

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Freshwater Mussel and White Sturgeon Monitoring

Location: Multiple counties in Oregon and Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 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 fund the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (Warm Springs Tribe), the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to conduct research activities related to the restoration of salmon and other native fish populations.

Freshwater Mussel Inventory: The Warm Springs Tribe proposes to conduct foot surveys to provide an inclusive inventory of freshwater mussels on reservation streams with a focus in the Warm Springs and Beaver watersheds within the bounds of the Warm Springs Reservation. These streams include Warm Springs River, South Fork Warm Springs River, Beaver Creek, and Mill Creek. Qualitative sampling protocol would use shell midden inventories and instream longitudinal surveys for species identification and location information. The tribe holds National Marine Fisheries Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service permits under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that cover incidental disturbance of any ESA-listed species in the waterbodies that are identified for the mussel surveys.

Lower Columbia River White Sturgeon Monitoring: WDFW and ODFW propose a 5-year study to investigate white sturgeon recruitment declines in the lower Columbia River, below Bonneville Dam. WDFW would evaluate the presence and number of adult sturgeon (more than 6 feet in length) aggregating within the spawning area below Bonneville Dam in the May – July spawning window. WDFW would use side-scan sonar to determine presence, and sample adult sturgeon to assess condition, sex-ratios, and reproductive stage of maturity. ODFW would conduct egg mat surveys within the spawning area to evaluate the presence of fertilized eggs, stage of embryonic development and estimate the number of spawning events. The eggs would also be measured for their thiamine concentrations to support studies for lowered embryo survival.

Funding for these actions would support projects that contribute to the restoration of salmon and other native fish populations.

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

Carolyn A. Sharp
Supervisory 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: Freshwater Mussel and White Sturgeon Monitoring

Project Site Description

The Lower Columbia River is classified as the area of the Columbia River downstream of Bonneville Dam, or the lower 146 miles of the river. It serves as designated critical habitat for various ESA-listed fish species, in particular anadromous salmonids which migrate through the lower Columbia to reach the ocean.

Beaver Creek and Warm Springs Creek are tributaries to the Warm Springs River and are located within the boundaries of the Warm Springs Reservation in north-central Oregon. They serve as a main spawning tributary for redband trout, steelhead, and fall and spring Chinook salmon. The Warm Springs is a protected stream with several regulations that vary from year to year. It is closed to fishing for all non-tribal members and in certain cases tribal members as well.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance or construction activities; therefore, there is no potential to cause effects to historic and cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed actions. Therefore, the proposed actions would not impact geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions do not include any vegetation management, ground disturbance, or work that would remove or substantially impact vegetation. Therefore, there is no potential to affect plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Personnel may displace wildlife during survey and monitoring activities due to elevated noise and human presence, but this would be temporary. There would be no actions that would occur on upland areas; therefore, there would be little effect on wildlife and no effect to wildlife habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Several species of ESA-listed fish occur in the affected areas; actions would have no effect or would have a small effect to fish species. The effects to waterbodies would be minimal, limited to temporary, low-level turbidity associated with walking in rivers or streams. In-stream work would cause brief, temporary disturbance to ESA-listed fish, but would not cause injury or death. The Warm Springs Tribe, ODFW, and WDFW would maintain the appropriate scientific research permits, including ESA permits, associated with their activities and would adhere to conditions of the permits that would avoid or substantially limit the potential for effects on ESA-listed species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed actions. Therefore, the proposed actions would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance or water withdrawal would occur as a result of the proposed actions. Therefore, the proposed actions would not impact groundwater and aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change in land use and no impact to specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change in visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to air quality from dust and exhaust due to boat or vehicle use for site access. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary noise could increase at field sites from vehicle, boat, and equipment use and human presence. However, these actions would be consistent with current activities typical of the field sites. There would be no permanent change in ambient noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use water safety best practices.

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 landowner notification, involvement, or coordination would be required as all field sites would likely be accessed via existing roads and public lands. The individual project sponsors would coordinate site access with private landowners, if applicable.

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

Signed:

Carolyn A. Sharp
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist