

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Valley Creek PIT Tag Array Consolidation

**Project No.:** 2018-002-00

**Project Manager:** Brady Allen, EWP-4

**Location:** Custer County, Idaho

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

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville proposes to fund Biomark, Inc. to modernize a pair of PIT tag arrays by removing the array equipment at one site (VC1) and consolidating it at a second existing location (VC2). The PIT arrays are used for escapement and population estimates in the Salmon River basin in collaboration with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), and local Tribes. Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp), commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp) and supports 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.).

Biomark would manually remove all equipment associated with site VC1, located on an IDFG fishing easement on private property, including a cargo trailer, the PIT tag array and antennae. At VC2, located upstream from VC1 on Forest Service-managed property, Biomark would replace an electronics enclosure mounted on a stand with a new tan colored enclosure. Three new cables in flexible conduit would extend on the ground surface from the enclosure to the array equipment in the creek. In-water-work would consist of manually creating a shallow trench across the channel approximately 6-inches deep by 4-feet wide to remove and replace six antennae. The antennae would be anchored with hydraulically-driven aluminum and stainless-steel earth anchors. Once the antennae are anchored into the streambed, the trench would be manually backfilled. The site would be accessed using existing access roads and vehicle pull outs. The array and associated equipment would be expected to be maintained in place for approximately 10 years. On an annual basis, Biomark may manually re-course the arrays (manually positioning rocks) as necessary to reduce scouring and/or deposition at the antenna locations.

**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 Sharp  
Carolyn Sharp  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

|                            |                          |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| <u>/s/ Katey C. Grange</u> | <u>February 12, 2021</u> |
| 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:** Valley Creek PIT Tag Array Consolidation

## **Project Site Description**

Both PIT tag arrays are located on Valley Creek near the town of Stanley, Idaho. Valley Creek is wooded and vegetated with riparian vegetation and stands of willow trees. The PIT tag arrays are deliberately sited in stretches of the creek that lack habitat complexity to encourage fish to pass through the reach, rather than linger around the arrays, to ensure better data collection.

The upstream site (VC1) is located at the upstream bridge of the Sawtooth Estates. NOAA Fisheries placed a small cargo trailer in the IDFG fishing easement on private property there more than 10 years ago to house the array equipment. The equipment does not span the entire channel and the antennas are heavily degraded.

The downstream site (VC2) is located in the Sawtooth National Recreation Area. This site has an existing thermoelectric generator (TEG) in a small cage at a parking area by the foot bridge, a 500-gallon propane tank, and an electronics enclosure on a stand. There are two lines of antennas (six in total, 20-feet long each) and one pressure transducer (water depth/temp) in the creek that are connected back to the electronics.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities are consistent with a program-level Section 106 consultation covering PIT tag O&M activities in Oregon, Washington and Idaho (BPA CR Project No. ID 2017 050 –ID-1). Consulting parties included the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, the Nez Perce Tribe and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe. BPA initiated consultation on June 5, 2018 and recommended a determination of no effect to historic properties. The Nez Perce Tribe was the only consulting party who commented on the Idaho projects. BPA assumed concurrence following the end of the 30 day comment period from the other consulting parties. A Forest archaeologist also reviewed the proposed activities at site VC2 and concurred with this determination on December 4, 2020.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing or vegetation removal activities are proposed. Soils would not be disturbed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing or vegetation removal activities are proposed. Plants would not be disturbed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no lasting effects to wildlife species in the project area, including special-status species. USFS data shows foraging habitat by a pair of bald eagles who may temporarily avoid the area during installation at VC2. Foraging habitat is abundant nearby and the eagles would return post-implementation. Other USFS-sensitive species may be present near the VC2 project area (northern bobwhite, little brown myotis, northern copperbelly watersnake, gray wolf, carpenter frog, hickory shad) but effects would be temporary and limited to a few individuals or habitat. There is no suitable habitat for ESA-listed wildlife species in the area and the project would have no effect.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: There would be no impact to floodplains. Short-term, localized turbidity from manual in stream work may occur during antenna placement. All work would be done with hand tools to minimize the impact. Bull trout, Chinook salmon, sockeye salmon and steelhead are known to occupy Valley Creek, but arrays are intentionally located in an area that lacks habitat complexity. In-stream activity would also occur during low water conditions, outside of migratory and spawning periods. USFS-sensitive species (spotted frog and westslope cutthroat trout) may also be present, but a USFS fish biologist has determined that while individuals or habitat may be affected, the action would not contribute towards Federal listing of the species.

HIP conservation measures would be applied for the PIT tag array installation. ESA HIP consultation Project Notification Form 2021026 for these actions was submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on February 5, 2021.

### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impact to wetlands. No ground-disturbing activities are proposed.

### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Neither PIT tag arrays nor the actions associated with their installation have potential to impact groundwater.

## 8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing PIT tag array VC2 is located within the Sawtooth National Recreation Area in the Sawtooth National Forest. All activities are compatible with Public Law 92-400 and would be authorized through a special use authorization with the SNRA (SF-299 submitted by Idaho Office of Species Conservation on behalf of Biomark).

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually prominent vegetative, landform, or structural changes would be made. The PIT tag arrays would be placed on the river's bed, below the surface of the water. The control boxes would be placed on the bank of the river, but would not impact the overall visual quality.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term impact to air quality from vehicle emissions during installation.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term increase in ambient noise during installation.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: 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: VC1 has been in place for more than 10 years as a fishing easement held by IDFG on private land. VC2 is located on land managed by the Sawtooth National Recreation Area/U.S. Forest Service. Biomark has submitted a SF-299 Special Use Permit application to the Forest Service and coordinated review with the appropriate resource specialists to review the proposal.

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

Signed: /s/ Carolyn Sharp February 12, 2021  
Carolyn Sharp, ECF-4 Date  
Environmental Protection Specialist