Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Spokane Tribe Inland Lake and Stream Monitoring

Project No.: 2024-003-00

Project Manager: Carlos Matthew, EWU-4

Location: Stevens and Lincoln counties, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish and wildlife

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Spokane Tribe of Indians (Spokane Tribe) to perform routine research, monitoring, and evaluation (RME) activities on inland lakes and streams on Spokane Tribe Reservation lands. Data from these activities would be used to develop management plans for enhancement, protection, restoration and maintenance of watersheds as well as the resident fish and North American beaver (*Castor canadensis*) that they support. Funding supports BPA's commitments to the Spokane Tribe 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 main stem 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.).

BPA proposes to fund the following types of RME actions that would be covered under this CX. For each RME activity, the sampling would be conducted four times per year, with one visit in each season (fall, winter, spring, and summer). All equipment would be cleaned and calibrated before being used in the field. Equipment such as boats would be maintained throughout the year, including cleaning and storing drained and dry in between uses to reduce the spread of invasive species or disease.

Lake Water Quality Sampling: Each quarterly sampling period would take approximately one full day to visit all inland tribal lakes. Sites would be accessed during daylight hours via existing tribal boat launches. Sampling would generally be completed from boat or shoreline without entering the water; field crews may enter the stream, if required. Field crews would temporarily place field measurement devices into the water column to record conditions such as temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, nutrient levels.

Lake Zooplankton Sampling: Each quarterly sampling period would take approximately one full day to visit all inland tribal lakes. Sites would be accessed during daylight hours via existing tribal boat launches. Sampling would generally be completed from boat or shoreline without entering the water; field crews may enter the stream, if required. Tow nets would be used to collect zooplankton from the water column and samples would be preserved in formaldehyde for later identification in a laboratory setting.

Stream Water Quality Sampling: Each quarterly sampling period would take approximately two full days to visit all tribal streams. Most sampling sites are near the confluence and near a road crossing. Sampling would be conducted during daylight hours and would generally be completed from the stream bank without entering the water; field crews may enter the stream, if required. Field crews would temporarily place field measurement devices into the water column to record conditions such as temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, nutrient levels.

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]

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Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

KATEY GRANGE

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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 Evaluation

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: Spokane Tribe Inland Lake and Stream Monitoring

Project Site Description

The current Spokane Indian Reservation, roughly 150,000 acres, is located in northeastern Washington state, headquartered at Wellpinit. The reservation is located almost entirely in Stevens County, with a very small portion in Lincoln County. The lands are characteristic of the arid montane area of the northern Columbia Basin, transitioning to the Okanagon highlands to the north. There are over 450 miles of stream and rivers within its boundaries, including over 150 miles of perennial streams; the Columbia River and one of its tributaries, the Spokane River, flow into various other large and small tributaries. In addition to numerous wetlands and ponds, there are four major inland lakes: Benjamin Lake (13 acres), Mathews Lake (3 acres), McCoy Lake (40 acres), and Turtle Lake (12 acres). Habitats present including grassland-sagebrush shrub steppe and riparian areas along the waterways and uplands, with a Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) zone at higher elevations and ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*) zones at lower elevations. Land use includes large expanses where new development is restricted, and residential areas are generally small, scattered, and low-intensity. Within the upland forests, a combination of active livestock grazing and logging activities can be found. Agricultural use is present in the valleys, and there are also active gravel/sand extraction areas within the reservation boundaries. Some of the reservation lands have been protected as wildlife mitigation areas, where no non-salvage logging can occur and entry is restricted during winter range and fawning periods. Tribal inland lakes and streams are utilized heavily for subsistence, recreation, and cultural purposes.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would be limited to biological/environmental sampling. Activities would typically occur within streams and lakes and would not result in ground disturbance that could potentially impact archaeological resources. No modifications to existing built historic resources are proposed. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties.

