

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Albeni Falls Dam RM&E

Project No.: 2007-246-00

Project Manager: Tim Ludington

Location: Bonner County, ID; Pend Oreille County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources; B1.3 Routine maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Kalispel Tribe to conduct ongoing research, monitoring, and evaluation (RM&E) actions in the Pend Oreille River system. The RM&E would focus on providing information and benefiting bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkia lewisi*).

BPA would fund recurring RM&E actions with the objectives of investigating temporary upstream passage for bull trout at Albeni Falls Dam, investigating long-term fish passage solutions at the dam, and filling data gaps identified through these and associated efforts in the Pend Oreille/Clark Fork system. Funding would contribute towards the following RM&E actions:

- Using a boat-mounted electrofishing unit to sample bull trout out of the mainstem Pend Oreille River below the tail race of Albeni Falls Dam for passive integrated transponder (PIT)-tagging and data collection.
- Truck transportation of bull trout captured below Albeni Falls Dam to upstream of the dam, where they would be released at the Priest River boat launch.
- Capture, inspection, PIT-tagging, and genetic sampling of bull trout upstream of Albeni Falls Dam.
- Electrofishing capture (via backpack), inspection, measurement, and genetic sampling of westslope cutthroat trout within approximately 30 Pend Oreille River tributaries both above and below Albeni Falls Dam.

All sampling activities involving the use of boats would occur at public boat launches.

Additionally, BPA would fund the Kalispel Tribe to make internal improvements to their boat and equipment storage area within the footprint of the Kalispel Natural Resources Department satellite office barn located on lands privately owned by the Kalispel Tribe at the Indian Creek Wildlife Management Area. Project activities would take place inside the barn and focus on removing and replacing some internal features to modify the size and shape of the interior storage space. This would involve adding another layer of gravel fill, and leveling/grading/compacting floor surfaces throughout the barn, and increasing the size of the interior space by removing existing wooden

beams and replacing them with beams capable of spanning larger openings created by removing posts. Existing posts would be cut at the concrete footing and replaced with an appropriately sized post and engineered beam to span 20 feet instead of 10 feet. No excavation would occur, and all materials and staging of equipment would take place within the existing building.

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the 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 1021.410(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, Jul. 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/ Mandy Hope

Mandy Hope
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>May 18, 2021</u>
Sarah T. Biegel	Date
NEPA Compliance Officer	

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: Albeni Falls Dam RM&E

Project Site Description

All activities would occur at field sites associated with the Pend Oreille River and its tributaries in northeastern Washington and northwestern Idaho.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground-disturbing activities associated with RM&E actions, which would occur in the water; thus, the proposed activities would not have the potential to affect historic properties or cultural resources. The proposed barn upgrades were evaluated and, recognizing that project activities would be limited to the interior of an existing modern structure and that no ground disturbance is proposed, BPA determined that the actions would not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed; thus, the proposed activities would not affect geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing or vegetation removal activities are proposed; thus, the proposed activities would not affect plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The actions would occur in water that would be accessed via existing roadways and therefore, would not affect terrestrial wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would involve sampling, transportation, and observational data collection. No anadromous fish species are present due to anthropogenic blockages such as Albeni Falls Dam. The Kalispel Tribe obtained an ESA Section 10 permit (TE844478-8) from the US Fish and Wildlife Service for research in support of bull trout recovery. The permit is valid from 6/6/18 through 6/5/23. ESA Section 10 coverage would be updated as it expires and kept in the project file. There would be no impact to adjacent waterbodies or floodplains because no ground-disturbing activities are proposed. No new RM&E equipment would be installed.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed; thus, the action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities that may affect groundwater or aquifers are proposed; thus, the action would not impact these resources.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Field sites would be accessed via existing road networks, and all activities would be compatible with local land use on public roads, public lands, or Kalispel Tribal lands.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would not impact visual quality as the action reflects RM&E data collection. No new equipment or installation would occur.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be carried out at the existing field sites and would have no effect on air quality. Any increase in emissions from vehicles accessing field sites would be very minor and short term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project implementation would not result in an increase in ambient noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers carrying out the proposed RM&E activities are trained in proper equipment management techniques. This activity is not considered hazardous nor would it result in any health or safety risks to the general public.

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 publicly-owned land and the Pend Oreille River, which would be accessed using existing roads and adjacent public lands.

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

Signed: /s/ Mandy Hope May 18, 2021
Mandy Hope, ECT-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing