

# Select Area Fisheries Enhancement (SAFE) Program

Finding of No Significant Impact  
Bonneville Power Administration  
DOE/EA-2277  
February 2026

## INTRODUCTION

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Bonneville Power Administration (Bonneville) announces its environmental findings for the proposed continued funding of the Clatsop County Fisheries, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife<sup>1</sup> to implement the ongoing Select Area Fisheries Enhancement (SAFE) Program.

Bonneville developed an environmental assessment (EA) evaluating the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. A 30-day scoping comment period was held in January 2024. Five comments were received. The EA was released for a 30-day public comment period in September 2024. Four comment letters were received. Bonneville reviewed and responded to all substantive comments in Appendix D of the Final EA. No new significant issues or circumstances were raised.

Bonneville hereby relies upon the EA, and based on its analysis and public comments received, has determined that neither the Proposed Action nor the No Action Alternative are major federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required and Bonneville is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative. Neither the Proposed Action nor the No Action Alternative are the type of actions that normally requires preparation of an EIS and is not without precedent.

Attached is a Mitigation Action Plan that lists all the mitigation measures that Bonneville and its contractors are committed to implementing for the Proposed Action should that alternative be implemented.

## PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

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This FONSI will be posted on Bonneville's project website: <https://www.bpa.gov/nepa/SAFE>

## PROPOSED ACTION

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Under the Proposed Action, Bonneville would continue to fund hatchery operators and co-managers to: (1) use existing hatchery facilities to collect and initially rear juvenile Chinook and coho salmon; (2) transport a majority of juveniles from these hatchery facilities to net pen sites in the Lower Columbia River Estuary (LCRE); (3) acclimate and release juveniles at the various net pen sites and hatchery release sites; (4) operate and maintain net pen sites and hatchery facilities; and (5) conduct associated SAFE monitoring and evaluation activities. The proposed action would fund hatchery operators and

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<sup>1</sup> On September 26, 2024, Wild Fish Conservancy and The Conservation Angler announced a joint consent decree settlement with WDFW which included termination of the Deep River coho net pen program. WDFW monitoring of adult returns would continue through 2027/2028.

fishery co-managers to produce up to 4.25 million spring Chinook and 4.3 million coho salmon smolts annually in off-channel net pen sites in the LCRE.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

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To determine whether the Proposed Action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, Bonneville analyzed the potential impacts of the proposal on human and natural resources and presented them in Chapter 3 of the EA. The potential impacts associated with the Proposed Action are summarized below. The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts. The following discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

### **Fish**

- The Proposed Action would have low impacts on Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish due to limited spatial and temporal overlap between released hatchery smolts and native fish populations in the LCRE.
- Hatchery fish are released at the smolt stage at off channel backwater areas of the LCRE and quickly emigrate to the ocean, minimizing competitive interactions, predation, and pathogen transmission to wild fish.
- The production of additional harvestable salmon from the released smolts is likely to increase the survivability and fitness of the native Chinook and coho salmon populations by ameliorating harvest pressure.
- Hatchery operations are covered under the 2025 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Biological Opinion (WCRO-2025-00274), which includes conditions to minimize risks to ESA-listed species. Bonneville would implement all reasonable and prudent measures and terms and conditions from the 2025 NMFS Biological Opinion.
- Potential effects on essential fish habitat were also analyzed by NMFS and Bonneville and determined to be negligible.

### **Water Resources**

- Minor, localized accumulation of organic material (e.g., uneaten feed, feces, biofouling debris) beneath net pens could temporarily affect sediment chemistry and dissolved oxygen. Annual benthic monitoring has shown recovery to baseline conditions between rearing cycles.
- Net pen operations in Youngs Bay and Deep River are conducted in accordance with National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits, which include monitoring macroinvertebrate communities, as well as, for water quality parameters such as temperature, pH, biological oxygen demand, and dissolved oxygen. Other sites operate below regulatory thresholds but still implement voluntary best practices.
- The Proposed Action would have low localized water quality impacts and no basin-wide water quality effects.

### **Wildlife**

- Net pen sites are located in developed, tidally influenced areas and do not support suitable habitat for ESA-listed terrestrial or avian wildlife.
- Minor increases in prey availability (e.g., smolts and returning adults) may benefit piscivorous birds and marine mammals, but not to a degree that would significantly alter population dynamics.
- Non-lethal deterrents (e.g., net covers, acoustic devices) are used to prevent predation on net pen fish and avoid harm to wildlife species.

### **Transportation**

- About 80 to 100 annual truck trips (round-trip) would occur within 30 miles of SAFE facilities. These trips would occur on public and private roads already used for aquaculture and agriculture and would not alter road conditions or traffic congestion.
- Water-based operations (e.g., net pen maintenance, fish feeding) would not interfere with navigation or recreational boating.

