

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Survival Estimate for Passage through Snake and Columbia River Dams
(Update to Categorical Exclusion Published Feb. 27, 2020)

Project No.: 1993-029-00

Project Manager: Christine Petersen, EWP-4

Location: Whitman County, Washington and Clatsop County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B 3.3 Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to mark and tag approximately 60,000 juvenile salmonids with Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags. Also, BPA would provide partial funding for pair PIT tag trawl operation in the Columbia River estuary. The data collected from the PIT tags would provide annual estimates of travel time and survival of juvenile salmonids through individual reaches of the Columbia River System. Data collected would be used by the region in evaluating structural and operational changes made to improve juvenile fish passage. Data based on PIT tagged smolts would be used to determine smolt-to-adult returns (SAR) and to evaluate how juvenile passage history and experience is related to the SARs.

NMFS would PIT tag smolts at Lower Granite Dam each year as part of this study to augment the number of tagged smolts available for survival estimation for stocks of interest. In most years, wild spring/summer Chinook salmon, wild steelhead, and hatchery steelhead are tagged and released at Lower Granite Dam.

In total, NMFS would mark natural-origin and hatchery-origin juvenile steelhead, and juvenile Spring/Summer Chinook at the Lower Granite Dam. These include:

- Approximately 20,000 hatchery-origin juvenile steelhead
- Approximately 20,000 natural-origin juvenile steelhead
- Approximately 20,000 natural-origin juvenile Spring/Summer Chinook

In addition, through a cost-share agreement with US Army Corps of Engineers, BPA would partially fund the pair PIT tag trawl operation in the Columbia River estuary. Fish would be detected using the pair PIT tag detection arrays attached to the trawl net of a trawling boat. Data provided by the pair trawl is necessary for survival estimation through the final reach to the tailrace of Bonneville Dam.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 NMFS Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These proposed activities also fulfill commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp).

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/ Catherine Clark

Catherine Clark
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Motus Recruiting and Staffing, Inc.

Reviewed by: Chad Hamel

/s/Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel April 1, 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

There are two primary project site locations on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Lower Granite Dam (PIT Tagging) and Jones Beach (Collect and Validate PIT Trawl Data). Lower Granite Dam is located on the Snake River in Whitman, Washington 22 miles south of Colfax and 35 miles north of Pomeroy. Jones Beach is located on the Columbia River mainstem in Clatsop, Oregon 5 miles Northeast of Westport.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ground-disturbing activities proposed. Therefore, the proposed activities would have no potential to affect historic or cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ground-disturbing activities proposed. Therefore, proposed activities would have no effect to geology or soils in the project areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ground-disturbing or vegetation removing activities proposed. Therefore, proposed activities would utilize existing access points. No soil disturbance or disturbance of vegetation including Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plants.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary displacement of wildlife due to noise and human presence from project activities could occur. No long-term effect on wildlife or their habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: PIT tagging wild-origin and hatchery-origin anadromous salmonids is a common and wide-spread activity within the Columbia River Basin; the majority of fish tagged would be wild-origin fish.

Since these activities are requirements in the 2020 NMFS CRS BiOp and ongoing commitments under 2020 FWS CRS BiOp, NMFS annually issues a Determination of Take Memorandum describing the maximum number of individual ESA-listed fish that may be tagged in a given year. Since these activities take place in bull trout critical habitat, FWS issued a Section 10 recovery permit for PIT tagging activities at the Lower Granite Dam.

There would be no impact to adjacent waterbodies or floodplains because no ground-disturbing activities are proposed. All work would be carried out at existing facilities or at mobile PIT tagging trailers.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed activities would not occur in or near wetlands. Therefore, no impacts to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No impact to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change to land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary changes to visual quality could occur during the proposed project activities.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of emissions associated with increased vehicular use would occur during the proposed project activities.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary intermittent noise would occur during the proposed implementation.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No known hazardous materials in the proposed project areas.

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: No notification required; All work would be conducted at existing facilities or at mobile facilities accessed on existing public roads.

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

Signed: /s/Catherine Clark April 1, 2022
Catherine Clark, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Motus Recruiting and Staffing, Inc.