

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Monitoring and Evaluation Activities in Support of Abundance, Productivity, and Life History of Fifteenmile Creek Winter Steelhead

Project No.: 2010-035-00

Project Manager: Richard Golden Jr.

Location: Wasco County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to provide ongoing funds to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to establish a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) program for abundance, productivity, and life history of steelhead in the Fifteenmile Creek population, which is ESA-listed as a component of the Mid-Columbia River steelhead distinct population segment (DPS). This work is critical to gaining a better understanding of the status of the population and DPS, of monitoring and adapting recovery actions, and for improving the knowledge of steelhead critical habitat.

M&E activities proposed are summarized as follows: Juvenile fish migrating out of the basin would be sampled using a five-foot rotary screw trap (RST). A Peterson mark-recapture design would be used to estimate numbers of fish passing the trap. Fish (≥ 80 mm FL) are marked with 12mm preloaded PIT tags. In addition, a small top caudal clip would be taken. The trap would be located in Fifteenmile Creek, approximately 50 meters downstream from the confluence with Eightmile Creek. Another screw trap would be located in Mill Creek, approximately 2 miles from the Columbia River. Adult escapement would be measured by trapping a subsample of adults as they migrate into the basin to determine age distribution, and a video tunnel would be used to complete the escapement estimate and would be located at the same weir on the opposite side of the trap. Adult fish passing upstream of the same location as the RST would be sampled. Any captured fish would be sorted, counted, and bio-sampled for length, weight, scales, and scanned for marks and tags. All adults captured would receive a PIT tag, if not previously tagged, and be released upstream of the trap. PIT-tagged adults would be tracked at upstream antennas within four tributaries of Fifteenmile Creek.

The information generated from this research project would not only significantly improve the quality of the viability status assessments but would also serve as a basis for evaluating long-term changes in productivity that result from tributary habitat improvement. This project is a long-term endeavor that would span multiple steelhead generations.

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) 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, July 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996, 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011), BPA has determined that the proposed action:

- (1) fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D (see attached Environmental Checklist);
- (2) does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal; and
- (3) has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

/s/ Elisabeth Bowers

Elisabeth Bowers

Contract Environmental Protection Specialist

ACS Professional Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ David K. Kennedy

David K. Kennedy

Executive Manager

Environmental Planning & Analysis

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: February 9, 2017

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Checklist

This checklist 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: Monitoring and Evaluation Activities in Support of a Study Collecting Abundance, Productivity, and Life History Data for Fifteenmile Creek Steelhead

Project Site Description

Adult and juvenile M&E activities will be conducted within the Fifteenmile Creek subbasin. Fish will be sampled at two rotary screw traps (RSTs) at two different locations within the basin.

The vegetative community in the vicinity of the project site is dominated by a deciduous upper canopy (60-80% cover) consisting of red alder (*Alnus rubra*) and black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera*). The riparian understory consists of native shrubs and grasses.

RSTs will be installed, operated, maintained, and removed by hand at the sites. Captured fish will be sorted, counted, and bio-sampled for length, weight, scales, and scanned for marks and tags. Fish will be marked with PIT tags and will be tracked with antennas within four tributaries upstream.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Tributaries have already been wired with antennas. No ground disturbance or impact to historic structures is anticipated.		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> No ground disturbance anticipated.		
3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Minimal ground disturbance is anticipated. Any disturbance to plants will be temporary and non-lethal. The same two monitoring sites are utilized annually. RSTs will be carried by hand to and from both monitoring sites from a nearby agricultural site. Therefore, any ground disturbance will be as a result of foot traffic. Furthermore, the only listed plant with the potential to occur in the project vicinity is candidate species whitebark pine (<i>Pinus albicaulis</i>); however, this species is not known to occur within the riparian area where the monitoring activities are proposed.		

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



Explanation: Northern spotted owls (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), listed as threatened, and associated critical habitat as well as bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) may occur within the project vicinity. However, proposed activities will be accomplished by hand with minimal ground disturbance and noise generation. Therefore, impacts to wildlife and associated habitat, including ESA-listed wildlife/critical habitat, are not anticipated to be significant.

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



Explanation: Capture of ESA-listed salmon is covered under National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA-Fisheries) Section 4(d) permit 19866, which expired in December of 2016 but was extended so that work can continue until a new permit is obtained sometime in 2017. Bull trout capture is covered under a Section 6 cooperative agreement between the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: Minimal ground disturbance that would disturb wetlands is anticipated since the RSTs will be carried in, installed, maintained, and removed by hand.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: No ground disturbance or excavation that would disturb groundwater or introduce contaminants into groundwater would be required.

8. **Land Use and Specially Designated Areas**



Explanation: The project locations have been used for this research previously. No change to land use is proposed.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: All fixed monitoring locations are previously-established and continued use would not alter existing visual quality of the area.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: No ground disturbance or use of heavy equipment that would produce increased dust or emissions would be required. Some vehicle emissions would be generated to access data collection sites. These emissions would be temporary and similar to those generated in the area by vehicles since this will occur on established roads.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: No activities would be noise generating.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: Appropriate safety measures, such as the use of floatation devices, if necessary, would be employed for staff working near the water.

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, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: Coordination among ODFW, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and other regional partners is ongoing and part of the regular annual planning process.

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

Signed: /s/ Elisabeth Bowers
Elisabeth Bowers
Environmental Protection Specialist

Date: February 9, 2017