

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Upper and Middle Fork John Day Effectiveness Monitoring

Project No.: 2007-397-00

Project Manager: Allan Whiting, EWL-4

Location: Grant County, Oregon

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 Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon (CTWS) to conduct biological and environmental field monitoring activities at multiple locations in Grant County, Oregon. The monitoring would involve collecting data to document pre-implementation conditions at sites of planned fish and wildlife habitat restoration projects and to evaluate the effectiveness of constructed restoration projects. The proposed monitoring would occur at sites on the Upper John Day River, Middle Fork John Day River, and tributary streams.

CTWS has constructed a number of projects in the Upper and Middle Fork John Day watersheds aimed at improving stream and riparian habitat conditions for fish and wildlife, and additional projects are planned. Restoration goals and objectives are specific to each project, but the projects generally target addressing problems of reduced habitat quality and complexity, altered hydrology, and degraded water quality (e.g., water temperature). Fish species that benefit from such projects include Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Mid-Columbia River (MCR) steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), and Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*).

The proposed monitoring includes the following activities:

- Stream Habitat Surveys: Surveys involve walking stream segments and visually observing and estimating, or measuring with a tape, indicators of habitat conditions such as pool length and depth and large wood abundance. Surface gravel counts on riffles may also be performed to estimate grain size and track changes over time.
- Vegetation Surveys: Visual observations would be made to describe vegetation conditions including species assemblages, relative proportion of different plant forms, prevalence of woody-dominated vegetation, indicators of wetland species, and localized survival of plantings.
- Topographic Surveys: Longitudinal profiles of the stream channel thalweg would be surveyed to measure bed elevation and track channel depth changes over time. Surveys would be completed using global positioning system equipment (GPS).

- **Streamflow Monitoring:** Stream flows would be recorded with field meters or gauges that measure stream velocity in locations of known cross-sectional area. BPA funding of CTWS's monitoring program would also support U.S. Geological Survey's operation and maintenance of three streamflow gauges in the Upper and Middle Fork John Day rivers.
- **Stream Temperature Monitoring:** Data would be collected using stream temperature loggers maintained in place with steel cable attached to a soil anchor, or in some instances by being fixed to a stationary object such as a tree or boulder. Temperature loggers could be deployed seasonally or left in place year-round.
- **Groundwater Monitoring:** Water level data would be collected using loggers with pressure sensors installed within groundwater monitoring wells.
- **Photopoint Monitoring:** Photographs would be taken from the ground or from drones to capture images and track site conditions at specific locations over time.
- **Snorkel Surveys:** Snorkel surveys would involve one or two snorkelers observing and recording fish species and life stages or mussel presence in specified stream segments. Fish would not be handled as part of these surveys.
- **Spawning Surveys:** Surveyors would walk along stream survey areas, visually observing and noting locations of live adults and redds, and collecting tissue samples from carcasses. Live fish would not be handled as part of these surveys.
- **Juvenile Salmon Tagging:** Juvenile Chinook salmon would be captured by snorkel-herding the fish into seine nets, or by electroshocking, and placing them into buckets. Captured parr would be anesthetized, measured, and weighed. Small caudal fin clips would be taken for genetic analysis and parr would be tagged with passive integrated transponder tags. The fish would then be allowed to recover in aerated buckets and would be released to the area of stream from which they were captured. These activities would be completed in partnership with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) under research permits held by ODFW.
- **Beaver Surveys:** Surveyors would walk along streams, visually observing and noting locations of previous and current beaver activity including slides, dens, chews, food catches, and dam building.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also support ongoing efforts to mitigate for 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.¹

John Vlastelicia
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

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 evaluation 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: Upper and Middle Fork John Day Effectiveness Monitoring

Project Site Description

The monitoring activities would occur within and along streams in the Upper John Day River and Middle Fork John Day River watersheds in Grant County, Oregon. Many of the sites are on CTWS-owned properties that are managed as fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas. Other sites include federal land managed by the U.S. Forest Service (Malheur National Forest) and a mixture of privately owned lands used for conservation and agricultural purposes.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would be limited to environmental survey and monitoring activities. These activities would not involve excavation or other substantial ground disturbance that could impact archaeological resources, and they would not involve modifications of any built historic resources. The proposed activities would therefore have no potential to affect historic resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed monitoring would not involve any excavation or fill activities, use of heavy machinery, or other ground disturbance beyond foot traffic from small monitoring crews. No impacts to geology or soils are anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed monitoring would not involve vegetation removal or other substantial vegetation disturbance. Minor and temporary impacts to groundcover and shrub layer vegetation may be expected from field monitoring personnel accessing streams and adjacent riparian areas on foot. The monitoring would not alter habitat conditions for plants in the long-term, and there would be no effect on federal or state special-status species or habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed monitoring could cause wildlife to temporarily avoid the areas where monitoring is actively occurring, due to human presence and activity. The monitoring would not involve any permanent alterations of wildlife habitat and is not expected to affect federal or state special-status species or habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Monitoring would occur at sites within and along the Upper John Day River, the Middle Fork John Day River, and tributaries of those rivers that provide habitat for fish species that include ESA-listed MCR steelhead trout, ESA-listed bull trout, Chinook salmon, and redband trout.

Monitoring activities with in-stream elements including stream habitat surveys, snorkel surveys, spawning surveys, and Chinook salmon tagging could involve temporary, low-level stream sediment disturbance and resulting turbidity from field personnel walking and snorkeling in the stream. Such disturbances would be localized, minor, and temporary in nature, with limited effect on ESA-listed fish or other fish species. Collection of information in streambeds and floodplains relative to habitat type and condition, species presence, and rehabilitation opportunities is authorized under NMFS and USFWS Biological Opinions for BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP). Juvenile Chinook salmon tagging would be conducted in partnership with ODFW under NMFS and USFWS scientific research permits held by ODFW.

The monitoring activities would not impact stream water quality, hydrology, or habitat long-term and would not impact floodplain functions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The monitoring would occur along streams and could include field data collection from wetland areas. Monitoring activities in wetlands could include vegetation surveys involving visual observations and photo collection. The monitoring would not involve excavation or fill in wetlands and would not otherwise result in wetland loss or adverse effects to wetland functions.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Collection of groundwater level data from existing monitoring wells would occur. This data is collected from data loggers equipped with pressure sensors. The monitoring does not involve extractions of groundwater or discharges to groundwater and would not affect groundwater levels or groundwater quality.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The monitoring would be conducted with permission from the landowners where monitoring would occur. The monitoring involves periodic, short-term activities that would not change the existing uses or capabilities of the land; public accessible areas would still be accessible, as well as CTWS-owned conservation areas and USFS land. The sites are not within any specially designated area that would prohibit monitoring.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The monitoring would not change the visual character of the areas in which monitoring activities would occur. It would not interfere with the use of scenic public viewpoints and would not otherwise impact visual qualities of any area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The monitoring activities would not introduce any new operational sources of air emissions and would not involve the use of any emissions-generating equipment for field data collection. Minor periodic emissions from vehicles used by monitoring staff to access the field sites would occur.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The sounds of human voices from small field monitoring crews would be expected while monitoring activities are occurring. There would be no substantial noise impacts resulting from monitoring activities, which do not involve use of noise-generating machinery.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The monitoring activities would present no long-term risks to human health and safety. Temporary safety hazards for staff conducting monitoring activities, which would involve working in and around water and walking uneven terrain, would be minimized through adherence to applicable safety procedures.

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 monitoring activities would occur on lands owned by CTWS, as well as on federal and private lands. CTWS would coordinate access permissions with property owners and land managers for activities on non-CTWS lands prior to field monitoring.

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

Signed:

John Vlastelicia
Environmental Protection Specialist