

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: CTUIR Columbia River Basin Bio-Monitoring

Project No.: 2009-014-00

Project Manager: Deborah Docherty

Location: Columbia, Garfield Counties Washington; and Grant, Union, Umatilla Counties, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat; B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish and wildlife

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) to conduct on-going bio-monitoring of salmon, steelhead, and bull trout. Bio-monitoring would guide conservation decisions and determine the effectiveness of aquatic habitat enhancements for endangered anadromous fish. These actions would support conservation of Endangered Species Act (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 Bonneville's commitments to the CTUIR under the 2020 Columbia River Fish Accord Extension agreement, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the FCRPS 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.).

CTUIR would conduct a series of bio-monitoring surveys at approximately 20 established monitoring sites in the Umatilla, Walla Walla, John Day, Grande Ronde, and Tucannon River Basins. In-water surveillance would occur during low-flow from June 15 - September 30. No new monitoring equipment would be installed and the sites would be accessed by established trails and roads. Bio-monitoring surveillance would include the following:

Snorkel Surveillance: Snorkeling surveys would be conducted at each site to document juvenile fish abundance, physical parameters, and instream habitat usage. Surveys would be limited to one pass per transect to minimize disturbance and would not involve handling or other contact.

Macroinvertebrate Sampling: Approximately 10 benthic macroinvertebrate samples would be accrued from each site using a method derived from the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program (EMAP) targeted riffle sampling protocol. Samples would be collected by wading in streams, and using D-framed kick nets, scoop nets, and systematic rock sampling.

PIT Tagging: Up to 4,000 juvenile spring Chinook would be tagged with passive integrated transponders (PIT). Tagged fish would be captured as by-catch during the operation of the Upper Umatilla River and Meacham Creek Screw Traps as part of the CTUIR's Umatilla Basin Natural Production RM&E Project (1990-005-01).

Habitat Assessment Surveillance: Habitat surveys would use a combination of Columbia Habitat Monitoring Program (CHaMP) and Action Effectiveness Monitoring (AEM) data collection methods to collect habitat attributes including in-channel characteristics, sediment type, riparian condition, floodplain characteristics, and water quality. Surveillance activities require the use of handheld and carried-in monitoring and surveillance equipment.

Redd Surveys: Spring Chinook (July-September) and summer steelhead (February-May) redd and carcass counts would occur annually during spawning seasons.

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/ Lindsey Arotin
Lindsey Arotin
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>September 20, 2021</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 at existing field sites associated with multiple habitat restoration or control sites consisting of flatland fields and forest adjacent to streams within a 100-mile radius of Pendleton, Umatilla County, Oregon. Sites range from southwest Washington to northwest Oregon. Washington sites are located near the border of the Umatilla National Forest on state-owned land. Oregon sites are located on CTUIR, the Umatilla National Forest, and privately-owned lands. All sites are established and land access permissions would be agreed upon prior to entry.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination that these actions have no potential to cause effects on historic properties on September 8, 2021.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground or soil disturbances are proposed during bio-monitoring activities. Temporary disturbances may occur due to human presence but no permanent impacts would be anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No activities that involve vegetation disturbance are proposed during bio-monitoring. No ESA-listed, state-listed, or sensitive plant species are known to exist on the site. No designated critical habitat is present. Minor and temporary disturbances may occur due to human presence; lasting impact would not be anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, state-listed, or sensitive wildlife species were documented in, or adjacent to, the project areas. Activities are not anticipated to impact federally or state-listed sensitive species. Wildlife present on the site during bio-monitoring activities may be temporarily disturbed by human presence and noise.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed bio-monitoring activities, such as PIT tagging and snorkeling surveys would have minor and/or temporary effects to the waterbodies and middle-Columbia and Snake River spring and summer Chinook salmon, middle-Columbia and Snake River steelhead, and bull trout; increased turbidity, aquatic habitat disturbances, and increased physiological stress to aquatic life. There would be no permanent adverse physical changes to water bodies or floodplains resulting from proposed activities. No ground disturbances or new RM&E equipment installations are proposed. All work would be carried out at the existing field sites.

Notes:

- Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 consultation is in place for the entire CTUIR RM&E program, including this project, through NMFS biological opinion and USFWS Section 10 permit.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground or wetland disturbing activities are proposed during bio-monitoring activities. Wetland impact would not be anticipated.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No actions during bio-monitoring activities would have potential to impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No changes in land use would occur as a result of bio-monitoring.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No changes to visual quality would occur as a result of bio-monitoring.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Air quality is not likely to be impacted during bio-monitoring activities. A temporary disturbance may occur from increased vehicle use in the areas.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Bio-monitoring activities would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise due to human presence.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: CTUIR employees participate in a 10-day training course to learn proper protocols and fieldwork safety procedures. All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work activities.

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: CTUIR would implement the work at established sites that are accessed on existing roads and adjacent state-owned, Umatilla National Forest, and CTUIR tribal lands. For sampling on private lands, the CTUIR has secured standing agreements for permission from private landowners to participate in the 'Biomonitoring of Fish Habitat Research' project.

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

Signed: /s/ Lindsey Arotin September 20, 2021
Lindsey Arotin, ECF - 4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist