

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: WA Estuary MOA Tide Gate Management and Surface Water Monitoring

Project No.: 2010-070-00

Project Manager: Anne Creason- EWL - 4

Location: Pacific County, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B 1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat; B 3.3 Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to continue funding Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) in the management of the Chinook estuary tide gates and surface water monitoring activities and action effectiveness monitoring at four locations within the estuary.

The tide gates at the WDFW Chinook Estuary site at the State Route 101 crossing would be raised and lowered seasonally to improve fish passage and to restore partial hydrologic connectivity between Baker Bay and the Chinook Estuary site. A Washington Department of Ecology (WADOE) flow gauge station was previously installed at the south end of the Chinook Estuary site. This gauging station electronically monitors precipitation, flow, and water surface elevation at two locations on the Chinook River; one is located within the Riverine (non-tidal) reach and one in the tidal reach of the river. WDFW and Sea Resources, Inc. (SRI) utilize this information to monitor conditions in the Chinook Estuary site and work with local contractors to raise and lower the gates. Operation of the gates would be consistent with past water management on the parcel.

Level 3 Action Effectiveness Monitoring and Research (AEMR) in the Lower Columbia River estuary would occur at four WDFW project locations: the Chinook Estuary site, the South Unit Shillapoo Wildlife Area, the South Bachelor Island site, and the Seal Creek site. WDFW would implement action effectiveness monitoring both before and after habitat restoration activities, which would entail spatially extensive sampling of basic restoration indicators. This monitoring would include photo-points, water surface elevation, water temperature, and sediment accretion data collection. Data collection would be passive and would not require ground disturbance or the installation of new monitoring equipment.

Photos would be taken at existing photopoint locations to show pre- and post- restoration activities data collection. Hourly water surface elevation and water temperature would be collected at multiple locations within all sites. Hydrologic data, topographic and bathymetric data would be collected post-restoration to track sediment accretion and scour at project site. In addition, groundwater elevation data would be collected every 12 hours. This data would be used to assess

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

The Chinook Estuary site is located on the Chinook Wildlife Area, approximately 1500 acres in size, which is owned and operated by WDFW. The lands surrounding the wildlife area are privately owned. The wildlife area is used for various recreational activities including hunting, fishing, kayaking, and bird watching. Vegetation type is predominately reed canary grass, with scattered smaller groves of Red Alder and Spruce in some riparian zones bordering tidal channels. Wetlands on the site are currently inundated as tidal regimes fluctuate, while the tide gates are closed to provide near by private homes.

The South Unit Shillapoo site is located on the Shillapoo Wildlife Area, approximately 2000 acres in size, which is owned and operated by WDFW. Approximately 40 acres of this land is wetlands. The wildlife area is currently managed for upland bird and waterfowl hunting, with agricultural uses occurring on large portions of the wildlife area through lease agreements. Predominant crop grown on the wildlife area is corn, which is utilized for cattle feed. Vegetation type is predominantly reed canary grass with scattered Oak and Ash tree stands throughout.

The South Bachelor Island site is located in Ridgefield, Washington, at approximately 200 acres in size, which is owned by Washington Department of Natural Resources. All lands surrounding the site are a part of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, which is managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Vegetation type is predominately non-native species (scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry) and some native stands of cottonwood and ash trees.

The Seal Creek site is located in Wahkiakum, Washington on private property near SR-4. The land is historically used for cattle grazing and has been reverted to wetlands. These wetlands are approximately 40 acres in size. Vegetation is predominantly reed canary grass.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA Archeologist determined there would be no potential to affect historic properties due to the tide gate operations and monitoring activities.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Geology and soils would not be disturbed by the proposed activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no planned ground-disturbing actions and tide gate operations and the associated inundation levels (both quantity and duration) would be consistent with the past. There are no anticipated impacts to any plant species, and no ESA-listed species or habitats exist within the immediate areas of impact.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or special status wildlife species would be affected by proposed activities. Wildlife may be temporarily displaced by human presence and noise, but would likely avoid the area during implementation and return once activities end.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed fish species (Chinook, chum, Coho, and green sturgeon) and their designated critical habitats are present in the project areas, but proposed actions would not physically alter any aquatic habitat site; there would be no adverse physical changes to water bodies, floodplains, or fish from these actions. Tide gate management and monitoring activities would have no negative effect.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities would not impact or change wetlands. Tide gate operations and the associated inundation levels (both quantity and duration) would be consistent with the past and would not result in additional effects to wetlands on the site.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities would not impact or change groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities would not impact or change land use. Tide gate operations and the associated inundation levels (both quantity and duration) would be consistent with the past and would not result changes to the land or recreational use in the area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities would not impact or change visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary generation of emissions associated with increased vehicular traffic (used to access field sites) would occur as part of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary noise increases associated with increased vehicular traffic would occur during project monitoring activities.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety.

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: WDFW will work with landowners for access to private properties for monitoring activities. All other work would occur on state owned lands.

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 September 22, 2020
Catherine Clark – ECF-4 date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Motus Recruiting and Staffing, Inc.