Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Evaluate Spawning of Fall Chinook below the Four Lowermost Mainstem Dams

Project No.: 1999-003-01

Project Manager: Martin Allen, EWU-4

Location: Skamania County, Washington

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 to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) to collect Chinook salmon spawning survey data within the mainstem Columbia River.

PSMFC would collect data along the mainstem Columbia River from River Miles 140 to 143 (Ives/Pierce Island complex). Spawning surveys would be conducted mid-September to late-October via jet sled with two observers and one boat operator or by foot with three observers. Water visibility conditions would be measured using the Secchi disk method. If the water depth is too low to allow boat access, then the area would be surveyed by foot. The associated data collection would include spawning counts of live and dead fish by species, redd counts, GPS mapping of spawning locations, and coded wire tag (CWT) recoveries. If carcasses are found they would be scanned for CWTs electronically, snouts would be collected, transferred to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) Olympia's CWT recovery lab, and egg retention would be calculated for female carcasses.

No live fish would be handled during the activities listed above. Boats would enter the river at preexisting boat ramps.

These actions would support conservation for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with National Marine Fisheries (NMFS) on the Operations and Maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also support BPA's 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. [1]

CATHERINE CLARK

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Catherine Clark
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

KATEY GRANGE

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Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

[1] 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 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: Evaluate Spawning of Fall Chinook below the Four Lowermost Mainstem Dams

Project Site Description

The Ives Island and Pierce Island complex (Complex) is located on the mainstem Columbia River between Skamania, Washington and North Bonneville, Washington. The Complex is made up of the two islands along the river. The islands are made up of rocky and sandy soils with a mix of conifers and deciduous trees as the primary vegetative cover.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BPA archaeologist determined (WA 2022 218) the project would have no potential to cause affect to historic properties. The action would be limited to funding that data collection of fish and sampling fieldwork. No ground disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed actions.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impact to geology and soils as there would be no ground disturbance associated with the proposed actions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impact to ESA-listed, state special-status, or non-listed plant species known to exist on the site as there would be no ground disturbance associated with the proposed actions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impacts to ESA-listed, state special-status wildlife species, or designated critical habitat as there would be no ground disturbance associated with the proposed actions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance as a result of the proposed actions. All work would be conducted by foot or on boat. Therefore, there would be no impact to waterbodies, floodplains, or habitats as a result of the proposed actions.

The Columbia River contains ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), chum salmon (*Oncorhynchus keta*), and steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and their critical habitat; however, all data collection action would occur on fish carcasses, no live fish would be handled. Short term negative effects to local fish are expected, such as displacement due to human presence. Local fish would return upon data collection action completion and would have alternate habitat available during temporary actions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no potential to impact wetlands as there would be no ground disturbance associated with the proposed actions.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no potential to impact groundwater and aquifers as there would be no ground disturbance associated with the proposed actions.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not impact land uses or specially-designated areas. Access to the project site is on existing road networks and all actions are comparable with local land uses.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed data collection actions would not have any effect on visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small increase in emissions would occur from vehicles entering and exiting the project site, and boat operation. However, the increase would be very minor and short term during data collections actions.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed data collection actions could result in an increase in ambient noise during boat operations. However, boat operations in this location are common and the increase in ambient noise would be short term, during daylight hours.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers carrying out data collection actions would be trained in proper collection techniques, and this activity is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. Workers would take water safety precautions while operating in waterbodies, such as wearing life vests as appropriate.

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: PSMFC would utilize existing state park boat launch for access to the data collection site. PSMFC would adhere to all listed guidance from Washington State Parks on access to the data collection site.

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

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