

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Rock Creek PIT Tagging Juvenile Coho and Steelhead

Project Manager: Joshua Ashline, EWL-4

Location: Klickitat County, WA

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

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes funding the Yakama Nation to monitor and sample juvenile steelhead and coho salmon to obtain estimates of population density and biomass of resident and anadromous fish in several distinct reaches of Rock Creek and its tributaries. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) would also assist with surveying and PIT tagging efforts, which includes PIT tag submission to PTAGIS and operation/maintenance of PIT tag instream monitoring systems and arrays. Staff from USGS and Yakama Nation Fisheries Project (YKFP) would conduct surveys in the spring (May - June) when temperatures are appropriate for electrofishing and handling of steelhead and coho. Between 200 to 2,000 juvenile steelhead and 50 to 800 juvenile coho would be PIT-tagged and fin clips would be collected for genotyping by the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fisheries Commission genetics lab. In the fall (September - November), staff would sample the same pools to recapture and sample as many steelhead as possible to evaluate over-summer survival. Temperature regime and habitat conditions would also be surveyed.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with National Marine Fisheries Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System and BPA's commitments to the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation 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.).

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/ Carolyn A. Sharp

Carolyn A. Sharp
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel June 7, 2022

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

Rock Creek Subbasin, within Klickitat County in southeastern Washington, is home to a population of native steelhead. Rock Creek joins the Columbia River at RM 230, about 12 miles upstream of John Day Dam. The Rock Creek watershed is primarily intermittent in the lower to middle reaches of Rock Creek with many dispersed perennial pools fed by groundwater input. The primary factors and threats limiting steelhead populations in Rock Creek are low summer flows and high summer water temperatures, which likely occur naturally in some parts of the watershed because of bedrock terrain and steep slopes, but are also due to anthropogenic changes in the subbasin.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Activities will be limited to conducting biological sampling and data gathering in a field and laboratory setting. No ground disturbance or modification of, or construction of, new structures is proposed. There is no potential to affect cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There is no ground disturbance associated with these actions, and, therefore, no potential to affect geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action does not include any vegetation management, ground disturbance, or actions that would impact vegetation. Therefore, there is no potential to affect plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would have a minor, temporary effect on wildlife due to minimally increased noise (above ambient level) and visual disturbance but no direct impacts.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Fish research on hatchery-origin and wild-origin anadromous salmonids is a common and wide-spread activity within the Columbia River Basin, and these project activities would involve the direct and indirect take of Mid Columbia River steelhead. Yakama Nation has a Section-10 Incidental Take permit from the National Marine Fisheries Service (Permit 19741-2R, expiration 12/31/2025). Neither bull trout nor suitable habitat exist in the project area. There are no state-listed species in the project area. There is no ground disturbance proposed by this project. Therefore, actions proposed would not impact waterbodies or floodplains.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not take place within or around wetlands, and therefore no potential to affect wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater is proposed.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No specially-designated areas are located within the project area; no land use changes are proposed; nor would the proposed project activities change the current land use at this site.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no adverse effects to the visual quality of the environment as a result of this project.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no adverse effects to the air quality of the environment as a result of this project.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Noise may increase in the local area associated with monitoring activities, but would be minor and temporary.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed project actions do not adversely impact human health and safety. Operational activities would follow applicable health and safety standards.

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: Some of the survey access points occur on private land, though areas within the ordinary high water mark of Rock Creek are considered waters of the state. To get to the creek or to the reaches that require access over private lands to reach the survey start and/or end points, Yakama Nation has obtained landowner permission.

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

Signed: /s/ Carolyn A. Sharp June 7, 2022
Carolyn A. Sharp, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist