

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Orofino Creek Steelhead Genetic Assessment

Project No.: 2008-604-00

Project Manager: Matthew Schwartz, EWM - 4

Location: Clearwater County, ID

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat; B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish and wildlife

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund Trout Unlimited (TU) to collect and analyze genetic samples of juvenile steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) in Orofino Creek to determine if fish present in the creek have anadromous influence. The results of the proposed work would help inform fish passage and habitat restoration projects in Orofino Creek to support Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead.

TU would work in partnership with the Nez Perce Tribe to collect juvenile steelhead using electrofishing and angling sampling methods. A backpack electrofisher would be operated instream per National Marine Fisheries Service guidance. Angling would occur if electrofishing methods are not successful and would be implemented from the banks of the creek. Work would occur in the fall and focus on three reaches of Orofino Creek located above and below two cascades at river kilometers (RKM) 8 and 31. Crews would sample at various points along each reach. A fin clip would be taken from collected juvenile steelhead and preserved for subsequent genetic analysis. Fish would be released back into Orofino Creek after samples were taken. Preserved samples would be sent to the Eagle Fish Genetics Lab in Eagle, Idaho, for genetic analysis.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). These actions also support BPA's commitments to the State of Idaho 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

Jacquelyn Schei
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: Orofino Creek Steelhead Genetic Assessment

Project Site Description

Orofino Creek is a tributary of the Clearwater River and is bordered by a mixture of state, federal, and private lands. The confluence of the Clearwater and Orofino Creek is at the City of Orofino in Clearwater County, Idaho. The Orofino Creek watershed is in the Lower Clearwater Canyon ecoregion characterized by deep canyons that are lower, drier, and warmer. Orofino Creek contains miles of designated critical habitat for steelhead, but there are two potential barriers (cascades) to anadromous fish in Orofino Creek at RKM 8 and RKM 31. However, there are reports of steelhead successfully navigating the cascades and reports from Tribal elders historically fishing for and catching steelhead upstream of both barriers. The lower stretch of Orofino Creek flows through an urban area, along the City of Orofino. The upper stretches flow through a combination of grazing land and forests.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: This project does not involve ground disturbance of any kind. There is no potential to affect cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: This project does not involve ground disturbance of any kind. There is no potential to affect geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tools lists Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), ESA-listed Threatened, as having the potential to be in the project area; however, there is no designated critical habitat and no documentation of species presence in the project area. Work would occur along the banks or instream, which is not habitat for the Spalding's catchfly (typically present in grasslands and not in the riparian area or stream). Therefore, there is no potential to affect ESA-listed plant communities. There are no state special-status plant species documented in the project area. The proposed action does not include any vegetation management, ground disturbance, or actions that would impact vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: IPaC lists the North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), ESA-listed Threatened, as having the potential to be in the project area. In addition, IPaC lists the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), ESA-proposed Threatened, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee

(*Bombus suckleyi*), ESA-proposed Endangered, as having the potential to be present in the project area. There are no critical habitats for ESA-listed or proposed species in the project area and no confirmed presence of any of the species in the project area. Therefore, there is no potential to affect ESA-listed wildlife.

There would be temporary disturbance and displacement of wildlife in the immediate area of the proposed actions due to noise and human presence. However, the actions are short-term (hours/days), and habitat would not be altered (no ground or vegetation disturbance). There would be no long-term effect on wildlife or their habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed actions would not change the existing conditions of water bodies or floodplains and would have no impact on them. Snake River Basin steelhead and their designated critical habitat are present in Orofino Creek. There are no other federally-listed or state special-status fish species in the project area. Fish sampling activities would be conducted in accordance with a Section 10 scientific research permit issued by NMFS (Permit Number 1339-6R, expiration December 31, 2026) to the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, of which the Nez Perce Tribe is a member, and following all terms and conditions of that permit.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not take place within or around wetlands, and therefore, there is no potential to affect wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No groundwater withdrawal and no discharge of pollutants would occur. There would be no effect on groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no changes to land use or impacts to specially-designated areas, and no potential to affect land use or specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Occupancy of the site by vehicles and people may temporarily intrude on what would otherwise be a natural landscape for several hours over the course of multiple days. There would be no change to the vegetation or landform, no construction of new structures, and thus, no change to visual quality in the long term.

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 when crews access sites for sampling. Air quality would return to normal conditions immediately once crews left.

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 public. Proposed actions working in and around water pose some risk to crew health and safety. All actions are standard and customary fisheries management activities that would follow accepted practices that ensure safe working conditions and would mitigate for the risks inherent in outdoor work and work on the water (gloves and boots in the woods, protective gear when electrofishing, etc.).

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: TU would access Orofino Creek mainly through state and federal public lands and have coordinated with staff in these agencies about the project. TU may need to access private timber company land that is open for public access to get to some parts of Orofino Creek and would coordinate with staff at the company if this occurs.

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

Signed:

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist