

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program

Project No.: 2002-013-01, 2008-608-00, 2008-206-00, 2008-104-00

Project Manager: Maura Eagan Moody – EWP-4

Location: Various counties, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.25 Real property transfers for cultural resources protection, habitat preservation, and wildlife management; B5.1 Actions to conserve energy or water; 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 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Colville Confederated Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Idaho Department of Water Resources, and Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation to administer the Columbia Basin Water Transaction Program and the Idaho Water Transactions Program to develop water rights transactions. Funding the proposed water transactions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with NMFS on the O&M of the Columbia River System. Additionally, the proposed activities are consistent with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program as authorized by the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act and the Columbia Basin Fish Accords.

Water rights transactions would be implemented to restore streamflow in ecologically-important Columbia Basin tributaries. Transactions would be developed between state water agencies or non-profit organizations (known as qualified local entities) and landowners. The water transactions could include leases, split-season leases, short or long term leases, source switches, forbearance agreements, non-diversionary agreements, minimum flow agreements, permanent purchases, and monitoring and collection of stream-flow data.

Stream-flow data collection would be an on-going process to monitor the effectiveness of the program and would occur at various locations throughout the basin. Monitoring would be part of general funding and directed by each entity. Data collection methods would be non-invasive and would include data downloads from permanent gauge stations, use of hand held devices, wading measurements, or reading staff gauges. Wading measurements would occur during low-flow conditions in summer and fall to minimize habitat disturbances. Sites would be accessed by maintained access roads and by foot. No permanent physical changes to the land are anticipated.

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

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.

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Project Site Description

Actions associated with the water transactions would be conducted within the Columbia River Basin on real property of participating landowners. Stream-flow monitoring would occur in the Grande Ronde, Umatilla, and Salmon subbasins.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change to existing conditions would be anticipated. Water transaction activities would not involve construction, ground disturbance, or installation of new, permanent equipment. Therefore, there would be no potential to affect historic or cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would be required. Stream-flow monitoring sites would be accessed by pre-existing roads and by foot. No digging would occur and new roads would be established.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance and no anticipated impacts to any plant species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbances and actions would have temporary impact to wildlife within the project area from elevated human presence during monitoring and sampling activities. There would be no effect on Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed or sensitive wildlife species.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: These transactions are implemented to restore streamflow in ecologically-important Columbia Basin tributaries. Temporary disturbances associated with in-stream transects may occur but no ground disturbance that would disturb water bodies or floodplains would be required. There would be a long term benefit to waterbodies, fish, and floodplains associated with increased water in the stream channels.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance or change in hydrology that would disturb wetlands would be required. There would be a long term benefit to riparian wetlands from increased water in the stream channels.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Changes in existing water-rights would potentially have a positive impact on groundwater and aquifers. No ground disturbance or excavation that would disturb groundwater or introduce contaminants into groundwater would be required.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Changes in existing water rights and non-invasive monitoring only. No change in land use or to specially designated areas would be required.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Changes in water rights and non-invasive monitoring only. Existing visual quality of the area would not be substantially altered; there may be additional water in tributaries, but it is not expected to be visible to the casual observer.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Changes in water rights and non-invasive monitoring only. No ground disturbance or use of heavy equipment that would produce increased dust or emissions would be required.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No exceedance of local noise regulations would be required.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No change that would result in a human health and safety regulation violation would be required.

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: Each organization affiliated with Columbia Basin Water Transaction Program would coordinate with their local land trust and conservation organizations who maintain pre-established relationships with landowners. Public notifications would be mailed to affected public, posted in local facilities, printed in local newspapers, and announced during shareholder meetings and events.

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

Signed: /s/ Lindsey Arotin
Lindsey Arotin, ECF-4
Environmental Protection Specialist

October 28, 2020
Date