

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Panther Creek Chinook Salmon Monitoring Project

**Project No.:** 2008-905-00

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

**Location:** Lemhi County, Idaho

**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 fund the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to annually monitor Snake River Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) in Panther Creek. Viable salmon population data would be collected in Panther Creek to inform hatchery effectiveness, critical uncertainties, and status and trend monitoring and meet Tribal harvest, culture, and conservation objectives. Performance metrics would be acquired from the operation of a rotary screw trap and picket weir, eDNA, stream micro-chemistry, harvest monitoring, spawning ground surveys, electrofishing surveys, and Remote Site Incubator (RSI) monitoring.

Specifically, the following activities would be conducted:

1. Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tagging of up to 6,000 juvenile Chinook salmon caught via the Panther creek rotary screw traps (up to 5,000 fish) or electrofishing (up to 1,000 fish) to facilitate post-release survival studies and estimate the following performance metrics for juvenile Chinook salmon: (1) survival of juveniles to Lower Granite Dam; (2) travel time of juveniles to Lower Granite Dam; (3) daily or weekly trap efficiency; (4) survival of juveniles back to Lower Granite Dam as adults; (5) harvest mortality in the Columbia, Snake, and Salmon river fisheries; (6) conversion rates of adults from Bonneville Dam to Panther Creek array; (7) adult returns to Panther Creek; and (8) arrival timing of adults to Panther Creek.
2. Determine salmon population data, via the operation of rotary screw traps and a picket weir in Panther Creek.
3. Sort, organize, and analyze data (eDNA, stream micro-chemistry, harvest monitoring, spawning ground surveys, electrofishing surveys, and RSI monitoring) collected within Panther Creek.

Field methods would involve the capture, handling, and marking of juvenile salmonids. Capture methods would include backpack electrofishing, rotary screw traps and weir operations. No ground disturbance nor structure modification would occur for screw trap installation or weir operation and maintenance.

Funding the proposed actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System and BPA's commitments to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as amended, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System 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; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024), 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>

Israel Duran  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

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<sup>1</sup> BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX/SA/EA BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to DOE's own regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021, to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 *et seq.*

# 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:** Panther Creek Chinook Salmon Monitoring Project

## **Project Site Description**

All activities would occur at existing collection sites in the Panther Creek subbasin in Lemhi County, Idaho. Monitoring activities would occur on private and public properties (Salmon-Challis National Forest).

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination that this undertaking is a type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties on November 26, 2024 (BPA CR Project No.: ID 2024 070).

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed and disturbance would be minimal, limited to minor sedimentation when walking in rivers or streams; 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: The proposed actions do not include any vegetation management, ground disturbance, or work that would remove or substantially impact vegetation. Therefore, there is no potential to affect plant communities, including ESA-listed plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Personnel may displace wildlife during surveys due to elevated noise and human presence, but this would be temporary. There would be no actions that would occur on upland areas; therefore, there would be little effect on wildlife, including ESA-listed wildlife) and no effect to wildlife habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Chinook would be monitored and trapped via rotating screw traps, weirs, or electrofishing and PIT-tagged. PIT-tagged Chinook would be detected at PIT tag arrays within the Columbia River Basin and this data would help inform conservation objectives. Other fish encountered during trapping would likely be, pikeminnow, suckers, sculpins and ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and may be temporarily disturbed due to project activities. Any fish trapped would be released as soon as practical. The Shoshone - Bannock Tribes has authorization for this action under a series of NMFS BiOP (Four Salmon River Basin Spring/Summer Chinook Salmon Hatchery Programs in the Upper Salmon River Basin; NMFS consultation number WCR-2017-7042) for the take of ESA-listed anadromous salmonids. Bull trout take associated with RM&E activities are covered under the USFWS Biological Opinion (0 1EIFW00-2017-F-1079). No other ESA-listed fish are present in the project area. Waterbodies and floodplains would not be affected by the actions.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed and wetlands are none known to be present; thus, the action does not have the potential to impact wetlands.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed and the action would not result in an increase in groundwater use. The work would not change the hydrological regime and, therefore, would not affect groundwater recharge.

## **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 use. Land use would not change. The project is not located in a specially-designated area or Wild and Scenic River.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: With the exception of operating the traps and surveys there would be no disturbance of visual quality. The activities would be short-term and limited in nature. Therefore, the proposed action would not have a permanent impact on visual quality.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the project sites would be very minor and short-term during construction. A negligible amount of temporary dust and vehicle emissions could be generated during project activities. Emissions and dust levels would return to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise during activities. Any noise emitted from equipment would be short-term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following completion of activities.

## 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. Personnel are trained in proper equipment management techniques, and all applicable safety regulations would be followed. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions and no CERCLA sites within the project area.

### 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: The project actions are proposed by the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to be implemented on private and public properties (Salmon-Challis National Forest.) Where projects are conducted on public lands, work is done in coordination with land managers. On private lands, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes would obtain landowner approval prior to accessing project areas and performing work.

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

Signed:

Israel Duran  
Environmental Protection Specialist