

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: PIT Tag Detection Arrays at Lower Wind River and Panther Creek

Project Manager: Dorie Welch, E-4

Location: Skamania County, 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 Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to install two Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag detection arrays in Skamania County, Washington. The first PIT tag detection array would be installed in the lower Wind River, and the second would be installed in Panther Creek. Each instream PIT tag detection system (IPTDS) would consist of two separate channel spanning rows of antennas, measuring approximately 120 feet (ft) across at the lower Wind River site and approximately 60 ft across at the Panther Creek site. Each row would have five antennas, for a total of ten antennas per site. The rows would be spaced at a minimum of 20 ft and a maximum of 60 ft apart. The antennas would be laid horizontally on the river bottom, flush with the top of the stream substrate; the dimensions of the antennas would be about 20 ft by 3 ft and 3 inches in diameter. The antennas would be anchored to the stream bed with M4 (“manta ray”) anchors attached to stainless-steel rods, driven to a maximum depth of 28 inches using a pneumatic jackhammer. The arrays would be powered by propane generators. Power supply lines and sensitive equipment would be stored in a job box, along with the propane generator and propane storage, which would occupy an about 20 ft by 10 ft area approximately 100 ft to 300 ft from the array and in the upland area. The propane generator and propane storage would be elevated on non-permanent structures for stability.

Installation would occur during low flow (less than 500 cubic feet per second[cfs]) periods either beginning between the months of March and May or from October to December. There would be no excavation for installation; only manual movement of stream cobbles, slightly upstream or downstream adjacent to the antennas would occur. Power cables running from the array to the power supply would be placed on the ground surface.

Funding for these actions would support projects that contribute to the restoration of salmon and other native fish populations.

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.

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Concur:

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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: PIT Tag Detection Arrays at Lower Wind River and Panther Creek

Project Site Description

The proposed project locations would be located in Carson, Washington in Skamania County. The lower Wind River project area is located within a transmission line right-of-way on U.S. Army Corps of Engineer managed property and within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA) designated Carson Urban Area. Both project areas consist of previously disturbed soils; the P Creek project is on privately-owned land adjacent to a paved roadway (NF-6808) and the lower Wind River project area is located adjacent to an active gravel access road (Indian Cabin Road). These areas are currently a mix of understory forested vegetation with fragmented pieces of natural habitat of varying quality.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation:

Panther Creek: On June 16, 2026, BPA completed a combined initiation and determination consultation (WA 2026 139) of no historic properties affected under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) on the proposed project. Consulting parties for the proposed project included the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Washington Department of Archaeologist and Historic Preservation (DAHP). BPA received concurrence on the determination from DAHP on June 16, 2026. No other responses were received in the 30-day consultation period.

Lower Wind River: On August 18, 2026, BPA completed a combined initiation and determination consultation (WA 2026 006) of no historic properties affected under Section 106 of the NHPA on the proposed project. The U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers agreed that BPA would be the lead Federal agency for NHPA Section 106 compliance (Corps Ref #NWS-2026-490). Consulting parties for the proposed project included the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Washington DAHP. BPA received concurrence on the determination from DAHP on August 18, 2026, and from the Cowlitz Indian Tribe on September 16, 2026. No other responses were received in the 30-day consultation period.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA and in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The IPDIS would be anchored to the riverbed substrate. Installation of the anchors would cause minor, short-term disturbance resulting from displaced substrate and would not have a significant impact on geology and soils. The job box and power supply for the PIT tag arrays would sit atop the ground, resulting in no soil disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or special-status plant species are present within the project sites. Upland equipment may require minor disturbance to nearby plants that hinder installation, but no broad-scale vegetation removal is proposed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed gray wolf (*Canus lupus*), North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), Northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis*), and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) are present at both project sites; however, no known identifications or active nests of these species are within one mile of these project sites. BPA determined that there would be no effect to ESA-listed or sensitive wildlife species. Minor, short-term disturbance to wildlife species may occur during IPDIS installation due to construction noise and human presence. No action proposed would physically alter any terrestrial habitat on site. There would be no adverse physical changes to wildlife or their habitat resulting from the proposed action.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus cunfluentus*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawyscha*), coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*), and steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) as well as their critical habitat are present in the lower Wind River; ESA-listed bull trout, coho salmon, and steelhead as well as their critical habitat are present in Panther Creek. Minor, short term disturbance to fish may occur during IPDIS installation. Project-related impacts to ESA-listed species are addressed in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinions with NMFS and USFWS. No action proposed would physically alter any aquatic habitat on site, however, minor turbidity from IPDIS installation and human presence in the rivers may occur causing fish to vacate the area during installation. There would be no adverse physical changes to water bodies, floodplains, or fish resulting from the proposed action.

Notes:

- WDFW would adhere to the Terms and Conditions and Conservation Measures in BPA's HIP consultation documents during the IPDIS installation.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Based on the USFWS's National Wetlands Inventory, the lower Wind River project area overlaps freshwater forested/shrub wetland and the Panther Creek project area does not overlap with wetlands; however, the proposed action areas and footprint are quite small, and no excavation is proposed within the wetland. Therefore, there would be no impact to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground-disturbing activities would be minimal and occur only within the streambed and are not likely to intersect groundwater and would have no impact on aquifers. BMPs would be implemented to prevent contamination of groundwater from equipment leaks and spills.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The lower Wind River project area is located in the CRGNSA; however, installation would last a day and would not hinder the use of the area by users. Because the proposed project would be located in designated Urban Area, the project would not require further review per the CRGNSA Management Plan. Further, the project would not disrupt transmission line operation at the lower Wind River site. Because the IPDIS would be installed on a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers non-restrictive easement, the project would undergo a single-phase Section 408 review. The project is not anticipated to alter the function, integrity, or authorized purpose of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project. Temporary, negligible disruption to road access and site access would occur at both project locations during installation. In the long term, PIT tag array installation would not hinder land use and no change to land use would occur.

Notes:

- WDFW would work with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on obtaining and working within the avoidance and minimization requirements identified in their Section 408 permit under the Rivers and Harbors Act (Corps Ref #NWS-2026-490).

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually prominent vegetation, landform, or structural changes would be made. The IPDIS would be placed on the river's bed, below the surface of the water. The job box and its associated power supply would be placed upland from the project but would be small and not visually obtrusive.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, short-term impact to air quality from vehicle emissions during installation would occur. Minor impact to air quality from the propane generator use would occur during the operation of the proposed projects. However, vehicle emissions would be temporary and limited to installation and prolonged generator use would average between 5.5 to 7 lbs of CO₂ per hour of use which is substantially lower than typical vehicle use in the project areas.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would result in a minor, temporary increase in ambient noise due to human presence, and use of vehicles and equipment. Prolonged generator use would not increase ambient noise levels at this location. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. WDFW would be responsible to comply with all procedural and substantive environmental requirements imposed by local, state, and

Federal laws and regulations applicable to the proposed project. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions and no CERCLA sites.

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: WDFW has been working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineering to secure realty authorization for the lower Wind River project location to conduct proposed work. WDFW would obtain necessary permissions from appropriate private landowners to conduct proposed work at the Panther Creek location.

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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