

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Continued Funding for PIT Tag Detection System Operations, Maintenance and Data Collection in the Columbia River Basin

Project No.: 2019-006-00 and 2018-002-00

Project Manager: B. Allen, EWP-4 and J. Lando, EWP-4

Location: Columbia, Snake and John Day Rivers and their tributaries in Idaho, Oregon and Washington

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: BPA proposes to continue funding Biomark, Inc for ongoing work on the research, monitoring and evaluation of existing Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) Tag Detection Systems (IPTDS) operations through maintenance and data collection in the Columbia River Basin. These activities are used to fulfil commitments begun under the 2008 NOAA Fisheries Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (as supplemented in 2010 and 2014) (2008 BiOp) and ongoing commitments under the 2019 NOAA Fisheries Columbia River System BiOp (2019 CRS BiOp).

The IPTDS supports programmatic evaluations of salmonid escapement and migration throughout the Snake, John Day, and upper-Columbia river basins. This project is responsible for administering remote communications (satellite, cellular, landline, or Ethernet) and data management for 93 IPTDS in the Columbia River Basin. In addition to remote communications and data management, additional routine operation and maintenance (O&M) responsibilities are conducted at 44 of the 93 IPTDS sites. Routine O&M includes a single annual visit to each IPTDS to assess site security, ensure in-stream antennas are properly armored, prosecute firmware updates, and repair, replace, or upgrade equipment as necessary. Given the large geographic area over which project IPTDS are located, the project uses a decentralized labor model. Highly trained “first-responders” are located in the upper-Columbia, Northeast Oregon, and Idaho. These first-responders have the technical training and tools to diagnose and repair common IPTDS problems and are optimally located to execute maintenance and repair with minimal travel/delay. Currently, first responders are fielded by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), Nez Perce Tribe (NPT), and Biomark, Inc. No fish are handled as part of this project.

BPA also funds the development of methodologies, designs, and models to produce salmonid inventory or assessments through the development of modeling, inventory methods and procedures. This work also develops RM&E Methods and Designs – Improve flexibility and end-user support for the Dam Branch Occupancy Model (DABOM) and produce Inventory or Assessment – Interrogation infrastructure assessment.

The ongoing work of research, monitoring and evaluation of existing PIT tag Detection System Operations described, occurs each year between April and February.

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/ Luca T. De Stefanis

Luca T. De Stefanis
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Motus

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: April 8, 2020

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

All activities would occur at either existing facilities or field sites associated with tributaries to the Columbia, Snake and John Day rivers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

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> There would be no ground disturbing activities, thus the proposed activities would not have the potential to affect historic properties or cultural resources. All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or at existing IPTDS field sites.		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> No ground disturbing activities proposed, thus the proposed activities do not have the potential to affect geology and soils. All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or at existing IPTDS field sites.		
3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> No ground disturbing or vegetation removal activities proposed. All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or at existing IPTDS associated with tributaries to the Columbia, Snake and John Day rivers in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.		
4. Wildlife (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> No ground disturbing or other activity that may affect wildlife or wildlife habitat is proposed. Field crews from 1-3 people hiking with backpacks would yield avoidance or minor disturbance through human presence of walking through the woods.		

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish**

(including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)



Explanation: This project work concentrates on In-stream IPTDS operations, maintenance and data collection. There would be no physical handling of fish to administer the installation of a PIT tag. This equipment counts fish previously tagged through other BPA contracts or via other entities in the Columbia River Basin. There would be no impact to adjacent waterbodies or floodplains because no ground disturbing activities are proposed. All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or at the existing IPTDS sites.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: No ground disturbing activities are proposed thus the action does not have the potential to impact wetlands. All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or at the existing IPTDS sites.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: No ground disturbing activities that may affect groundwater or aquifers are proposed. No ground disturbing activities are proposed thus the action does not have the potential to impact wetlands. All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or at the existing IPTDS sites.

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



Explanation: Access to field sites is on existing road networks and all activities are compatible with local land use.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: IPTDS sites have already been installed. The equipment in place at each of the sites is not a new action under the contracts funding cycles. Therefore the proposed action would not impact visual quality as the action reflects operations and maintenance.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or at the existing IPTDS sites and would have no effect on air quality. Any increase in emissions from vehicles accessing field sites would be very minor and short term.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or the existing IPTDS sites and would not result in an increase in ambient noise at PIT tagging locations.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or the existing IPTDS sites. Workers carrying IPTDS operations and maintenance activities are trained in proper IPTDS equipment management techniques. This activity is not considered hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public.

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:

- 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: No notification necessary. All work is at existing facilities and field work at IPTDS sites are accessed on existing roads and adjacent public lands.

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

Signed: /s/ Luca T. De Stefanis

Date: April 8, 2020

Luca T. De Stefanis
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Motus