

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Upper Columbia United Tribes Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Program

Project No.: 2008-007-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss – EWM-4

Location: Okanogan, Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille counties, Washington Boundary, Kootenai, and Benewah counties, Idaho

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 continue funding the Upper Columbia United Tribes (UCUT) to collect yearly field data on vegetation, birds, and larval amphibians on the reservations of the Colville, Kootenai, Coeur d'Alene, Spokane, and Kalispel Tribes in Okanogan, Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille counties in WA; and Boundary, Kootenai, and Benewah counties in ID.

Data would be collected through monitoring surveys completed at discrete locations called stations. The information obtained would be used to determine the effectiveness of management actions in moving towards restoration goals and assess directional change as terrestrial mitigation lands, with associated aquatic habitats, undergo restoration.

The following surveys would be carried out at monitoring stations that were established in 2007 when the study began:

Vegetation Surveys

At each station, transects about 200 feet in length would be established. Surveys would be based on visual observation and would measure percent ground cover, vegetation obstruction, shrub species composition and length, live tree counts with standing tree measurements, and photo documentation.

Bird Surveys

Bird populations would be visually sampled by the point-count method, in which each sampling point would be the center of a point-count station. A single observer would spend eight minutes at each birding station. All stations would be visited three times during the breeding season (late May to late August) with a minimum of one week between counts.

Larval Amphibian Surveys

All larval amphibian surveys would be completed during three, 2-day survey sessions from April 15 to July 31 to accommodate the life histories of different species. The following survey methods would be employed:

1. Environmental DNA (eDNA) Sampling – eDNA water samples would be collected by hand.
2. Visual Surveys – Observers would record captured amphibian characteristics and habitat. Any amphibians observed during visual surveys would be netted, measured, and life stage determined. Fish caught in nets would be identified to species and counted. All captured animals would be released at the site of capture.
3. Larval Traps –Five collapsible minnow traps would be used in easily-accessible open water areas. Each trap would be attached to a single rebar pole pushed into the ground. Traps would be set out for two days at each station during each of three survey sessions. Traps at each station would be submerged the morning of the first day and then checked once daily for two consecutive days. Salamander, frog larvae, and fish captured in traps would be identified and released. Habitat conditions at each trap would be recorded.

Funding the proposed activities would support ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System (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 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.

Catherine Clark
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
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.

Proposed Action: Upper Columbia United Tribes Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Program

Project Site Description

The proposed action would occur in various locations across the UCUT reservations, which encompass approximately 1,910,100 acres and includes the Colville, Kootenai, Coeur d'Alene, Spokane, and Kalispel Tribes' reservations in Okanogan, Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille counties in WA; and Boundary, Kootenai, and Benewah counties in ID. The project area is located in the Columbia River Basin, overlapping several subbasins and multiple watersheds in eastern Washington and northern Idaho. The area is part of what is known as the northern Rocky Mountains, an arc of mountainous topography that curves around the eastern extremity of an arid steppe-covered plateau. Generally, the elevation of the edge of the steppe falls between 1,970 and 2,950 feet above sea level, with the mountain slopes on the north and east rising to approximately 5,900 and 6,890 feet. Forests dominated by plant species adapted to dry environments are present near their summits. The mountains of the entire core area generally consist of a series of sharp, level ridges with V-shaped valleys, except locally where they were somewhat reamed out during glaciation. The mean elevation of alpine timberline at this latitude in the Rockies is about 6,230 feet.

The Spokane River runs along the southern border of the Spokane Tribe Reservation, meeting the Columbia River at the southwestern tip of the Spokane Tribe Reservation. From there, the Columbia River continues along the southern and eastern borders of the Colville Tribal Reservation. The Pend Oreille River, originating at Lake Pend Oreille in Bonner County, ID, runs along the western edge of the Kalispel Tribe Reservation north towards Canada. The Kootenai River meanders south through the Kootenai Tribe Reservation. Prominent waterbodies in the Coeur d'Alene Tribe Reservation include the Spokane and St. Joe Rivers, lake Coeur d'Alene, and Hayden Lake.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action has been evaluated and was determined to have no potential to affect cultural resources or historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed larval amphibian traps would be affixed to rebar poles pushed into the ground at a depth of 10 inches or less. This would not involve digging or excavation. Impacts to soil would be minor and short term. The remaining actions would not affect geology or soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) and water howellia (*Howellia aquatilis*) have the potential to occur within the project area. The proposed actions would not result in vegetation disturbance and would have no effect on plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed species may be present within the project area (US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation, 2020); however, no known occurrences of listed terrestrial species have been recorded throughout the entire course of the study. It can reasonably be assumed that this would continue to be the case. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on listed wildlife species. The survey methods described above would have short-term negative impacts on aquatic species caught in larval amphibian traps; however, all captured animals would be released at the site of capture within 24 hours of being caught. No long-term negative impacts are expected and collected data would help inform management that would benefit wildlife in the sampling areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawtscha*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) may be present in waterways within the project area; however, no known occurrences of listed fish species have been recorded throughout the entire course of the study. It can reasonably be assumed that this would continue to be the case. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on listed fish species. The survey methods described above would have short-term negative impacts on non-listed fish species caught in larval amphibian traps; however, all captured animals would be released at the site of capture within 24 hours of being caught. No long-term impacts are expected.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wetlands are present throughout the proposed action areas. The proposed actions would not involve removal or fill; therefore, no impact is expected.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater is proposed.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change as a result of this project.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no adverse effects to the visual quality of the environment as a result of this project.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change to air quality as a result of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change in ambient noise levels as a result of the proposed action.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best management practices to protect workers' health and safety.

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: All work would occur on lands owned and managed by the UCUT within reservations.
Landowner coordination is not necessary.

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

Signed:

Catherine Clark
Environmental Protection Specialist