

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership Monitoring Program (*Update to previous categorical exclusion issued on October 2, 2020*)

Project No.: 2003-007-00 and 2003-011-00

Project Manager: Anne Creason, EWL-4; Siena Lopez-Johnston, EWM-4

Location: Multiple monitoring sites throughout Clatsop County, Oregon, and Clark, Columbia, Pacific, Skamania, and Wahkiakum counties, Washington

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

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to continue funding two of the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership's (LCEP) monitoring programs – 1) the Ecosystem Monitoring Program (EMP) that tracks trends in overall conditions throughout the Lower Columbia River as reference points and 2) the Action Effectiveness Monitoring and Research (AEMR) Program which attempts to quantify changes in ecosystem conditions resulting from specific restoration actions. Funding the proposed activities fulfills ongoing commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp) and commitments specified in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp), 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.). This is an update to the CX signed on October 2, 2020 to add two additional monitoring sites under the AEMR program.

The study area of these two programs extends from the mouth of the Columbia River to Bonneville Dam. Five EMP trend sites are distributed along the estuarine-tidal freshwater gradient and are representative of the gradient of conditions that occur along the lower river: 1) Ilwaco Slough 2) Welch Island 3) Whites Island, 4) Campbell Slough, 5) Franz Lake, and 6) Cunningham Lake. AEMR post-construction data collection would occur at recently-implemented restoration sites in the Columbia River Estuary, including Wallooskee-Youngs near Astoria, OR (in support of the Cowlitz Tribe), and the Steigerwald floodplain restoration project, near Washougal, WA. Data collection for both the EMP and AEMR programs would focus on the following:

- Salmonid occurrence, composition, growth, diet, condition, and residency
- Habitat structure, including physical, biological, and chemical properties
- Food web characteristics
- Biogeochemistry for assessing hypoxia, ocean acidification, and climate change impacts.

Data collection related activities would include photo documentation, water surface elevation surveys, vegetation characterization, water sampling, zooplankton and invertebrate sampling, qualitative sediment characterization, and photo points. Existing PIT tag arrays would be operated and

maintained throughout the sampling season, as permits and conditions allow. Juvenile salmonids would also be sampled via beach seines to study size, weight, stomach contents, otoliths, and genetic analysis. Data collection and analysis would be completed by LCEP and multiple partners including National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) West Coast Region Office, NMFS' Northwest Fisheries Science Center, Columbia Land Trust (CLT), Columbia River Estuary Study Taskforce (CREST), Oregon Health and Sciences University, the University of Washington, and private contractors.

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/ Carolyn Sharp

Carolyn Sharp
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange August 23, 2021

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: Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership Monitoring Program

Project Site Description

The study area extends from the mouth of the Columbia River to the Bonneville Dam at River Mile 146. Project activities would be conducted in riparian and riverine systems at monitoring locations along this stretch of the lower Columbia River.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The actions proposed by this project would not impact historic or cultural resources. PIT tag array maintenance would involve in-kind replacement of existing modern structures.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance, and geology and soils would not be impacted.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance and no anticipated impacts to any plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance and actions would have a temporary impact to wildlife within the project area from elevated human presence during monitoring and sampling activities. There would be no effect on Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed or sensitive wildlife species.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Sampling and monitoring may temporarily disturb fish within the project area from elevated human presence during sampling activities. Federally-listed fish would be handled and sampled, and LCEP would be responsible for obtaining, adhering to the minimization

measures, and completing all reporting associated with a Section 10 permit under the Endangered Species Act that allows for direct take of Federally-listed species for scientific purposes. There would be no effect to waterbodies or floodplains.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance and activities would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance and activities would not impact or change groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Monitoring activities would not impact or change land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Monitoring activities would not impact visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Monitoring activities would not affect air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Monitoring activities would not increase ambient noise levels.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Safety regulations would be followed as necessary for the proposed activities.

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 - All work would be implemented at existing facilities or on public land. Where appropriate, LCEP would obtain permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct monitoring activities within National Wildlife Refuges.

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

Signed: /s/ Carolyn Sharp August 23, 2021
Carolyn Sharp, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist