

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Continued funding to Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for ongoing Relative Reproductive Success Study

**Project No.:** 1992-026-04

**Project Manager:** Russell Scranton

**Location:** Grande Ronde and Imnaha River Subbasins in Union and Wallowa Counties, Oregon

**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:** BPA proposes to continue funding the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for ongoing work on the Relative Reproductive Success Study (RSS) in the Grande Ronde and Imnaha River Subbasins. The goal of this project is to investigate the critical habitat, abundance, migration patterns, survival, and alternate life history strategies exhibited by spring Chinook salmon and summer steelhead juveniles 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 and migrant survival for steelhead, estimate the Viable Salmonid Population (VSP) Indicator smolts per spawner for four natural populations of spring Chinook salmon, and assess stream conditions in selected study streams.

This study provides a means for long term monitoring of juvenile salmonid natural production in the Grande Ronde and Imnaha River Subbasins to assess the success of restoration and enhancement efforts including hatchery supplementation and habitat improvement. These activities fulfill commitments begun under the 2008 NMFS Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (as supplemented in 2010 and 2014) (2008 BiOp) and ongoing commitments under the 2019 NMFS Columbia River System BiOp (2019 CRS BiOp).

Field methods would involve the capture, handling, and marking of juvenile salmonids, specifically Chinook salmon and steelhead. 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 in order to develop survival estimates of summer rearing and overwinter survival.

Fish would also be captured, handled, and marked at rotary screw trap locations. 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.

**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/ Travis D. Kessler

Travis D. Kessler  
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist  
Salient CRGT, Inc.

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel  
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: March 5, 2020

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:** Continued funding to ODFW for ongoing Relative Reproductive Success Study

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## Project Site Description

All activities would occur in waterbodies in the Grande Ronde and Imnaha River Subbasins in Union and Wallowa Counties, Oregon.

## Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. <b>Historic and Cultural Resources</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> There would be no ground disturbing activities nor structure modifications. Thus the proposed activities do not have the potential to affect historic properties or cultural resources. All work would be carried out in the stream channel, from within existing facilities, or at mobile PIT tagging trailers.</p>		
2. <b>Geology and Soils</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> No ground disturbing activities proposed. Thus the proposed activities do not have the potential to affect geology and soils. All work would be carried out in the stream channel, from within existing facilities, or at mobile PIT tagging trailers.</p>		
3. <b>Plants</b> (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> No ground disturbing or vegetation removal activities proposed. All work would be carried out in the stream channel, from within existing facilities, or at mobile PIT tagging trailers.</p>		
4. <b>Wildlife</b> (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> No ground disturbing or other activity that may affect wildlife or wildlife habitat is proposed. Work would be carried out from within existing facilities or at mobile PIT tagging trailers would not disturb wildlife. Increased human presence associated with stream sampling activities may cause temporary disturbance to wildlife, but this is anticipated to be of short duration and minor.</p>		

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



Explanation: PIT tagging wild-origin anadromous salmonids is a common and wide-spread activity within the Columbia River basin. Since these activities are requirements in the Biological Opinion under the 2008 NMFS Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion (as supplemented in 2010 and 2014) (2008 BiOp) and ongoing commitments under the 2019 NMFS Columbia River System BiOp (2019 CRS BiOp), NMFS annually issues a Determination of Take Memorandum describing the maximum number of individual ESA-listed fish that may be tagged in a given year—the number of fish tagged in support of the RSS study is well below that threshold.

Bull trout are covered under the USFWS BiOp for NOAA issuance of section 10(a)(1)(A) 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 (LSRCP) Office and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), and its effects on bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and designated critical habitat in accordance with section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

There would be no impact to adjacent waterbodies or floodplains because no ground disturbing activities are proposed. All work would be carried out from within existing facilities or at mobile PIT tagging trailers.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: No ground disturbing activities are proposed. Thus the action does not have the potential to impact wetlands. All work would be carried out in the stream channel, from within existing facilities, or at mobile PIT tagging trailers.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: No ground disturbing activities that may affect groundwater or aquifers are proposed. All work would be carried out in the stream channel, from within existing facilities, or at mobile PIT tagging trailers.

8. **Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**



Explanation: All work would be carried out from in the stream channel, within existing facilities, or at mobile PIT tagging trailers. Access to field sites is on existing road networks and all activities are compatible with local land use.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: All work would be carried out in the stream channel, from within existing facilities, or at mobile PIT tagging trailers and has no effect to visual quality. The mobile PIT tag trailers would access field sites on existing roads and remain parked temporarily. Any change to the viewshed would be short-term and temporary.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: All work would be carried out in the stream channel, from within existing facilities, or at mobile PIT tagging trailers 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**



Explanation: All work would be carried out in the stream channel, from within existing facilities, or at mobile PIT tagging trailers and would not result in an increase in ambient noise at PIT tagging locations.

## 12. Human Health and Safety



Explanation: All work would be carried out in the stream channel, from within existing facilities, or at mobile PIT tagging trailers. Workers carrying out PIT tagging activities are trained in proper tagging techniques and this activity is not considered hazardous nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the general public. Field crews working in the stream channel would take water safety precautions, such as wearing life vests as appropriate.

### **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, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

- 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, if necessary:

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### **Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination**

Description: All work would occur in the stream channel, at existing facilities, or at mobile facilities accessed on existing roads on public lands.

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

Signed: /s/ Travis D. Kessler  
Travis D. Kessler, ECF  
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist  
Salient CRGT, Inc.

Date: March 5, 2020