

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Bear Valley Creek Passive Integrated Transponder Tag Array Installation Project

Project No.: 2002-059-00

Project Manager: Verl Miller, EWM-4

Location: Custer 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 Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to install a Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag array within the Boise National Forest to monitor the movement of juvenile and adult salmon.

The array would be installed between July 8 and August 15, 2025. Installation includes instream and upland elements. The instream components include four antennas (3 feet wide and 20 feet long) installed flush with the streambed to maintain the natural profile and anchored to the streambed. The antenna arrays are connected to the controller and power using conduit-encased cables trenched (4 inches wide and 4 to 8 inches deep) into the streambed and streambank. The master controller and satellite modem system for remote data transmission, environmental probes for data monitoring are housed in a 36-inch-long, 30-inch-wide steel enclosure, positioned outside the floodplain. Power for the system would be provided via solar panels, a 260AH battery system, and a hybrid thermoelectric generator placed next to the master controller. The work would be completed with hand tools; access and staging would be along the roadside.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp) and the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp). These actions also support BPA's commitments to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as amended, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System 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.*).

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.102 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; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024; 90 FR 29676, July 3, 2025 [Interim Final Rule]) and *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures* (dated June 30, 2025), BPA has determined the following:

- 1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021;
- 2) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion; and
- 3) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal (see attached Environmental Evaluation).

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.¹

Israel Duran
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

¹ BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to the interim final rule to revise DOE NEPA regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021 and NEPA Implementing Procedures (dated June 30, 2025), to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

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: Bear Valley Creek Passive Integrated Transponder Tag Array Installation Project

Project Site Description

Installation would occur in Bear Valley Creek, about 25 miles northeast of Stanley, in Custer County, Idaho on US Forest Service-managed property within the Boise National Forest. The creek supports a diverse array of native fishes; however, past and current land management activities (i.e. timber harvesting and dredge mining) have impacted areas critical to their survival. The Yankee Fork Gold Dredge is nearby and there are camping, mining, trails, other recreational activities and interests within a several mile radius.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: USFS Boise National Forest issued a special use permit for the Fir Creek Campground Weir and consulted with Idaho SHPO for Section 106 in 2010 (Determination of Significance and Effect for BS-10-2897). In May 2025, USFS BNF Heritage Program Manager Virginia Clifton reviewed the proposed FY25 PIT array and determined the work would be consistent with the 2010 consultation and finding of no effect on historic properties (none present). On May 16, 2025, BPA acknowledged USFS as lead federal agency for 106 and their determination review.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term soil disturbance from instream antenna placement and trenching for cables. All work would be done with hand tools to minimize impacts. The control box for the PIT tag array would sit atop the ground, resulting in no soil disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) is Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed as threatened and could potentially be present within the Project area (US Fish and Wildlife Service Information for Planning and Consultation [IPaC], 2025). However, the area has been highly impacted due to previous mining efforts and suitable habitat is not present. No other Federal or State special-status plant species are within the project sites. Streamside equipment may require minor disturbance to nearby plants that are hindering installation, but no broad-scale vegetation removal is proposed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Project area has the potential to contain ESA-listed Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) and their critical habitats are present within Custer County (IPaC, 2025) but are not known to exist within the Project area. The monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*) are proposed for ESA listing and may be in the Project area, but there is no designated critical habitat for either species. No other Federal or State special-status species or habitat are known to exist on the project site; therefore, there would be no impact from the installation of the PIT tag array and its associated parts. Wildlife may be temporarily displaced by construction noise during implementation or maintenance but would return to the project area once after construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Endangered Species Act-listed fish species Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Snake River steelhead (*O. mykiss*), their critical habitats, and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are present. Minor, short-term disturbance to fish may occur during array installation. The amount of sediment displacement is low and the reconstructed instream environment would be recolonized by fish and other aquatic organisms in a matter of hours to days. Project-related impacts to ESA-listed species are addressed in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinions with NMFS and USFWS. The array would be installed with best management practices designed to minimize the severity and duration of temporary water quality impacts in accordance with the conditions of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and State of Idaho's joint Nationwide Permit 27 for Aquatic Habitat Restoration, Establishment, and Enhancement Activities. No action proposed would permanently physically alter any aquatic habitat on site. There would be no adverse physical changes to water bodies, floodplains, or fish resulting from the proposed action. In the long term, the array would be beneficial by collecting fish, including ESA-listed fish, data to monitor the movement of juveniles and adults.

Notes:

- Shoshone-Bannock Tribes would adhere to the HIP and NWP27 Terms and Conditions and Conservation Measures during installation.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Due to the incised/entrenched nature of the existing area there is a narrow riparian fringe and no wetlands; thus, the action does not have the potential to impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Only minor ground-disturbing activities are proposed and the actions would not result in an increase in groundwater use. The work would not change the hydrological conditions and, therefore, would not affect groundwater recharge.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access to field sites is on existing road networks and all activities are compatible with local land use. Land use would not change or be interrupted. The project is not located in a specially-designated area or Wild and Scenic River.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as work zone conditions, vehicles, and equipment. Therefore, the proposed action would not have a permanent impact on visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the project site would be very minor and short-term during construction. A negligible amount of temporary dust and vehicle emissions could be generated during project activities. Emissions and dust levels would return to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short-term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. Personnel are trained in proper equipment management techniques, and all applicable safety regulations would be followed. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions and no CERCLA sites within the project area.

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 actions are proposed by the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to be implemented within the Boise National Forest property. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe has coordinated with the US Forest Service.

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

Signed:

Israel Duran
Environmental Protection Specialist