

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Laboratory Research on Non-Native Fish Species

**Location:** Multiple locations

**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 Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho (Nez Perce Tribe) and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to conduct lab-based research activities on non-native fish species to inform the restoration of salmon and other native fish populations.

**DNA-based Diet Analysis of Smallmouth Bass and Walleye:** WDFW proposes to study the diet of fish species that are a predation threat to juvenile salmonids using DNA-based tools. Controlled feeding trials would be conducted in a mobile laboratory at the Ringold Spring Hatchery to understand how different environmental and biological factors influence the detection of prey by the smallmouth bass and walleye. All prey used in the trials would be from non-Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species. Walleye and smallmouth bass would be collected as part of other ongoing research activities on the Columba River and used for these additional analyses. The stomach contents of the bass and walleye would be dissected and analyzed to quantify the effects of factors on predator digestion rates.

**American Shad Carcass Surrogate Stability Study:** Shad is an introduced species that competes against salmon smolts in the Columbia River for food, and shad crowds salmon out of fish ladders during migration. The Nez Perce Tribe proposes to conduct a two-year lab-based study to determine if American shad, a non-native fish species, can be used as a replacement to native fish for nutrient enhancement efforts (placement of fish carcasses in a stream to allow them to decompose and return nutrients to the stream ecosystem) in salmon spawning habitat. Shad carcasses would be sourced from the existing operational fish traps at Bonneville or Lower Granite Dam where shad are encountered as bycatch. The study would assess risks, such as the introduction of pathogens and enzymes from placed carcasses in the stream environment and recommend carcass treatment actions to address those risks. Any collection activities that may have an effect on ESA-listed species would have the appropriate permits from USFWS and NMFS and would be conducted in accordance with the terms and conditions of the permits.

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.<sup>1</sup>

Carolyn A. Sharp  
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

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<sup>1</sup> 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:** Laboratory Research on Non-Native Fish Species

## **Project Site Description**

Laboratory trials would be conducted within existing laboratory facilities on non-native fish species. The fish used in these lab trials would be collected from the Columbia River. Smallmouth bass, walleye and American shad were introduced to the Columbia River between the 1870's and the 1960's, all for sport fishing. The Columbia River has the largest American shad run in the Pacific Northwest. Habitat change is the major factor causing the expanded distribution and increased abundance of these species.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance or structural modifications would occur as a result of the proposed actions. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no potential to affect 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 would not require any tree or vegetation removal or management and would not result in adverse modification to suitable protected plant habitats. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no effect on special-status plant species or habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Personnel may displace wildlife during fish collection 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: The fish species that would be the subject of the lab-based research activities are non-native/introduced fish species. ESA-listed Chinook, steelhead and bull trout may be encountered or handled in the course of collecting specimens used for the research on the Columbia River. Other fish encountered during trapping would likely be bass, pikeminnow, suckers, and sculpins. Collection activities that may have an effect on ESA-listed species would have the appropriate ESA permits from NMFS and USFWS and would be conducted in accordance with the terms and conditions of the permits. Waterbodies and floodplains would not be affected by the actions.

## **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 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 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 and equipment use and human presence. However, these actions would be consistent with current activities typical of the field sites. All other proposed project activities would occur indoors at existing laboratory facilities. There would be no permanent change in ambient noise.

## **12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous. All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety, and there would be no impact to general public health or safety.

### **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 work would be implemented on property or sites that are owned or managed by the entities conducting the research or on public waterways.

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