

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: South Fork Snake River Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Recruitment and Survival Improvement

Project No.: 2007-170-00

Project Manager: Jennifer Lord, EWM-4

Location: Bonneville County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat; B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish and wildlife

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to research and monitor, collect and transport fish gametes for propagation, and operate and maintain fish trap weirs for selective fish passage on four tributaries of the South Fork Snake River (SFSR): Pine, Rainey, Burns, and Palisades creeks. The proposed actions would preserve the genetic integrity and promote growth of fluvial Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout (YCT) populations. Funding these actions would support BPA's commitments to the State of Idaho under the 2018 Columbia River Fish Accord Extension agreement, while also supporting 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.).

Specifically, activities would include:

Selective Passage: IDFG operates permanent electric and waterfall fish trap weirs on YCT spawning migration tributaries. Captured fish would be hand-sorted by phenotype. YCT would be released upstream of weirs, rainbow trout and trout-hybrids would be relocated to public stock ponds. Spawning season ranges from spring to summer. Weirs would be non-operational outside spawning season.

Research Monitoring & Evaluation (RM&E): Fish captured in the weirs would be measured for total length, scanned for Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags, up to 300 untagged YCT per weir would be tagged with PIT tags, caudal fins would be marked, and fin clips collected for genetic analysis. Electrofishing would be used to survey for YCT to collect data on weir capture efficiency, propagation success, growth, exploration range, and to evaluate restoration success. RM&E and electrofishing would occur at weirs or within 2 miles up or downstream of weirs.

YCT Propagation: During electrofishing surveys IDFG would collect wild YCT gametes from the SFSR adjacent to Rainey Creek to rear about 300,000 eyed-eggs at the Lake Henry Hatchery. At eyed-stage, eggs would be transported back to Rainey Creek and planted by

hand in eyed-egg boxes in three shallow pool areas near the weir. BPA funding is only used to collect, transport, and outplant eyed-eggs.

Weir Operation and Maintenance: Structural repairs and routine maintenance would occur as needed to include: replacing broken trap doors, repairing fish ladders, log and debris clearing, and positioning stoplogs on the weir to stabilize flow during spring runs. Structural repairs requiring substantial in-water work, such as fish ladder repairs, would be accomplished during the dry season. Existing PIT tag arrays would receive software and hardware upgrades as needed to maintain ample data collection.

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/ Lindsey Arotin

Lindsey Arotin
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Katey C. Grange</u>	<u>April 2, 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: South Fork Snake River Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout Recruitment and Survival Improvement

Project Site Description

The South Fork Snake River tributaries—Burns, Pine, Rainey, and Palisades Creeks—are located in Bonneville County, Idaho in the Swan Valley. The weirs are owned and operated by the IDFG; Burns, Pine, and Rainey Creeks weirs are on U.S. Forest Service (USFS)-managed lands and the Palisades Creek weir is on IDFG property. IDFG would conduct work throughout the entirety of the four tributaries but most activities occur within about 2 miles up or downstream of weirs. Bonneville County is surrounded by mountains, forest, and farmland with elevations ranging from 5,000 - 9,000 feet.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA has determined the proposed activities would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties. The proposed activities would not result in ground disturbance that could potentially impact archaeological resources. No modifications to existing historically built resources are proposed.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minimal ground disturbance would occur as a result of conservation management activities, including eyed-egg planting. Impact to geology and soils would be temporary and minor causing little to no effect. All weirs are accessible by vehicle and have well-defined parking and maintenance areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary vegetation disturbances could occur as a result of human presence, but no known ESA-listed, state-listed, sensitive or non-listed plant species are known to exist at the activity sites. No ground disturbances would be associated with surveillance, or weir operation and maintenance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities may cause minor, temporary disturbance to wildlife due to increased noise and vehicle traffic, and human presence. No ESA-listed, state-listed, sensitive wildlife species, or designated critical habitat are known to exist in activities locations. .

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed activities such as, electrofishing, fish surveying (to include marking and tagging), egg outplanting, and O&M would have minor and/or temporary effects to water bodies and fish; increased turbidity, aquatic habitat disturbances, increased physiological stress to aquatic life. There would be no permanent adverse physical changes to water bodies or floodplains resulting from the proposed actions. Activities with potential to effect aquatic life are part of an effort to restore the YCT, a special-status species within Idaho. There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish or other special-status species or associated habitats known to exist within or near the project site.

Notes:

- IDFG would adhere to all applicable terms and conditions identified in the following state collection permit: USFS Special Use Permit, Authorization ID: PAL80

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

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

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action does not have the potential to impact groundwater.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not impact or change land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing visual quality of the area would not be altered.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small increase in emissions would occur from vehicles entering and exiting the weir locations. However, this increase would be very minor and short term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities would generate minor, temporary increases in noise due to vehicle traffic and human presence during project activities. Operational noise would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers carrying out fish sampling activities are trained in proper tagging techniques and 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: 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: The proposed work would occur on property managed and operated by the USFS and IDFG. IDFG maintains the right to access and work on USFS property to manage fish

throughout rivers, lakes, and streams in Idaho. A renewable special use permit was granted by USFS to sample fish at fixed survey sites such as the weirs and PIT tag arrays.

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

Signed: /s/ Lindsey Arotin April 2, 2021
Lindsey Arotin, ECF - 4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist