

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Study Reproductive Success of Hatchery and Natural Origin Steelhead in the Methow Project (*update to CX issued on July 12, 2021*)

**Project No.:** 2010-033-00

**Project Manager:** Maureen Kavanagh, EWP - 4

**Location:** Okanogan County, Washington

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 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 conduct the ongoing study of reproductive success of hatchery and natural origin steelhead in the Twisp River, a tributary to the Methow River in the upper Columbia River Basin. This CX has been updated to reflect changes in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) permits from the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Specific objectives of the proposed study include: (1) directly measuring the relative reproductive success of hatchery- and natural-origin steelhead in the natural environment, (2) determining the degree to which any differences in reproductive success between hatchery and natural steelhead can be explained by measurable biological characteristics such as run timing, morphology, or behavior, and (3) estimating the relative fitness of hatchery-lineage steelhead after they have experienced an entire generation in the natural environment.

To accomplish the study objectives, WDFW would trap and collect biological data and DNA from adult steelhead released upstream of a Twisp River weir, conduct intensive spawning ground surveys, and collect DNA samples from progeny (i.e., parr and smolts) of previous brood years. Based on the objectives, WDFW would conduct the following field activities:

1. Operate adult fish trap at Twisp River weir located at River Mile (RM) 7.0 on privately-owned land and collect biological data from trapped fish and take tissue samples for DNA analysis from all wild and hatchery steelhead released to spawn naturally.
2. Conduct steelhead spawning ground surveys throughout the Twisp River and its tributaries.
3. Trap age-1 steelhead parr using angling and electrofishing throughout the Twisp River and its tributaries, collect tissue samples for DNA analysis, and PIT tag parr not previously tagged.
4. Operate smolt trap in the lower Twisp River at RM 1.2 on privately-owned land and collect tissue samples from steelhead smolts for DNA analysis.

Funding these actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service and United States Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System and would support 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:

/s/ Katey C. Grange

Katey C. Grange

NEPA Compliance Officer

September 7, 2022

Date

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:** Study Reproductive Success of Hatchery and Natural Origin Steelhead in the Methow Project (update to CX issued on July 12, 2021)

## **Project Site Description**

All activities would occur at field sites associated with the Twisp River and its tributaries in north-central Washington. The adult fish and smolt traps would be located on privately-owned lands. Spawning ground surveys and age-1 parr trapping activities would occur on both privately-owned and public lands (Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest).

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur at existing fish traps or in the water. No ground-disturbing activities that may affect historic or cultural resources are proposed; thus, the proposed activities would not have the potential to affect these resources.

### **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 or habitat.

### **4. Wildlife (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 wildlife or their habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities that may affect water bodies or floodplains are proposed; thus, the action would not impact water bodies or floodplains. Proposed activities would involve stream surveys, trapping, electrofishing and angling for fish, biological data collection of fish, and taking tissue samples from fish. The Twisp River supports ESA-listed summer steelhead, spring Chinook, and bull trout. The WDFW has ESA coverage for take of steelhead and spring Chinook from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) under Section 10 permits 23163 and 18925, respectively. WDFW also has ongoing ESA coverage for take of bull trout from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service under their ESA Section 6 Cooperative Agreement.

## 6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities that may affect wetlands 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 with Conditions

Explanation: Field sites would be accessed via existing road networks, and all activities would be compatible with land use polices on public roads and lands and authorized activities on private roads and lands. Field sites, including areas where spawning-ground surveys would occur, are not proposed within the specially-designated Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, Lake Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness Area.

### Notes:

- Sponsor would follow all terms and conditions of the lease between WDFW and Douglas County Public Utility to operate and maintain the Twisp River weir fish trap.
- Sponsor would follow all agreements in the License for Entry and Use between WDFW and the Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation (MSRF) to operate and maintain the lower Twisp River smolt trap.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No activities that may affect visual quality are proposed; thus, the action would not impact visual quality. No new equipment or installation would occur.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any increase in emissions from vehicles accessing field sites would be minor and short term.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any increase in noise from vehicles accessing field sites would be minor and short term.

## **12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Workers carrying out the proposed action would be trained in proper equipment management techniques. Proposed activities are not considered hazardous nor do they 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: No notification is necessary for work on publicly-owned lands. On privately-owned land, WDFW coordinates work with the Douglas Co. Public Utility District, who is a partner in the study plan, and leases the land to the WDFW at the Twisp River weir fish trap. To access and perform work at the Twisp River smolt trap, WDFW notifies and obtains MSRF's approval in accordance with their License for Entry and Use.

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 September 7, 2022  
Brenda Aguirre, ECF-4 Date  
Environmental Protection Specialist