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 or 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. Limited disturbance could occur from trampling of plants or habitats, if

present. However, the proposed actions would be temporary and the net effect of these actions would be similar to those associated with routine events and processes that commonly occur (e.g., large wildlife walking up to a stream, human recreation). Undesirable or noxious weed infestation occurs in scattered areas across the reservation; best management practices would reduce the likelihood of additional spread from proposed actions. In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), BPA utilized the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool in September 2025, which listed the federally-threatened Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), as a potentially-present species; no designated critical habitat is present. This small, perennial herb is generally found in dry upland prairies and unlikely to occur within the proposed action areas around inland lakes and streams. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no effect on special-status species or habitats that may be in project areas and would not result in long-term impact to other plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are many wildlife species present throughout the reservation, including large mammals like deer, elk, moose, bear, and cougar, and important species for hunting like waterfowl and upland game species. Per the USFWS IPAC tool, the list of ESA-listed threatened or endangered species is limited to the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). While suitable habitat is potentially present at some of the field sites, the yellow-billed cuckoo is functionally extinct in the state of Washington, with no known occurrences near the project area. Thus, the species are unlikely to occur near the project area and the proposed actions are unlikely to have any effect. Two proposed species, the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), also have the potential to occur and may be affected by proposed actions through trampling of host plants; however, the project is unlikely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species. Gray wolf, which are federally-delisted but still considered threatened by the state, are known to occur in the vicinity.

Limited disturbance of normal wildlife behavior could occur from elevated noise and human presence at the various field sites. However, the proposed actions would be temporary (no more than a few hours at each site) and the net effect of these actions would be similar to those associated with routine events and processes that commonly occur (e.g., large wildlife walking up to a stream, human recreation). Wildlife species that could be present in the area would likely be accustomed to this level of activity. The proposed actions would not result in adverse modification to any suitable protected species habitat. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no effect on special-status species or habitats that may be in project areas and would not result in long-term impact to other wildlife species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Streams of the Blue Creek, Tshimikin Creek, and Spokane River watersheds contain many fish species, including rainbow trout (*Salmo gairdneri*), brown trout (*Salmo trutta*), brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*), various sucker species (*Catostomus* spp.), speckled dace (*Rhinichthus osculus*), and redside shiner (*Richardsonius balteatus*). Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), a federally listed threatened species, has been observed at the mouth of Blue Creek. However, the species has not been documented within the boundaries of the reservation since the 1980's, and they are not known to occur in the section of Blue Creek designated for sampling. Even if present, proposed actions are very limited in duration and intensity. There are no other special-status fish species currently known to occur within the field sites. Due to the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam, anadromous runs (salmon, lamprey, and steelhead) are not currently present in the vicinity.

In-water sample and data collection could disturb stream or lakebed sediment, which would temporarily increase turbidity in a limited area. Following completion of the proposed actions, suspended sediments would resettle, and turbidity would quickly return to pre-existing conditions. The net effect of these actions would be similar to those associated with routine events and processes that commonly occur in streams (e.g., large wildlife walking in a streambed, human recreation). No ground disturbance within floodplains would occur as a result of the proposed actions. Therefore, the proposed actions would have no effect on floodplains or special status fish species or habitat and would not result in long-term impact to water bodies or other fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some proposed activities (e.g., accessing streams and boat launch sites) could take place within or near wetlands. However, 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 any 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: Minor and temporary dust and emissions could increase in the local area from vehicle and equipment use. However, these actions would be consistent with current land use activities typical of the field sites. There would be no permanent change in air quality.

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 land use 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: Formaldehyde used in the zooplankton sampling is a known carcinogen. However, individuals carrying out the proposed actions would be trained in proper techniques and use of all equipment and chemicals, including proper waste handling rules. Therefore, the

project would not create conditions that would increase risk to human health and safety and no impacts are expected as a result of the proposed actions.

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 on land owned by the Spokane Tribe. No coordination or outreach would be required.

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

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