

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Spokane Tribe Inland Lake and Streams: Electrofishing and Macroinvertebrate 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 the proposed action fulfills ongoing commitments under a 10-year Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between BPA and the Spokane Tribe, which was signed in May 2024 and formalizes a long-standing collaborative partnership that provides a dedicated funding mechanism for habitat restoration, among other activities in the upper Columbia River Basin. In addition, this action supports 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.).

Electrofishing and macroinvertebrate sampling would occur in Tshimikain (Chamokane) Creek, Little Tshimikain Creek, Blue Creek, Sand Creek, Orazada Creek, Ente Creek, and McCoy Creek. Electrofishing would also occur at McCoy Lake, Turtle Lake, Benjamin Lake, and Mathews Lake. Access to monitoring sites would be via existing roads and trails whenever possible. All equipment would be cleaned and calibrated before being used in the field. Equipment such as boats and wading gear 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 & Stream Electrofishing: Sites would be accessed between July 1 and October 15, and each sampling visit would take approximately 35 full days to visit all 7 stream and 4 lake monitoring sites. Trained professionals would conduct non-lethal fish surveys in stream and lake systems, only during favorable weather and acceptable water temperatures. Stream surveys would occur during daytime hours, but lake surveys would be conducted primarily between sunset and sunrise. This improves sampling efficiency and species detection in lakes by targeting nocturnal use of shallow littoral zones and minimizing boat avoidance, as well as reducing both thermal stress on captured fish and safety conflicts with daytime public recreation. Standard electrofishing methods would be utilized, either via a portable backpack in wadeable stream reaches, or tow-barge systems in lakes. The electrofishing units would apply pulsed direct current to temporarily stun fish

for safe, live capture. Field staff would adhere to established fish-handling guidelines, including actively monitoring fish reactions and adjusting output currents to keep the electrical field in an optimal 3-4 amp range, minimizing contact within the 0.5-meter anode zone of injury. Captured fish would be held briefly in shaded, aerated containment vessels to be identified, measured, and temporarily marked via minor fin clips, using approved mild anesthetics in strict accordance with label dosage and safe disposal guidelines. Following standard recovery protocols, all fish would be released alive back into the water within 10-25 meters of their capture coordinates.

Macroinvertebrate Sampling: Sites would be accessed between July 1 and October 15 during daylight hours. Each annual sampling period would take approximately one full day to visit all seven stream monitoring sites. Field sampling would be conducted using standard 500-micron mesh devices to collect composite samples across an 8-square-foot area of stream bottom per site. The field procedure would involve gently scrubbing and agitating stream substrates to a depth of 4-5 cm to release organisms into the collection net, with specific techniques tailored to both flowing and slack water habitats. Collected specimens would be preserved in 95% non-denatured ethanol, securely sealed, and labeled for taxonomic analysis.

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 the current *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Procedures*, 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.

Daphne Day
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

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.

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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 activities 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 activities 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 activities. Therefore, the proposed activities would not impact geology or soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed activities 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 activities 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 activities. 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 project areas around inland lakes and streams. Therefore, the proposed activities 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 is unlikely to occur near the project area and the proposed activities 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 activities through trampling of host plants; however, the project is unlikely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species. Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), which is federally-delisted but still considered threatened by the state, is known to occur in the vicinity. If present during construction, that project would cause localized disturbance to wolves and other common wildlife, due to elevated noise and human presence. However, the proposed activities 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 activities would not result in adverse modification to any suitable protected species habitat. Therefore, the proposed activities 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 (*Rhinichthys osculus*), and redbelt 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 1980s, and they are not known to occur in the section of Blue Creek designated for sampling. Even if present, proposed activities 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 activities, 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 activities. Therefore, the proposed activities 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 activities. Therefore, the proposed activities would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed activities. Therefore, the proposed activities 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: The project would not create conditions that would increase risk to human health and safety. As previously stated, lake surveys would be conducted primarily between sunset and sunrise to reduce safety conflicts with daytime public recreation. Overall, no impacts are expected as a result of the proposed activities.

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.

Signed:

Daphne Day
Environmental Protection Specialist