

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Crooked River Salmon Carcass Placement Project

Project No.: 2010-086-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz, EWM - 4

Location: Idaho County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) to outplant salmon carcasses in the Crooked River on federal land in Idaho County, Idaho to increase marine derived nutrients in the ecosystem. The project would benefit Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Snake River steelhead and Columbia River bull trout, Chinook and coho salmon, and a suite of resident fishes.

The NPT would outplant 200-400 spring and summer Chinook salmon carcasses in the lower 6 miles of the Crooked River. The carcasses would be derived from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dworshak National Fish Hatchery on the Clearwater River. Carcasses would be tossed into the river by hand and spread over a span of 2 - 4 river miles. Project locations would be accessed using existing forest roads. The carcasses would be tossed into the river from the road, in areas where the river is accessible and where the road is close to the river. Placement of the carcasses would not involve entering the river. The carcasses would typically decay within a few days. The development of access or staging areas is not needed. Implementation would occur mid-August to mid-September 2024.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These actions also support the conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the CRS. Additionally, these actions support 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 (the Northwest Power Act) (16 USC (USC) 839 et seq.).

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.

Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. 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.

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Project Site Description

The project area is located within the Crooked River Watershed. The watershed and project area consist of mountainous terrain with forested vegetation interspersed with grasslands and meadows. Crooked River is a perennial tributary to the South Fork Clearwater River. Land use activities within the project area include timber harvest, mining, and camping. Intense historic timber harvest and mining practices impacted areas of aquatic habitat critical to the survival of anadromous fish and their associated marine derived nutrient contributions to the ecosystem. The area of placement would be in the lower 6 miles of river, of which is the Crooked River narrows in the south and then an open valley in the north, where the river then feeds into the South Fork Clearwater River. The slope of the river ranges from 4% in the narrow to 1.2% in the open valley.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA Archaeologist reviewed the proposed placement of salmon carcasses and determined that this activity does not have the potential to cause effects to historic or cultural resources (ID 2023 033).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No soil disturbance proposed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Carcasses would be hand thrown from a truck on existing roads into the river; no plants present/disturbed.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed Canada lynx and North American wolverine may occur within the project area. Based on the project's short duration, location outside of lynx and wolverine primary habitats, and availability of adjacent habitat for dispersal, carcass placements may affect but are not likely to adversely affect lynx or wolverine dispersing through the area. Any potential effects to these ESA-listed species are addressed in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP4) programmatic biological opinions with US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Any noise or human presence impacts to non-listed species would be limited to the immediate project sites where there would be a temporary, short duration of available habitat. No other special status wildlife species occur within the project area.

Notes:

- All actions that would have the potential to impact ESA-listed wildlife species would conform to the procedures and proscriptions contained in HIP4 programmatic biological opinions (HIP PNF 2024 084).

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed Snake River Basin steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are present in Crooked River. Any potential effects to these ESA-listed species are addressed in BPA's HIP4 programmatic biological opinions with US Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service. No separately listed Idaho state fish species have been recorded in the project areas. Carcass placements have the potential to disturb fish. There would be no long-term negative impacts to fish or their habitat. Despite the short-term effects on fish in the areas, the long-term effects associated with nutrient additions from the project on fish, floodplains, and waterbodies would be positive.

Notes:

- All actions that would have the potential to impact ESA-listed fish species would conform to the procedures and proscriptions contained in BPA's HIP4 programmatic biological opinions (HIP PNF 2024 084).

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present on the project sites.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance proposed.

8. Land Use and Specially Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur. No specially designated areas are present. Additionally, the project would not impact camping, mining, or other uses/users in the area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Visual quality may be impacted by the additional travel to project sites and salmon carcasses in the river, but impacts would be local and temporary in nature.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Air quality may be impacted by the additional travel to project sites by increased vehicle exhaust, but the impact would be local and temporary in nature.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Noise levels may be impacted by the additional travel to the project sites and human presence, but the impact would be local, temporary in nature, and only occur during regular working hours.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All applicable safety regulations would be followed during work 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: The project area is located on Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest managed lands and the proposed activities would occur according to terms and conditions for access and use of the lands.

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

Signed:

Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist