

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Continued Columbia River System Power Marketing Services and Activities Consistent with its Biological Opinion

Proposed By: Bonneville Power Administration

Location: Multiple locations in the Columbia River Basin

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.4 Power Marketing Services and Activities; B4.5 Temporary Adjustments to River Operations

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (Bonneville) proposes to continue marketing the power generated from the operation of the 14 federal Columbia River System (CRS) projects located on the mainstem Columbia and Snake Rivers in multiple counties in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana in a manner to support the implementation of the 2019 NOAA Fisheries CRS Biological Opinion.

The US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) operates and maintains 12 of the 14 CRS projects: Bonneville, The Dalles, John Day, McNary, Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, Lower Granite, Dworshak, Chief Joseph, Albeni Falls, and Libby Dams. The Corps operates and maintains these projects for flood risk management, navigation, hydropower generation, fish and wildlife conservation, irrigation, recreation, water quality, and municipal and industrial water supply, though not every project is authorized for every one of these purposes. The US Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) operates and maintains the remaining two of the 14 CRS projects: Grand Coulee and Hungry Horse Dams. Reclamation operates these projects to support multiple purposes, including irrigation, hydropower generation, flood risk management, navigation, and municipal and industrial water supply.

Bonneville's role is to market and transmit the power generated by the CRS projects in accordance with Bonneville's statutory directives. To fulfill its obligations to meet power customer loads and provide an adequate, efficient, economical, and reliable power supply, Bonneville staff coordinate closely with dam operators (the Corps and Reclamation) to ensure power marketing operations remain within normal operating limits (including operations that may change spill levels at different times during the day [e.g., flexible spill operations]). These operations are managed with other project purposes and Columbia River System-wide operating constraints, including operations to support Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish, such as listed salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon.

On November 2, 2018, Bonneville, the Corps, and Reclamation (Action Agencies) requested initiation of formal consultation with NOAA Fisheries under Section 7 (a)(2) of the ESA, and submitted a consultation package which included a description of the Federal action describing how the hydropower system would be operated. That consultation initiation request noted that the Action Agencies were engaged in discussions with regional sovereigns with the goal of developing a spring spill operation (i.e. flexible spill operations) that balance increased spill for ESA-listed salmon and steelhead, increased power generation during periods of high demand, and increased implementation feasibility for the operation that would extend from 2019 and 2020. On December 19, 2018, the Action Agencies submitted a letter to NOAA Fisheries amending the spill and hydropower operation and transportation portions of the previously-submitted proposed action as a result of those discussions. NOAA Fisheries received a letter from the Corps dated March 8, 2019, on behalf of the Action Agencies which included additions to the

Proposed Action that are beneficial to salmonids and not intended to alter proposed CRS operations. On March 29, 2019, NOAA Fisheries issued the 2019 CRS Biological Opinion.

The Action Agencies are implementing CRS operations and other actions identified in the 2019 NOAA Fisheries CRS Biological Opinion, and are complying with the reasonable and prudent measures and terms and conditions of the Incidental Take Statement (ITS). Bonneville's power marketing services and activities and power demand changes are consistent the 2019 NOAA Fisheries CRS Biological Opinion and are within existing operating constraints and normal operating limits of CRS projects.

The Action Agencies would implement offsite mitigation actions, such as tributary and estuary habitat improvement actions, conservation and safety net hatchery projects, and predator management and monitoring programs to benefit ESA-listed salmon and steelhead. Bonneville provides funding to multiple local, state, tribal, and Federal entities as part of its fish and wildlife program to implement offsite mitigation actions listed in various Biological Opinions for ESA-listed species as well as offsite mitigation actions for non-listed species. The Bonneville fish and wildlife program also supports efforts to protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife affected by the development and operation of the CRS under the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act) (16 USC 839b (h)(10)(A)).

Bonneville completes site-specific environmental analysis prior to implementing fish and wildlife protection, mitigation, and enhancement actions. This analysis includes review under applicable laws and regulations, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Examples of Bonneville-funded tributary and estuary habitat improvement, and conservation and safety net hatchery actions that support implementation of the 2019 NOAA Fisheries CRS Biological Opinion, as well as the fish and wildlife program, include:

- Steigerwald Habitat Restoration and Flood Control Project (DOE/EA-2027)
- Wallooskee-Youngs Confluence Restoration (DOE/EA-1974)
- Bird Track Springs Fish Habitat Enhancement Project (DOE/EA-2032)
- Upper Stillwaters and Stormy A Restoration Project (DOE/EA-2058)
- Springfield Sockeye Hatchery Project (DOE/EA-1913)
- Nez Perce Tribal Hatchery Programs (DOE/EA-2078)
- Chief Joseph Hatchery Program (DOE/EIS-0384)

During the course of the implementation of future actions associated with marketing power from the CRS Projects and the other actions addressed in the 2019 NOAA Fisheries CRS Biological Opinion, projects would continue to undergo site-specific environmental review prior to implementation. If projects change the status quo or directly impact the physical environment, commensurate NEPA analysis would be conducted. Actions that would likely change the status quo are being evaluated as part of the ongoing CRSO EIS process and associated ESA consultations. If the selected EIS alternative changes the status quo, these considerations would be analyzed as part of the CRSO EIS.

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) of the Department of Energy's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations (57 FR 15144, Apr. 24, 1992, as amended at 61 FR 36221-36243, July 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996, 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011), Bonneville has determined that the proposed action:

- (1) fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 Code of Federal Regulation 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, Bonneville finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey Grange

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: April 2, 2019

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: Continued CRS Power Marketing Services and Activities Consistent with its Biological Opinion

Project Site Description

The 14 federal CRS projects are located on the mainstem Columbia and Snake Rivers in multiple counties in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of effects from dam operations to historic or cultural resources.		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of effects from dam operations to soils and geological resources.		
3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of effects from dam operations to plants, including ESA-listed or special-status species.		
4. Wildlife (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of effects from dam operations to wildlife, including their habitat.		
5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including federal/state special-status species and ESUs)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, impacts from dam operations to water resources and fish are expected to be limited in 2019 and 2020 due to migration timing and depth compensation for total dissolved gas. The Action Agencies would also implement the Essential Fish Habitat conservation recommendations included in the 2019 NOAA Fisheries CRS Biological Opinion. Analysis conducted by Washington Department of Ecology determined that even though total dissolved gas levels may change during the day, this would not necessarily change the maximum allowed total dissolved gas level. Operations would be managed up to the total dissolved gas water quality standards.		

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of effects from dam operations to wetland resources.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of effects from dam operations to groundwater or aquifers.

8. **Land Use and Specially Designated Areas**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of effects from dam operations to adjacent land uses.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of effects from dam operations to visual resources.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of effects from dam operations to air quality.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of noise effects from dam operations.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of effects from dam operations to human 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, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary: Because operations to support power marketing would remain within normal system operating limits, there is expected to be no change in the level of disturbance from dam operations to hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA excluded petroleum and natural gas products.

- 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, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: Bonneville coordinates extensively with the Corps and Reclamation on the operation of CRS projects. Because operations would remain within normal system operating limits, there would be no change in the level of effects experienced by upstream and downstream land owners.

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

Signed: /s/ Katey Grange
Katey Grange, ECT
Environmental Protection Specialist

Date: April 2, 2019