

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Pacific Lamprey Conservation Initiative

**Project No.:** 2017-005-00 (Contract #78040 REL 27)

**Project Manager:** Siena M. Lopez-Johnston, EWM-4

**Location:** Cowlitz and Okanogan Counties, WA

**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 Pacific Lamprey Conservation Initiative (PLCI), a cooperative effort among agencies and tribes to achieve long-term persistence of Pacific lamprey (*Entosphenus tridentatus*) and support traditional tribal cultural use throughout the Columbia River Basin. Funding the proposed activities supports ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System on fish and wildlife in the main stem 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.). BPA proposes to fund as part of the PLCI the following specific actions:

## ***Electrofishing and Habitat Assessments in Abernathy Creek***

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) would conduct larval Pacific lamprey electrofishing in Abernathy Creek in Cowlitz County, Washington. The presence or absence of larval lamprey would be compared between areas that underwent recent salmonid habitat restoration and areas that did not undergo habitat restoration.

Lamprey would be collected following lamprey-specific electrofishing techniques, identified, measured, and then immediately returned to the stream. At each sample site, the USFWS would collect habitat variables, including:

- Water depth, velocity, temperature, and pH
- Organic debris depth and substrate size
- Channel unit type (i.e., pool or riffle), habitat type (i.e., I, II, or III as described by Moser et al. 2007), channel position (i.e., margin or mid-channel), and wetted width
- Percent canopy closure
- Distance (in river kilometers) from the confluence of Abernathy Creek and the Columbia River

### ***eDNA Sample Analysis***

Confederated Colville Tribes (CCT) would coordinate with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to conduct environmental DNA (eDNA) analysis of archived water samples collected in the Okanogan River Basin from 2012 to 2019, which could provide insight into the recent history of lamprey distribution and habitat preferences within the basin. All proposed activities would take place at the Pacific Northwest Environmental DNA Laboratory in Boise, Idaho.

### ***Adult Pacific Lamprey Translocation***

CCT would participate in a collaborative effort to translocate lamprey from the Lower Columbia River to release sites in the Okanogan River Basin. No materials, equipment, or activities associated with lamprey collection would be funded by BPA as part of this project. Rather, CCT would receive lamprey collected at Priest Rapids Dam (and potentially John Day Dam) by partner organizations, including Grant County Public Utility District and Yakama Nation. Collected lamprey would be implanted with passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags to monitor their movement through an existing network of PIT tag arrays. CCT would transport the lamprey to designated release sites within the Okanogan River Basin, potentially including:

- Similkameen River
- Loup Loup Creek
- Salmon Creek
- Okanogan River main stem immediately downstream of the mouth of Salmon Creek
- Omak Creek above and below Omak Falls

As an additional method of determining lamprey occupancy, pre- and post-release water samples would be collected at the release sites for eDNA analysis by USGS.

### ***Natal Origins Study***

Oregon State University (OSU) and St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) would examine chemical elements and isotopic signatures stored in lamprey stratoliths and eye lenses, which could reflect the unique biogeochemical composition of the areas where the fish hatched and developed.

No materials, equipment, or activities associated with lamprey collection would be funded by BPA as part of this project. OSU and SMCM would receive lamprey from partner organizations in Washington and Oregon, including Yakama Nation, fisheries biologists working at Rock Island Dam, Lower Granite Dam, McNary Dam, and Clackamas North Fork Dam, and researchers at Humboldt State University. All proposed activities would take place within laboratory facilities.

**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



# 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:** Pacific Lamprey Conservation Initiative

## **Project Site Description**

Larval Pacific lamprey electrofishing and habitat assessments would occur at multiple field sites in Abernathy Creek, a tributary to the Columbia River located in Cowlitz County, Washington. As part of ongoing translocation efforts, adult lamprey would be released at designated sites within the Okanogan River Basin, potentially including:

- Similkameen River
- Loup Loup Creek
- Salmon Creek
- Okanogan River main stem immediately downstream of the mouth of Salmon Creek
- Omak Creek above and below Omak Falls

All remaining project activities would occur indoors at existing laboratory facilities.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA has determined the proposed activities would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties. The proposed activities (electrofishing and habitat assessments, lamprey translocation, and laboratory-based analyses) would not result in ground disturbance that could potentially impact archaeological resources. No modifications to existing built historic resources are proposed.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed project. Therefore, there would be no impact to geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not require any tree or vegetation removal or management and would not result in adverse modification to suitable protected plant habitats. Therefore, there would be no effect on state special-status plant species or plant species protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary disturbance of normal wildlife behavior could occur from elevated noise and human presence at the various electrofishing and lamprey release sites. However, proposed activities would be temporary and largely consistent with activities typical of these sites. Wildlife species that could be present in the area would likely be habituated to these types of human activities. The proposed project would not result in adverse modification to suitable protected species habitat. Therefore, there would be no effect on state special-status wildlife species or wildlife species protected under the Federal ESA.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Larval Pacific lamprey surveys would use backpack electrofishing equipment and methods specifically designed to stun and not harm lamprey. Because larval lamprey are smaller and more sensitive to shocking than bony fish, electrofishing equipment would be operated at frequencies low enough to not harm protected fish while still effectively targeting lamprey. Field staff would visually inspect survey areas and would not conduct in-water surveys when protected fish species are observed. USFWS has obtained NOAA Scientific Research Permit 23633, which authorizes the take of Lower Columbia River (LCR) Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) and LCR coho salmon (*O. kisutch*) while conducting electrofishing in Abernathy Creek.

Surveys and in-water data collection would disturb streambed sediment, which would temporarily increase turbidity. Following completion of the proposed activities, suspended sediments would resettle on the streambed, and turbidity would quickly return to pre-existing conditions. Therefore, there would be no long-term impact to water bodies, and there would be no impact to floodplains.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some proposed activities could take place within or near wetlands. However, no new ground disturbance or vegetation removal or management is proposed. Therefore, there would be no impact to wetland quality, condition, or size.

#### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would occur as a result of the proposed project. Therefore, there would be no impact to groundwater and aquifers.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change in land use and no impact to specially-designated areas.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All proposed actions would occur at existing sites. There would be no impact to visual quality.

## 10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary dust and emissions could increase in the local area from the transportation of staff and equipment to project areas. There would be no substantial change in air quality.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and temporary noise could increase at field sites from vehicle and equipment use. However, these actions would be consistent with current activities typical of the field sites. All other proposed project activities would occur indoors at existing laboratory facilities. There would be no substantial change in ambient noise.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Individuals carrying out proposed project activities would be trained in proper techniques and use of materials and equipment. The project would not generate or use hazardous materials and would not create conditions that would increase risk to human health and safety. No impacts to human health and safety are expected as a result of project activities.

### **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 landowner notification, involvement, or coordination would be required as all proposed project sites would be accessed via existing roads and public lands.

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

Signed: /s/ W. Walker Stinnette October 28, 2020  
W. Walker Stinnette, EC-4 Date  
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist  
Salient CRGT