Research Permit 1135 – 11R for take of ESA-listed Lower Columbia River steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and incidental take of ESA-listed coho and Chinook; WDFW would annually obtain authorization under Section 6 Cooperative Agreement for potential impacts to ESA-listed species. 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.

Notes:

- USGS and WDFW must adhere to the terms and conditions in the ESA permits and provide specified reporting information.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions could take place within or around wetlands; however, the actions would not have any effects to their quality, condition, or size since there would be no habitat modifications. Therefore, there is no potential to affect wetlands.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There is no ground disturbance that would be outside of vehicle use of existing roadways. Therefore, there is no potential to affect groundwater and aquifers.

## **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no specially designated areas located within the project area; there would be no changes to land use and no impacts to specially designated areas. Therefore, no potential to affect land use or specially designated areas.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no changes to visual quality associated with the proposed actions. Therefore, there is no potential to impact visual quality.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to the air quality of the environment from dust and exhaust due to vehicle use for site access. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise during implementation. Any noise emitted from vehicles would be short term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following project completion.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work may present a small human health and safety risk associated with working around waterbodies but is not expected to create a hazard to the general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions. All personnel would use best management practices, such as personal floatation devices as appropriate, to protect worker health and safety.

### **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: Use of public lands would be done in consistent with existing allowable uses or with permission from the underlying land manager. Use of private lands would be coordinated closely with private land owners. All information collected would be available to the public.

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

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Catherine Clark  
Environmental Protection Specialist