

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Estimate Adult Steelhead Abundance in Small Streams Associated with Tucannon & Asotin Populations

Project No.: 2010-028-00

Project Manager: Russell Scranton, EWP-4

Location: Columbia, Garfield and Whitman Counties, Washington

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: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to estimate adult steelhead abundance in small streams associated with Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Tucannon and Asotin River steelhead populations, and Columbia River Basin bull trout when encountered, in southeast Washington.

WDFW would operate and maintain 5 existing fixed-picket weirs, trap fish, collect biological data and tissue samples, PIT tag fish, and monitor water temperature at each site. The weirs consist of 76 mm x 76 mm aluminum angle stringers and 19 mm electrical metallic tubing (EMT) conduit pickets connected to an adult salmonid trap box to capture pre-spawn adult steelhead and for recapture of post-spawn kelts. The weirs are located on private land in Pataha (tributary to Tucannon), Alkali Flat, Deadman, and Penawawa Creeks (independent Snake River tributaries with Tucannon steelhead), and Almota Creek (Snake River tributary with Asotin steelhead). WDFW would also conduct spawning ground surveys on public lands in Penawawa and Deadman Creeks where weir operation is not feasible or spawning distribution is limited. Data collection and PIT tagging would occur on site using equipment brought in and removed daily by foot or in trucks. All work would occur without excavation or removal of vegetation.

For the data collection, trapping and PIT tagging activities, each site would occupy less than 0.5 acre, and the work would occur for 1 to 2 hours. Spawning ground surveys would occur instream over several miles and take 1 to 2 days per site. Access to all sites would be along existing roads, or by foot on existing trails or across land.

This action would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with both National Marine Fisheries Service and US 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/ Brenda Aguirre

Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Katey C. Grange</u>	<u>December 15, 2021</u>
Katey C. Grange	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: Estimate Adult Steelhead Abundance in Small Streams Associated with Tucannon & Asotin Populations

Project Site Description

Work would occur on private and public lands along and within Pataha, Alkali Flat, Deadman, Penawawa, and Almota Creeks located in the Lower Snake and Tucannon Subbasins of the Columbia River Basin in southeast Washington. Pataha Creek is a tributary to the Tucannon River and Alkali Flat, Almota, Deadman, and Penawawa Creeks are tributaries to the Snake River. Anadromous and resident fish are present in both Subbasins. Vegetation and land use surrounding the project sites consists of riparian vegetation, grasslands and commercial agriculture.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would occur in-stream and on dry land. Work would not involve excavation or removal of vegetation, or attachment to structures. A BPA archaeologist reviewed the proposed activities and determined that they do not have the potential to cause effects to historic or cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would not involve excavation or removal of vegetation, and vehicles would travel on existing roads. There would be little to no potential to impact geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would occur on small areas and for short durations of time, and would not involve removal of vegetation. There would be little potential to impact listed plant species and habitats.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would result in temporary disturbance or displacement of wildlife. Work would occur on small areas and for short durations of time, thus there would be little potential to impact listed wildlife.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minimal, temporary disturbance to water and fish would occur from in-stream equipment and foot traffic. Despite short-term adverse impacts from monitoring activities, the overall impacts would be beneficial to the ESA-listed species. WDFW would conduct work in accordance with their NOAA Fisheries Section 7 Determination of Take Authorization and Renewed Permit under the 2020 Columbia River System BiOp for direct take of threatened steelhead and Chinook salmon; and their US Fish and Wildlife Service Section 6 Cooperative Agreement for take of threatened bull trout. WDFW would submit numbers of bull trout handled and their lifestage to the USFWS at the end of the year for the purpose of assisting in the implementation of conservation and recovery of bull trout, a ESA-listed threatened species. Proposed work would be conducted on land and instream without ground or sediment disturbance, so there would be no disturbance to waterbodies or floodplains.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would not occur in wetlands, so there would be no disturbance to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground or groundwater disturbance would occur.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change in land use would occur.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would occur on small areas and for short durations of time. Equipment would be brought in and carried out daily. There would be little potential to impact visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed actions would emit a small quantity of pollutants. Vehicle traffic to and from the sites would be temporary and short duration. There would be little potential to degrade air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed work would use hand tools and manual labor. Vehicle traffic to and from the sites would be temporary and short duration. There would be little potential to impact area noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would use sharp tools and anesthesia to PIT tag fish. WDFW would train individuals conducting the PIT tagging in the proper techniques and follow standard protocols. Additionally, PIT tagging would occur on private land away from public activity. There would be little potential to effect human 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: Coordination with landowners would be completed by WDFW prior to work starting and proposed activities would occur according to terms and conditions for access and use of the lands.

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

Signed: /s/ Brenda Aguirre December 15, 2021
Brenda Aguirre, ECF-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist