

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Continued Funding for Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT) Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Program.

Project No.: 2008-00-00

Project Manager: V. Watts, EWM-4

Location: Boundary County, ID. And Pend Oreille County, WA.

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 Power Administration (BPA) proposes to continue funding the UCUT for annual, ongoing work to implement wildlife M&E by collecting data for amphibians, breeding birds and vegetation on mixed conifer forest, riparian floodplain and steppe land types. Sampling sites would be located in Usk, Washington and Bonners Ferry, Idaho near the Pend Oreille River and Kootenai River. The proposed actions goals are to understand the condition of managed lands to reference sites that represent a desired future condition through comparative M&E analysis informing future restoration strategies.

This project would implement the following activities:

1. Methods & Data Analysis:

The project would use field data to inform the web based query system to disseminate fish and wildlife data. In addition, a final draft M&E plan of future permanent sample site selection and site interval would be developed.

2. Collect Field Data:

The project would obtain information on breeding birds, amphibians and vegetation data within low elevation areas adjacent to the Pend Oreille River and Kootenai River.

- Breeding birds:

Breeding bird data would be collected during 3 separate site visits evenly spread throughout the breeding season. This effort would involve the establishment of approximately 40 permanent monitoring sites. Breeding bird surveys use point counts, so a professional birder would count all breeding birds that come across sample site areas reflecting a multitude of species such as: Western blue bird, tree swallows and robins.

- Amphibians:

Amphibian data would be collected on at least 2 sites. Additional data would be collected on potential permanent sample site locations to develop routine control sites. Amphibian surveys would use minnow traps (small mesh fabric boxes that are 12-inches by 8 inches in size) to capture Columbia spotted frog, Chorus frog and the Invasive bull frog. Observational data would be collected and the species would then be released.

- Vegetation:
Vegetation data would be collected on at least 40 sites for two different tribes.
Data would be collected via observational surveys through measuring.

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
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/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Date: May 8, 2020

Katey Grange
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: Continued Funding for Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT) Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Program.

Project Site Description

All activities would occur at approximately 40 field sites at low elevations associated with Pend Oreille River and Kootenai River.

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 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 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 sites adjacent to the Pend Oreille River and Kootenai River. There would be very minor limited impact to plants by field staff measuring the size of small plants by walking through field sites on public and or tribal lands.		
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. Amphibians would be released quickly after capture.		
5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> 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 field sites adjacent to the Pend Oreille River and Kootenai River.		

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: No ground disturbing activities are proposed thus the action does not have the potential to impact wetlands.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: No ground disturbing activities that may affect groundwater or aquifers are proposed.

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 on public roads and public lands or UCUT tribal lands.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The proposed action would not impact visual quality as the action reflects operations and maintenance. All existing equipment was installed from previous year's sites and remains as a designated M&E site. No new equipment or installation exists in the proposed actions.

10. **Air Quality**



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

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or the existing sites. Workers carrying the proposed actions of M&E activities are trained in proper 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 fish and wildlife information collected informs the development of the UCUT database (GDMS) and is available to the public. M&E field work would occur on tribal lands. All work is at existing facilities and field work at established sites that are accessed on existing roads. The tribes have an information and engagement process for tribal members of UCUT projects funded by BPA each year. This project has been reviewed by tribal members.

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: May 8, 2020
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