

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Non-Native Fish Suppression in the Pend Oreille Subbasin

Project No.: 2007-149-00

Project Manager: Carlos Matthew

Location: Bonner County, Idaho and Pend Oreille County, Washington

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, wildlife, and cultural resources

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Kalispel Tribe's ongoing non-native fish suppression and removal efforts in areas where native fish populations are threatened by competition from non-native species in the Pend Oreille subbasin in northeastern Washington and northwestern Idaho. This project is a Kalispel Tribe cost-share in partnership with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG). BPA would continue funding for this program to mitigate for the altered hydrology caused by the operation of Albeni Falls Dam. These actions would support the conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with USFWS on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System (2020 FWS CRS BiOp), in addition to supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for the 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.).

Non-native fish species impact native westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*) and ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) populations throughout the Pend Oreille subbasin via competition for resources, hybridization, and predation. Activities conducted under the Kalispel Tribe's fish suppression program would include the following:

- **Fish suppression:** Fish suppression efforts are intended to result in reduced, depressed or potentially eliminated populations of non-native species. Suppression of lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*) in Upper Priest Lake and northern pike (*Esox lucius*) in the Pend Oreille River would be accomplished by way of electrofishing, netting (gill, fyke, seine), trapping (weir, light-minnow, minnow) or angling. Removal of eastern brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) in Saucon Creek and Mill Creek would be accomplished using electrofishing.
- **Collection and analysis of brook trout tissue samples:** Samples collected during fish removal in Saucon Creek and Mill Creek would be analyzed to compile fish distribution data that would be used to develop management strategies for future non-native fish species suppression activities.

- **Collection of environmental DNA (eDNA) samples:** eDNA would be extracted from active project areas, potential project areas, and suspected locations where a non-native species has established and could impact native fish species. Data collection would involve pumping water through a small, filtered sample cup at designated sample sites.

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/ Thomas DeLorenzo

Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange 4/26/2022

Katey C. Grange 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.

Proposed Action: Non-Native Fish Suppression in the Pend Oreille Subbasin

Project Site Description

Project activities would take place in water bodies throughout the Pend Oreille subbasin in northeastern Washington and northwestern Idaho. Suppression efforts in the mainstem Pend Oreille would be focused largely on the Box Canyon Reservoir, located roughly 20 miles north of Usk, Washington. Priest Lake is located in northern Bonner County, Idaho, roughly 18 miles south of the United States/Canada border and drains into the Pend Oreille via Priest River. The lake is roughly 19 miles long and occupies more than 26,000 acres at a depth of up to 400 feet. Suppression efforts are focused in the northern section of the lake. Mill Creek is a tributary of the Pend Oreille located roughly 12 miles northeast of Usk, Washington in Pend Oreille County. The creek runs through the eastern portion of the Coleville National Forest along the border of Washington and Idaho. Saucon Creek is located roughly 12 miles north of Mill Creek in the same national forest. It is a tributary of LeClerc Creek, which drains into the Pend Oreille.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archeologist reviewed the proposed actions and determined that there would be no potential to affect historic and cultural resources (BPA CR Project No. WA 2022 109).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities would be conducted. Access to project locations would be along existing roadways and use existing infrastructure (boat launches, etc.).

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species are present in the project area (United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC)). Washington state-listed endangered Michigan moonwort (*Botrychium michiganense*) has the potential to occur in Pend Oreille County (Washington Department of Natural Resources). However, this species is typically only found in sandy dune systems and would not be present at the project locations. No Idaho state-listed species of

endangered plants are present in Bonner County (Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation).

Work sites would be accessed by existing infrastructure and project activities would be conducted in-water. As a result, further effects to plant species would not occur.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Canada lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*), grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), mountain caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*), and Yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) have the potential to occur in Pend Oreille and/or Bonner counties (IPaC). The project areas are below the typical elevation and outside the typical spruce and fir forests in which lynx are found. Grizzly bear are likewise unlikely to be found near project sites due to their avoidance of human presence. Critical habitat for the southern mountain caribou distinct population segment surrounds the northern portion of Priest Lake. However, this habitat is composed of higher elevation forest and does not descend into the lower elevation of the project area, making caribou encounter unlikely at project sites. Yellow-Billed Cuckoo typically nest in dense riparian woodlands. However, all project locations are within water bodies and access would be along established roadways, avoiding these areas. As a result, the actions would have no effect on these species. No other Washington or Idaho state-listed species of endangered animals are present in the project area (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation).

To the extent that any wildlife would be disturbed by human presence (noise, shadows, etc.) during project activities, the effects would be temporary and cause no lasting impacts.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No anadromous fish species are present due to anthropogenic blockages downriver of the project locations. ESA-listed bull trout and bull trout critical habitat are present in the Pend Oreille River and its tributaries. The Kalispel Tribe obtained an ESA Section 10 permit (TE844478-8) from USFWS for authorized activities in support of bull trout recovery under this project. The permit is valid through June 5, 2023. Authorized activities under the permit include surveying, collecting and capturing, handling, tagging, biosampling, holding, transporting, releasing, and salvaging bull trout in the project area.

To ensure minimal effects to native fish species during suppression efforts, placement of nets in and around the primary inlets and outlet of the water bodies would be avoided to reduce by-catch of bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. Any native fish incidentally captured during project activities would be returned no more than 100 meters downstream of the capture location. All netting used for capturing, handling, and holding of fish would be composed of a fine mesh, knot-free material that would minimize injury to the fish. Handling of all listed species would be done as quickly as possible to minimize the risk of injury and mortality. To prevent the spread of invasive and non-native species, all equipment, clothing, and boots would be cleaned before arriving at a project area. Staff would take precautions to avoid stepping in areas that may be potential redd locations for resident bull trout.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project activities would not take place in wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or groundwater use are proposed.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No changes to existing land uses are proposed.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No construction or habitat alterations are proposed. There would be no changes to visual quality of project areas.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Transport vehicles would create exhaust emissions. However, these effects would be minor and temporary and cause no lasting changes to air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Transport vehicles would create an increase in ambient noise. However, these effects would be minor and temporary.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best practices to ensure human health and safety. All electrofishing would be conducted and supervised by licensed personnel.

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: Access to project locations would be through both public and private land. Public landowners include the Colville National Forest (U.S. Forest Service (USFS)) and the Washington Department of Natural Resources. Private landowners include a number of large timber companies. Existing public and private roads would be used to access sites. Boat launches to be used are owned by USFS, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Pend Oreille County, and the Kalispel Tribe. The project sponsor will coordinate with public and private landowners as necessary to ensure access.

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

Signed: /s/ Thomas DeLorenzo
Thomas DeLorenzo, ECF-4
Environmental Protection Specialist

4/26/2022
Date