

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Piscivorous Fish Status and Trend Monitoring in the Columbia River Upstream of McNary Dam.

**Project No.:** 2020-001-00

**Project Manager:** Josh Ashline

**Location:** Benton, Walla Walla, Franklin, WA; Murrow, Umatilla, OR

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B3.1 Site characterization and environmental monitoring; B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources

**Description of the Proposed Action:** BPA is proposing to fund the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to conduct research intended to analyze the temporal and spatial predator-prey overlap and consequential predatory impacts on juvenile anadromous salmonids in the Columbia River. WDFW would monitor predator densities by habitat type in order to provide a more detailed geographical distribution, which could assist in modeling impacts of potential range expansion under future scenarios.

Between April and June each year WDFW would sample from the Snake River confluence to the Priest Rapids tailrace. The objectives of this research are to a) estimate predatory fish (Northern pike minnow, smallmouth bass, and walleye) abundance and trends; b) evaluate methods including electroshocking, gillnets, and angling to reduce predator abundance in the McNary Pool; and c) and determine spawning locations / habitat of predatory fish. Research may result in future proposed actions to reduce spawning success or predatory removal. Any future proposals for BPA funding would be undergo environmental compliance, including NEPA analysis, when identified.

Predatory fishes would be collected by boat electrofishing at randomly selected sites along the shoreline at night. Electrofisher settings would be pulsed direct current (DC) at 60 pulses per second, 40% power, and low voltage range (50-500 V). During sampling, predator fishes would be netted and placed in a 280 Liter live-well and held for a maximum of 20 minutes before fish processing.

All predators greater than 60 mm would be tagged with a passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag. Tagged fish would be released within the site they were caught.

The Proposed Action fulfills commitments under the 2020 NMFS Columbia River System Biological Opinion and would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also support ongoing efforts to mitigate for the 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 (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. <sup>1</sup>

Ted Gresh  
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:** Piscivorous Fish Status and Trend Monitoring in the Columbia River Upstream of McNary Dam

## **Project Site Description**

Project activities would occur in the Columbia River between the mouth of the Snake River and Priest Rapids Dam, a distance of approximately 135 kilometers (80 miles). The majority of the work would be focused on the lower portion of this area, between the mouth of the Yakima River and the Snake River, a distance of approximately 40 kilometers (24 miles). The lower portion of the study area is considered part of the reservoir behind McNary Dam and is bordered on both sides by heavy urban development of the cities of Richland, Pasco, and Kennewick, WA. The upper portion, moving upstream, transitions into what is called the Hanford Reach and is the only remaining free-flowing portion of the Columbia River in the United States.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All activities would be on the water so no ground disturbance or alterations to existing structures would occur. Therefore, actions proposed by this project would not impact historic or cultural resources.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All activities would be on the water so no ground disturbance would occur. Therefore, geology and soils would not be impacted by the proposed activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Because all activities would occur on the water, no plants would be impacted.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All activities would occur on the water. Therefore, wildlife would not be impacted by the proposed activities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: This project work would use electrofishing along shorelines of the Columbia River, within the McNary Pool (behind McNary Dam) to determine spawning locations and habitat

uses of predatory fish. Electrofishing would be conducted in accordance with NMFS current electrofishing guidelines and target piscivorous fishes. For the targeted fish, there would be brief physical handling to take their length and weight.

Because of the likely presence of ESA-listed salmon and steelhead during these activities the National Marine Fisheries Service completed a biological opinion (WCRO-2024-00840) along with an Incidental Take Statement for the project on May 13, 2024. Because of the timing and location of these activities, BPA made a no effect determination for bull trout.

There would be no impact to adjacent waterbodies or floodplains because no ground disturbing activities are proposed. All surveys would be done by boat.

Notes:

- Survey timing, warmer water temperatures and limiting sampling to shallow shoreline sections greatly limits the number of resident and anadromous salmonids encountered. If adult fish or juveniles are encountered, the electro shocker would power off and move away before resuming sampling.
- Salmonids would not be dip netted by the netting crew.
- No sampling would occur when water temperatures exceed 18 degrees Celsius.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbing activities are proposed thus the action does not have the potential to impact wetlands. All work would be carried out from a boat.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbing activities that may affect groundwater or aquifers are proposed.

## **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access to the Columbia River would be on existing road networks and all activities are compatible with local land use.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project activities would not result in any changes to the existing landscape. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact visual quality.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be carried out from the river and would have no effect on air quality. Any increase in emissions from vehicles or the operation of boats would be minor and short term.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be carried out on the water and the operation of boats would not result in an increase in ambient noise.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers operating boats and/or conducting electrofishing activities are trained in proper equipment management techniques. This activity is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public.

### **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 would occur entirely on the Columbia River and use existing public boat ramps for river access.

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

Signed:

Ted Gresh, ECF-4  
Environmental Protection Specialist