### **Socioeconomics**

- The SAFE Program directly supports local commercial fishing by increasing availability of harvestable hatchery-origin spring Chinook and coho salmon in designated Select Area Fisheries.
- Under full implementation, the program would produce up to \$5 million in annual personal income from commercial and recreational fisheries combined, supporting up to 93 full-time equivalent jobs in Clatsop, Pacific, and Wahkiakum Counties.
- Recreational anglers would also benefit, though to a lesser extent, and provide seasonal boosts to local businesses such as tackle shops, guides, hotels, and fuel stations.
- Overall, the increased fisheries would represent a modest contribution to overall regional employment and income.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

- The Proposed Action would result in small, localized increases in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from fish transport vehicles and facility operations. The magnitude of emissions would be minor, intermittent (mostly in spring), and would not contribute meaningfully to cumulative regional GHG loads.
- Net pen operations do not involve combustion sources or intensive energy use.

Effects on other areas and resources—such as geology, soils, scenic values, wetlands, vegetation, floodplains, public health and safety, land use, and cultural resources were considered but determined to have no impact.

### **NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

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Under the No Action Alternative, Bonneville would not provide funding for SAFE Program activities. Operators and co-managers could acquire funding from other, non-Bonneville sources. For the purposes of the EA, it is assumed that portions of the SAFE Program currently being financed by other sources would continue, while all Bonneville-funded hatchery production would discontinue. Spring Chinook and coho smolt production would be reduced by up to 2.25 million spring Chinook and 2.3 million coho salmon smolts annually, resulting in SAFE Program adult harvest reduction of approximately 50%.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

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To determine whether the No Action Alternative has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, Bonneville analyzed the potential impacts on human and natural resources and presented them in Chapter 3 of the EA. The potential impacts associated with the No Action Alternative are summarized below. The No Action Alternative would have no significant impacts. The following discussion provides a summary of the No Action Alternative's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

## **Fish**

- The lack of Bonneville funding would likely halve smolt production, further reducing impacts on aquatic species due to fewer fish released and reduced spatial and temporal overlap.

## **Water Resources**

- The SAFE program would continue with partial funding, resulting in approximately half the smolt production. This reduction would lead to a corresponding decrease in organic matter sources (dead fish, uneaten food, and feces) and related water quality effects, further reducing the low impact on water quality compared to the Proposed Action.

## **Wildlife**

- Wildlife species would likely not experience a substantial change in prey availability as the numbers of released smolts and returning adults from this and other hatchery programs are still likely to satiate predator appetites during brief windows of availability. Therefore, there would be a low effect on wildlife under the No Action Alternative.

## **Transportation**

- Smolt transport would still be required, but to a lesser extent, resulting in a very small beneficial impact on land-based and water-based transportation due to fewer trucks on the roadways.

## **Socioeconomics**

- Smolt production would be halved, likely reducing adult returns. The difference in employment between the no-fund and maximum production scenarios is approximately 38 jobs. However, most jobs in the commercial and recreational fishing industry are seasonal, and many participants have other occupations or engage in other fisheries. Thus, the overall socioeconomic effect of discontinuing the SAFE Program on commercial fisheries would be low. Similarly, the overall socioeconomic impact on regional and local recreational fisheries would be low, as many alternatives are available.

## **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

- The routine hauling of fish would likely occur to a lesser degree as production capacity is diminished. The overall effect of the No Action alternative on GHG emissions would be low.

Effects on other areas and resources—such as geology, soils, scenic values, wetlands, vegetation, floodplains, public health and safety, land use, and cultural resources were considered but determined to have no impact.

## **DETERMINATION**

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Based on the information in the EA, as summarized here, Bonneville determines that the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative are both not major federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA (42 USC 4321 et seq.). Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared, and Bonneville is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative.

Consistent with DOE's Implementing Procedures, I certify that: 1) Bonneville has tailored the breadth and depth of the analysis in the EA to not exceed the 75-page limit; 2) Bonneville considered the factors mandated by NEPA; and the EA represents Bonneville's good-faith effort to prioritize documentation of the most important considerations required by the statute within the Congressionally mandated page

limits; and 3) that this prioritization reflects Bonneville's expert judgment; and that any considerations addressed briefly or left unaddressed were, in Bonneville's judgment, comparatively not of a substantive nature that meaningfully informed the consideration of environmental effects and the resulting decision. Further, I certify that the EA represents BPA's good-faith effort to fulfill NEPA requirements within the Congressional timeline; that such effort is substantially complete; and that, in Bonneville's expert opinion, the analysis contained therein is adequate to inform and reasonably explain Bonneville's final decision regarding the proposed action.

Finally, consistent with Department of Energy's regulations in 10 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 1022 et seq. (Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements), the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to any wetlands as referenced above and presented in Chapter 3 of the EA. Consistent with 10 CFR § 1022.12 and 1022.13, all impacts to floodplains from the Project have been assessed and proper notification provided.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

Benjamin Zelinsky  
Executive Vice President (Acting)  
Environment, Fish and Wildlife

Date