

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: ODFW East Region Salmonid Life Cycle Monitoring

Project No.: 2023-007-00

Project Manager: Russell Scranton, EWP-4

Location: Grant, Gilliam, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, and Wheeler counties, 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: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to annually monitor Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) and federally-listed steelhead (*O. mykiss*) populations within the John Day Basin and in the Grande Ronde and Imnaha River Subbasins. The goal of this project is to conduct Viable Salmonid Population (VSP) monitoring for status assessments and investigate the critical habitat, abundance, migration patterns, survival, and life history strategies exhibited by and supporting spring Chinook salmon and summer steelhead from distinct populations. This project would provide information on abundance of naturally-produced spring Chinook salmon and steelhead parr, estimates for egg-to-migrant survival for spring Chinook salmon steelhead, estimate the VSP Indicator smolts per spawner for four natural populations, and assess stream conditions in selected study streams. This study provides a means for long term monitoring of juvenile salmonid natural production that is essential for assessing the success of restoration and enhancement efforts including hatchery supplementation and habitat improvement. This research, monitoring, and evaluation project focuses on natural populations of Middle Columbia and Snake River steelhead, natural populations of Snake River Spring/Summer Chinook salmon, and natural populations of Middle Columbia River Spring Chinook Salmon.

The following activities would be conducted.

1. Document via operation of rotary screw traps and Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tagging the in-basin and out-migration patterns and estimate abundance of naturally produced spring Chinook salmon and steelhead juveniles in the South Fork, Middle Fork, and Upper Mainstem John Day River, Catherine Creek and the upper Grande Ronde, Minam, and Lostine rivers.
2. Determine, via the operation of rotary screw traps and PIT tagging, overwinter mortality and the relative success of fall (early) migrant and spring (late) migrant life history strategies for spring Chinook salmon from tributary populations in Catherine Creek and the upper Grande Ronde, and Lostine rivers, and the relative success of fall (early) migrant and spring (late) migrant life history strategies for spring Chinook salmon from the Minam River.

3. Capture and PIT tag Chinook parr to estimate and compare smolt survival probabilities at main stem Columbia and Snake River dams for migrants from five local, natural populations of spring Chinook salmon in the Grande Ronde River and Imnaha River subbasins.
4. Operate rotary screw traps and PIT tag juveniles to estimate the VSP Indicators Natural Origin Spawner abundance, species distribution and juvenile outmigrant abundance/recruits per spawner, for spring Chinook salmon and steelhead in the North Fork John Day and Middle Fork John Day River, Catherine Creek, Upper Grande Ronde River, Lostine River, and Minam River populations.
5. Document patterns of movement and estimate abundance of juvenile steelhead from tributary populations in Catherine Creek, the upper Grande Ronde, Lostine and the Minam rivers including migration timing, and duration with rotary screw traps and PIT tagging.
6. Estimate and compare survival probabilities to main stem Columbia and Snake River dams for Spring/summer Chinook summer steelhead from four tributary populations: Catherine Creek and the upper Grande Ronde, Lostine, and Minam rivers with rotary screw traps and PIT tagging.
7. Describe aquatic habitat conditions, using water temperature and discharge data collection, in Catherine Creek and the upper Grande Ronde, Lostine, and Minam rivers.
8. Conduct parr surveys to estimate density and distribution of steelhead parr and Chinook salmon parr in the John Day, Wallowa/Lostine populations.
9. Support PIT array O&M.

Field methods would involve the capture, handling, and marking of juvenile salmonids. Sampling sites would be chosen from areas that have had previous habitat surveys from past projects. Capture methods would include backpack electrofishing, snorkel seining, and snorkel herding with nets. These sample events would occur twice per year, once in late summer and again in early winter to develop survival estimates of summer rearing and overwinter survival. Fish would also be captured, handled, and marked at rotary screw trap locations. Tagged fish could be detected at PIT tag arrays located downstream and in mainstem Columbia and Snake River dams. Temperature data would be collected at screw trap locations and at some of the fish sampling locations. PIT tag array operation and maintenance would consist of direct repairs or maintenance of the array. No ground disturbance nor structure modification would occur for screw trap installation or PIT tag array operation and maintenance.

These actions would support conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with both National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also support BPA's 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/ Israel Duran

Israel Duran
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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: ODFW East Region Salmonid Life Cycle Monitoring

Project Site Description

All activities would occur at existing collection sites in the John Day, Grande Ronde and Imnaha rivers subbasins in Grant, Gilliam, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, and Wheeler counties, Oregon. Monitoring activities would occur on private and public properties (Oregon, Bureau of Land Management, Malheur, Ochoco, and Umatilla National Forests).

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no ground disturbance or construction activities, only data collection at existing fish trapping facilities or by visual observations; therefore, there is no potential to cause effects to historic and cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed and disturbance would be minimal, limited to minor sedimentation when walking in rivers or streams; thus, the proposed activities do not have the potential to affect geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions do not include any vegetation management, ground disturbance, or work that would remove or substantially impact vegetation. Therefore, there is no potential to affect plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Personnel may displace wildlife during surveys due to elevated noise and human presence, but this would be temporary. There would be no actions that would occur on upland areas; therefore, there would be little effect on wildlife and no effect to wildlife habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Chinook and steelhead would be monitored and trapped via rotating screw traps, electrofishing, and seines and PIT tagged. Other fish encountered during trapping would likely be bass, pikeminnow, suckers, sculpins and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*). All fish species would be fin clipped, and pikeminnow and bass would also be PIT tagged. ODFW has authorization for this action under a series of NMFS Section 4(d) and Section 10 permits for the take of ESA-listed anadromous salmonids. Bull trout take associated with RM&E activities in the Grande Ronde and Imnaha are covered under the USFWS Biological Opinion for *NMFS issuance of section 10 permits for the continued operation and maintenance of the Northeast Oregon and Southeast Washington spring/summer Chinook, steelhead and rainbow trout hatchery programs funded by the Service's Lower Snake River Compensation Plan Office and BPA*. All other bull trout take is covered under Section 6 agreement with USFWS. No other ESA-listed fish are present in project area. Waterbodies and floodplains would not be affected by the actions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed and wetlands are none known to be present; thus, the action does not have the potential to impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed and the action would not result in an increase in groundwater use. The work would not change the hydrological regime and, therefore, would not affect groundwater recharge.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access to field sites is on existing road networks and all activities are compatible with local land use. Land use would not change. The project is not located in a specially-designated area or Wild and Scenic River.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: This project would use rotary screw traps, and conduct surveys that may be visible to recreational users. The traps and any associated equipment would be removed upon completion of the spring run and the visual quality of those sites would not be permanently impacted. Therefore, the proposed action would not have a permanent impact on visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any increase in emissions from vehicles accessing sampling sites would be very minor and short term. A negligible amount of temporary dust and vehicle emissions could be generated during project activities.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be carried out from within existing sampling sites and would not result in an increase in ambient noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Personnel are trained in proper equipment management techniques, and all applicable safety regulations would be followed. The project activities are not likely to mobilize previously undisturbed soils. Therefore, the action would not uncover contaminated earth, mobilize fuel or chemical leaks, or disturb underground storage tanks. This activity is not considered hazardous nor does 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: The project actions are proposed by the ODFW to be implemented by ODFW staff on private and public properties (Oregon, Bureau of Land Management, Malheur, Ochoco, and Umatilla National Forests.) Where projects are conducted on public lands, work is done in coordination with land managers. On private lands, ODFW would obtain landowner approval prior to accessing project areas and performing work.

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

Signed: /s/ Israel Duran

Israel Duran

Environmental Protection Specialist

01/22/2024

Date