

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Viable Salmonid Population (VSP) Estimates for the Yakima River Steelhead Major Population Group (MPG) Project

Project No.: 2010-030-00

Project Manager: Russell Scranton, EWP-4

Location: Yakima; Benton; and Kittitas counties, WA

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: BPA proposes to fund the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) (hereafter referred to collectively as “the Sponsor”) to provide viable salmonid population (VSP) estimates for steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) within the Yakima River Basin. This project was developed to expand Research, Monitoring, & Evaluation (RM&E) activities conducted by the Sponsor to better evaluate VSP parameters (abundance, productivity, spatial structure, and diversity) for Yakima River steelhead populations. Data from this project would be used to evaluate population status and trends, inform National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) status reviews, and address critical uncertainties. The improved understanding of steelhead population performance produced by this project provides long-term status and trends monitoring data for the Yakima River Steelhead Major Population Group (MPG) populations, and directly informs efforts to recover steelhead populations in the Yakima River Basin.

Specific activities proposed to be funded by BPA include:

1. Passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag array installation, operation, and maintenance
2. Biological and DNA sampling at the Prosser adult monitoring facility
3. PIT-tagging of adult steelhead at the Prosser Dam trap
4. Electrofishing and PIT-tagging of juvenile steelhead within the Naches River and tributaries by the Yakama Confederated Tribes
5. Electrofishing and PIT-tagging of steelhead within the Yakima River and select tributaries by WDFW

Funding the proposed activities would fulfill commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion, while also supporting 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/ Mandy Hope

Mandy Hope
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
ACS Professional Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ Chad Hamel

Chad Hamel
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel May 19, 2021

Sarah T. Biegel 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: Viable Salmonid Population (VSP) Estimates for the Yakima River Steelhead Major Population Group (MPG) Project

Project Site Description

Adult steelhead would be captured and PIT-tagged at the Prosser Dam trap within the right bank fish ladder, which is operated from early September to June, to sample steelhead across the migration period. Biological data collected at the Prosser Dam trap include, but are not limited to: fork length, weight, age (scales), sex, and DNA. Electrofishing and PIT-tagging of juvenile steelhead by the Yakama Confederated Tribes would occur within the Naches River and its tributaries. Electrofishing and PIT-tagging of steelhead by WDFW would occur within the mainstem Yakima River and select tributaries. PIT tag array installation, operation, and maintenance would take place across the Yakima River Basin by the Yakama Confederated Tribes.

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, only data collection at existing facilities; therefore, there is no potential to impact historic and cultural resources.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Earth disturbance would be minimal and limited to minor sedimentation when walking in rivers or streams. Therefore, geology and soils would not be impacted.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not remove or disturb vegetation. Therefore, no effects on plants are anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would increase noise and visual disturbance only minimally above ambient levels. The project would not be using heavy construction equipment and would not disturb earth or vegetation. Therefore, negligible effects on wildlife are anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Effects to the Middle Columbia River steelhead DPS are covered under the Yakima River Spring Chinook Salmon, Summer/Fall Chinook Salmon, and Coho Salmon Hatchery Programs Biological Opinion dated November 25, 2013 (NWR-2011-06509), which expires July 15, 2023. Effects to bull trout are covered by a Section 10 permit (TE-05166B-0) which expired in March 2019. The Section 7 consultation for effects to bull trout as a result of this program is currently in progress.

Electrofishing and PIT-tagging are not anticipated to have any effect to the floodplains or waterbodies within the Yakima River Basin, as no ground disturbance or channel modifications are proposed. Temporary, localized sediment/substrate disturbance may be caused by walking through streams during the electrofishing activities, but this effect is not anticipated to be significant.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No known wetlands are present. The project would not disturb wetlands; therefore, there would be no effect on wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: 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: 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: The project is not anticipated to have any impact to visual quality since project activities would occur at existing facilities. Electrofishing would occur in various locations within the Yakima River Basin but there would be no lasting visual impact related to the surveys.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A negligible amount of temporary dust and vehicle emissions could be generated during the work.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions do not involve any new construction or new use of heavy equipment. Therefore, there would be only negligible increase in ambient noise.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The work is 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.

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: Where projects are on public land (e.g., Wenatchee National Forest), work would be done in coordination with land managers (e.g., U.S. Forest Service, Department of Natural Resources, WDFW, etc). On private land, WDFW and the Yakama Confederated Tribes would access project areas or perform work only after obtaining landowner approval.

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

Signed: /s/ Mandy Hope May 19, 2021
Mandy Hope, ECF-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
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