

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Upper Columbia Stream Habitat and Geomorphic Reach Assessments through 2031

Project No.: 2009-003-00

Project Manager: Tori Bohlen, EWU-4

Location: Multiple locations in Kittitas, Chelan, and Okanogan Counties, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.16 Research activities in aquatic environments

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Yakama Nation Fisheries (YNF) to conduct stream habitat and geomorphic reach assessments in selected salmon-bearing river and stream segments within the Methow, Entiat, and Wenatchee Subbasins of the Upper Columbia River Basin in central Washington. Information from the assessments would then inform potential aquatic-habitat restoration efforts in these Subbasins.

Reach assessments would be conducted by a survey crew consisting of a geomorphologist and two to three additional surveyors. Crews would walk stream channels to collect and measure physical habitat data, following the US Forest Service Level II Stream Inventory protocol. This protocol employs a habitat unit survey along with general characterizations of substrate, large woody debris, and riparian conditions. There would be no disturbance to the stream bed or riparian vegetation. Crews would access assessment sites by walking overland from the nearest existing public road. All work would occur during the spring, summer, and fall in 2026 through 2031.

Funding the proposed action would support conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, 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 1021.102 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; 90 FR 29676, July 3, 2025 [Interim Final Rule]) and the current *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures*, BPA has determined the following:

- 1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021;
- 2) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion; and
- 3) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal (see attached Environmental Evaluation).

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Evaluation

This evaluation 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 Methow, Entiat, and Wenatchee Subbasins of the Upper Columbia River Basin in central Washington. The Subbasins consists of mountainous terrain and forested vegetation with interspersed grasslands and meadows. The US Forest Service manages a majority of the subbasins, while the remainder is state and privately owned. Land use activities in the subbasins include timber harvest, recreation, agriculture, and rural residential.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would occur in-stream and on dry land. Work would not involve ground disturbance or removal of vegetation. There would be little to no potential to impact historical or cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would occur in-stream and on dry land. Work would not involve ground disturbance or removal of vegetation. There would be little to no potential to impact geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would occur in-stream and on dry land. Work would not involve ground disturbance or removal of vegetation. Plants in the immediate vicinity of each assessment area would be subject to minimal, short-term impacts as a result of trampling by overland foot traffic to reach the assessment sites. This would not be expected to have long-term impacts to plant communities, including any ESA-listed or sensitive species.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Federal or state-listed wildlife species, specifically lynx, and habitats have the potential to occur in the assessment areas. Any potential impacts to listed species or habitats would be minimized by following conservation measures for survey activities outlined in BPA's ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS for the Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) programmatic. Any impacts to non-listed species or habitats at the assessment sites would be limited to the immediate area, where there would be a temporary, small decrease in available habitat and temporary elevated noise disturbance from human presence. Wildlife would likely move into surrounding areas and return to assessment sites after crews have left.

Notes:

- Complete annual HIP notification to USFWS.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Proposed work would result in temporary, low-level turbidity in water bodies from in-stream foot traffic and displacement of fish by crews in the streams. ESA-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and its critical habitat have the potential to occur in the assessment areas. Any potential impacts to ESA-listed species or habitat at the assessment sites would be minimized by following conservation measures for survey activities outlined in BPA's ESA Section 7 consultation with the USFWS and NMFS for HIP programmatic. Any impacts to non-listed fish species or habitat at the assessment sites would be limited to the immediate area, where there would be a temporary, small decrease in available habitat from low-level turbidity and human presence. Data gathered would support potential plans and designs for aquatic-habitat restoration efforts in these subbasins.

Notes:

- Complete annual HIP notification to USFWS and NMFS.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would occur in-stream and on dry land. Work would not involve ground disturbance or removal of vegetation. There would be little to no potential to impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance that would reach groundwater is proposed.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Land use would not change as a result of the proposed work.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Visual quality would not change as a result of the proposed work.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of dust and emissions associated with vehicle travel to and from assessments sites would occur.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary noise increases associated with vehicle travel to and from assessment sites would occur.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to protect workers' 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: No notification - All proposed work would occur 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:

Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist