

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Snake River Basin Predator Control

**Project Manager:** Maureen Kavanagh, EWP-4

**Location:** Multiple counties, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho

**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 the conservation of fish, wildlife and cultural resources

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to provide funding to the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) Department of Fisheries Resources Management to operate and study a predator control program to address avian and piscine predation in the Snake River Basin. Several native and non-native bird and fish species have been documented to consume large quantities of out-migrating juvenile salmon and steelhead in the Snake River Basin. The management and research actions funded under this proposal would be designed to increase survival rates of salmon and steelhead from the Grande Ronde, Imnaha, Salmon, and Clearwater subbasins and in the lower Snake River Basin. Data collected from BPA's funding of these efforts over a one-year period would be used to inform future management approaches and the associated permitting and environmental compliance that would be required to support those actions. Funding for these actions would support projects that contribute to the restoration of salmon and other native fish populations.

**Piscine Predation Control:** NPT would develop and implement a piscine predator removal program in the Snake River and tributaries upstream and downstream of Little Goose and Lower Granite dams targeting walleye, northern pikeminnow, and smallmouth bass, with an emphasis placed on stopping walleye range expansion and reducing established population productivity for all three species. NPT would conduct physical removal of piscine predators using selective gear and timing to target piscine predators while minimizing bycatch of native fish species. Removal methods would include the use of temporary nets, weirs, or traps placed at strategic locations, seasons, and times of day to intercept invasive species. Gear would be selected and used in a manner designed to minimize non-target bycatch. Netting would occur over a short duration (8 hours) and use appropriate mesh size and orientation. Weir and trap placement would occur after steelhead spawning periods. Targeted angling and fishing tournaments would also be used to remove the targeted species and increase community awareness of the threats of predation to salmonids. Monitoring and surveys would be conducted to track effectiveness of the management actions and track abundance and distribution in areas upstream and downstream of Lower Granite and Little Goose Dams.

**Avian Predation Control:** NPT would implement an avian predator hazing program in the Grand Ronde, Imnaha, Salmon and Clearwater subbasins and in the lower Snake River. Target avian species include American white pelican, double crested cormorants, California and ring-billed gulls, and great blue herons that congregate at documented loafing and roosting sites. Bird hazing techniques on the Columbia River would include pyrotechnics, green lasers, audio

deterrents, and watercraft patrolling. These non-lethal methods would target piscivorous birds, disrupting foraging during high salmon smolt out-migration periods, primarily between mid-April and the end of July, concentrated in the early morning hours when bird activity is greatest. Multiple, integrated techniques would be used to prevent the target species from habituating to the frightening strategy and maintain effectiveness. Monitoring data would be collected to measure effectiveness of the hazing treatments, avian abundance, and spatial distribution to after being hazed. PIT tags that have passed through the digestive tracts of predatory birds would be collected from the ground around known loafing, nesting, roosting and areas.

**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.

Carolyn A. Sharp  
Supervisory 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: Snake River Basin Predator Control**

### **Project Site Description**

The lower Snake River basin covers an about 140-mile-long stretch of the Snake River in southeastern Washington, northeastern Oregon, and western Idaho. The Snake River is the principal tributary to the Columbia River and receives its major flows from the Clearwater, Palouse, and Tucannon rivers. Land ownership in the Lower Snake River Basin is a patchwork of federal, state, tribal, and private holdings. Large segments of land adjacent to the river are federally owned. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers controls narrow operational buffers, levees, and project lands immediately surrounding the reservoirs created by the four Lower Snake River dams (Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental, Little Goose, and Lower Granite). Public and user access to the river is extensive, with boat launches, parks, camping areas, and fishing sites maintained along the reservoir pools. Primary land uses along the river corridors range from navigation, hydropower system infrastructure, and industrial port operations around dam impoundments to dryland farming, livestock grazing, commercial timber harvest, and rural residential development.

### **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

#### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance, building or structure modifications, or construction activities associated with the proposed activities; therefore, there is no potential to cause effects to historic and cultural resources.

#### **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 and soils

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions do not include any vegetation management, ground disturbance, or work that would remove or substantially impact vegetation. Therefore, there is no potential to affect plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: American white pelican are listed as sensitive in the state of Washington. None of the other target bird species are a Federal- or state-listed ESA or sensitive species. Yellow billed cuckoo, an ESA-listed species, may occur in riparian areas in the Snake River Basin. A great variety of other wildlife occupy and utilize the riparian habitat including a wide variety of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Hazing would force both targeted and

non-targeted birds and wildlife to expend additional energy fleeing designated areas and seeking alternative foraging or loafing habitats. Watercraft patrolling, sound deterrents, and pyrotechnics may cause incidental, temporary disturbance to non-target wildlife (e.g., non-target waterbirds, shorebirds, or terrestrial mammals) utilizing nearby shoreline and riparian habitats. These effects would be minor, localized, and transient, with non-target species expected to return to the area after the disturbance. Because hazing relies strictly on non-lethal deterrents and is limited geographically to key smolt mortality zones and seasonally to out-migration periods, no adverse long-term impacts on regional avian population viability or overall reproductive success are anticipated.

PIT tag collection on foot from known loafing, nesting, and roosting sites would cause minor, temporary human disturbance to birds present in the immediate vicinity, but these visual and auditory disruptions would be short-lived. Watercraft use and human presence on the shoreline during piscine fish removal may introduce temporary noise and human presence disruption. The level of disturbance would be minor, temporary, and consistent with the use of the areas by other users.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Avian predation control actions would have no effect on fish species, including Federally- or state-listed fish species. For the piscine fish removal, Biological Opinions by the National Marine Fisheries Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service (WCR-2019-000400, WCR-2018-10283 and 01EIFW00-2019-F-0234) address the effects of recreational and tribal treaty fisheries in the Snake River Basin, including the use of nets, weirs, traps and angling and the incidental capture of ESA-listed fish species (bull trout, steelhead, Chinook, sockeye) that may occur.

The intentional direct effect from piscivorous fish removal would be the localized reduction of predator density, disruption of population productivity, and slowing walleye range expansion in the Snake River and tributaries upstream and downstream of Little Goose and Lower Granite dams. Both ESA and non-listed fish species may be incidentally caught, including the potential for mortality, though the gear (mesh size and placement) and timing/duration of methods are designed to minimize effects to ESA-species.

The installation, operation, and removal of temporary in-water structures (weirs, traps, nets) and the operation of motorized watercraft may cause minor, localized, and transient increases in turbidity and total suspended solids (TSS) due to bottom sediment resuspension. All equipment would be removed following targeted operational periods, allowing physical aquatic habitat and localized water quality to immediately return to baseline conditions. No chemical treatments or permanent physical alterations to the waterbody or bed/bank morphology would occur.

The suppression of piscine predators and non-lethal hazing of avian predators would yield a direct and indirect benefit to native salmon and steelhead from the Snake River, Grande Ronde, Imnaha, Salmon, and Clearwater subbasins. Lowering predator density and foraging efficiency during critical out-migration windows is expected to increase juvenile salmonid survival rates during downstream migration.

### Notes:

- Personnel conducting removal activities would include, or be trained by, qualified fish biologists. Field crews would actively monitor for the presence of non-target species (especially threatened, endangered, or state-sensitive species) and would conduct live release of all non-target fish.
- Terms and conditions and conservation measures from the ESA consultations with the Services would be implemented during piscine fish removal activities.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the hydrology within the project area. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur.

## **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: The underlying land use would not change and no impact to specially-designed areas would occur as a result of this project. Noise minimization measures, as outlined in the Noise evaluation below, would be implemented to limit potential deterrent noise impacting the use of adjacent lands.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no new construction or habitat modification activities proposed. As a result, there would be no changes to visual quality from these actions.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to air quality from dust and exhaust due to boat or vehicle use for site access. The use of pyrotechnics during avian hazing operations would result in minor, short-term, and localized emissions of fine particulate matter and combustion gases. Because pyrotechnic use would be intermittent, seasonal, and conducted in open-air river corridors with rapid dispersion, these emissions would cause temporary, negligible impacts on local air quality. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Minor and temporary noise would increase during piscine predation activities associated with boat use and human activity, but these actions would be consistent with current human use of the area. Noise associated with avian hazing (audio deterrents, pyrotechnics, vehicle and equipment use and human presence) would be temporary, short-duration disturbances, comparable to routine seasonal waterfowl hunting noise present throughout the Snake River corridor. There would be no permanent change in ambient noise.

### Notes:

- Coordinate hazing activities with local jurisdictions (counties/cities) to comply with noise standards or secure necessary early-morning operational variances.
- Minimize off-site noise impacts on sensitive human receptors (residences, recreational areas, and campgrounds) by restricting pyrotechnics and audio scare devices to daytime hours and maintaining spatial distance buffers around occupied shorelines, recreation sites, and bridge crossings.
- Use targeted, directional noise generating methods rather than continuous noise-broadcasting devices near sensitive human receptors.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No with conditions

Explanation: Field technicians would use appropriate personal protection equipment such as including personal floatation devices, high-visibility vests, gloves, eye protection, and hearing protection during pyrotechnic and high-decibel acoustic operations to protect worker health and safety. Operators would comply with local safety ordinances. Public safety hazards would be negligible to minor.

Notes:

- Discharge pyrotechnics away from human subjects, public recreation areas, or nearby structures.

### **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: Sites would be accessed via existing roads and public lands. The Nez Perce Tribe would coordinate site access with landowners and land managers, if applicable.

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

Signed:

Carolyn Sharp  
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist