

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Nez Perce Tribe Use of Snake River Salmonids for Nutrient Enhancement and Cryopreservation

Location: Multiple counties in the Snake River Basin in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 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 of Idaho (Nez Perce Tribe) to use fish produced through Snake River tribal fishery programs for salmon restoration purposes.

Nutrient Enhancement: BPA would provide funds to the Nez Perce Tribe to place the carcasses of up to 4,200 Snake River salmon and steelhead harvested by Nez Perce tribal members for personal consumption back into the rivers to provide marine derived nutrients to improve watershed health. Fish carcasses would come from tribal salmon and steelhead fisheries (non-BPA funded subsistence distributions or spawned out fish from broodstock activities from Snake River Hatcheries [or a combination]) and shad collected from mainstem dams as part of other ongoing research and monitoring efforts. Fish from subsistence distribution would be purchased from the fishers, processed, and the edible portions distributed to the tribal community. The fish carcasses would then be stored and distributed in salmon streams. Outplanting hatchery broodstock carcasses is an established practice for most hatcheries in the Snake River basin. Protocols are described in Hatchery Genetic Management Plans (HGMPs) and Annual Operating Plans (AOP) which describe handling methods for fish health and handling fish exposed to chemical treatments.

Cryopreservation: A salmon genetic material (germplasm) repository was developed in the 1990s to provide long-term storage of frozen reproductive cells (cryopreserved gametes) from hatchery and natural populations of Endangered Species Act-listed stocks of Snake River Chinook salmon and steelhead. This repository could then be used to reconstruct the genetic heritage of some number of populations that may be lost due to local extirpation. At that time, only male gametes could be cryopreserved. This project would a) maintain and expand the male gamete inventory; and b) establish a stem cell repository that includes maternal genetics. Also, stem cells from juvenile Chinook salmon and steelhead would be collected during planned parr/presmolt tagging activities.

This project would also fund the operation and maintenance of cryogenic freezers at Washington State University and United States Department of Agriculture - National Animal Germplasm Program repository (USDA-NAGP), including replacement of aging equipment.

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: Nez Perce Tribe Use of Snake River Salmonids for Nutrient Enhancement and Cryopreservation

Project Site Description

The Snake River Basin is a mountainous region in the Pacific Northwest that includes the Snake River and its tributaries. The Snake River is the largest tributary of the Columbia River and is a major source of irrigation water for crops and is also used for hydropower generation, recreation, including salmon fishing and boating and other purposes. Salmon and steelhead hatchery programs in the Snake River Basin release 33 million spring/summer and fall Chinook salmon, coho salmon, sockeye salmon, and steelhead annually. Hatchery programs are operated by the states and tribes located in the area and are funded by several federal agencies.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance, building modifications or construction activities associated with the proposed 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 fish placement activities due to elevated human presence, but this would be temporary. There would be no actions that would occur on upland areas; therefore, there would be little negative effect on wildlife and no effect to wildlife habitat. In the long term, nutrient enhancement would promote a long-term beneficial effect to wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The fish obtained from the tribal fishery would include hatchery-origin and natural-origin fish. ESA-listed fish may be encountered or handled in the course of collecting fish used for project activities on the Snake River and its tributaries. The Nez Perce Tribe has authorization for their actions under a series of National Marine Fisheries Service Section 4(d) and Section 10 permits for the take of ESA-listed Snake River spring and summer chinook salmon and summer steelhead. These permits are associated with several studies that are part of ongoing efforts to monitor the status of ESA-listed species in the Snake River basin, hatchery production, and fisheries management actions. In the long term, enhanced nutrients in the waterbodies would enhance and be beneficial to fish and aquatic organisms.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the hydrology within the project area. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur.

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: The underlying land use would not change and no impact to specially-designed areas would occur as a result of this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no new construction or habitat modification activities proposed. As a result, there would be no changes to visual quality from these actions.

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 water safety best management practices to protect worker health and safety, and there would be no

general public health and safety risk. Replaced freezers would be disposed of at an appropriate, licensed recycling or disposal facility.

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 activities would take place on the locations or facilities already affiliated with the Nez Perce Tribe's hatchery programs and fishery management activities, conducted by Nez Perce Department of Fisheries Resource Management staff.

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