

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Albeni Falls Dam RM&E

Project No.: 2007-246-00

Project Manager: Timothy Ludington, EWM - 4

Location: Pend Oreille County, Washington and Bonner County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B3.3 Research related to conservation of fish, wildlife, and cultural resources; B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish, and wildlife habitat; B1.3 Routine maintenance.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Kalispel Tribe's ongoing research, monitoring, and evaluation (RM&E) actions in the Pend Oreille River basin. These RM&E actions would focus on evaluating populations of westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkia lewisi*) and Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) in the Pend Oreille River and its tributaries. These actions would support the conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System (2020 FWS CRS BiOp), in addition to supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for the 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. 839 et seq.).

BPA would fund ongoing RM&E actions with the objective of studying populations of trout affected by the anthropogenic blockage of the Pend Oreille River by the Albeni Falls Dam. The long-term goal of the project is to develop fish passage solutions at the dam. Until such a long-term solution can be found, these RM&E actions would provide temporary upstream passage for trout in the basin while studying the effects that the passage barrier has caused on resident fish populations. Actions being funded would include:

- Electrofishing capture of bull trout in the mainstem Pend Oreille River and tributaries both above and below the Albeni Falls Dam. Fish captured would be measured and weighed, have tissue samples taken for lab analysis, and have passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags implanted for further data collection.
- Transportation of bull trout captured below Albeni Falls Dam to upstream of the dam. Fish captured below the dam would be transported via truck to locations above the dam. The fish would be released either at the Priest River Boat launch during cooler water temperatures or directly into Lake Pend Oreille when water temperatures exceed the biological tolerances for bull trout so that the fish could seek thermal refugia in the lake.

- Electrofishing capture of westslope cutthroat trout in tributaries to the Pend Oreille River both above and below the Albeni Falls Dam. Fish captured would be measured and weighed and have tissue samples taken for lab analysis.
- Routine maintenance of the existing boat and equipment storage barn at the Tribe's Indian Creek property. Routine maintenance work would include general upkeep of the barn and equipment used for project activities.
- Building upgrades at the Indian Creek storage barn. Existing support beams would be moved and wooden beams replaced with metal beams to allow for increased storage space and easier access. Additionally, the barn's electrical system would be updated by removing and replacing old wiring, outlets, and lights. No new construction would occur and all activities would be within the existing barn's footprint.

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/ Thomas DeLorenzo

Thomas DeLorenzo
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel May 11, 2022

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: Albeni Falls Dam RM&E

Project Site Description

Project activities would take place in water bodies throughout the Pend Oreille subbasin in northeastern Washington and northwestern Idaho. Some project activities would take place in the mainstem Pend Oreille River, a roughly 200 km long tributary to the Columbia River that runs from Lake Pend Oreille in northern Idaho to its confluence with the Columbia in southern British Columbia. Project activities in the Pend Oreille would occur as far downstream as the confluence with Indian Creek, located roughly 12 km downriver of the Albeni Falls Dam, near the border of Idaho and Washington. The storage barn which would be maintained is also located near this confluence on tribally-owned land. Project activities would also occur in numerous small tributaries to the Pend Oreille, including Priest River, located roughly 8 km upstream of the Albeni Falls Dam, and Lake Pend Oreille.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA archaeologist reviewed the project activities and determined that there would be no potential to affect cultural resources (BPA CR No. WA 2022 131).

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities are proposed. All access to project sites are along established roadways and infrastructure (boat launches, etc.). All work at the Indian Creek storage barn would occur within the existing building footprint.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed plant species are present in the project area (United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC)). Washington state-listed endangered Michigan moonwort (*Botrychium michiganense*) has the potential to occur in Pend Oreille County (Washington Department of Natural Resources). However, this species is typically only found in sandy dune systems and would not be present at the project locations. No Idaho state-listed species of endangered plants are present in Bonner County (Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation).

Work sites would be accessed by existing infrastructure and project activities would be conducted in-water and within the existing footprint of the Indian Creek storage barn. As a result, no further effects to plant species would occur.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Canada lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*), grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) have the potential to occur in the project area (IPaC). The project areas are below the typical elevation and outside the typical spruce and fir forests in which lynx are found. Grizzly bear are likewise unlikely to be found near project sites due to their avoidance of human presence. Yellow-billed cuckoo typically nest in riparian woodlands and all project locations are within water bodies with access along established roadways. As a result, the actions would have no effect on these species. No other Washington or Idaho state-listed species of endangered animals are present in the project area (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation).

To the extent that any wildlife in the project area would be disturbed by human presence (noise, shadows, etc.) during project activities, the effects would be temporary and cause no lasting impacts.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No anadromous fish species are present due to anthropogenic blockages downriver of the project locations. ESA-listed bull trout and bull trout critical habitat are present in the Pend Oreille River and its tributaries. The Kalispel Tribe obtained an ESA Section 10 permit (permit number TE844478-8) from USFWS for authorized activities in support of bull trout recovery. The permit is valid through June 5, 2023. Authorized activities under the permit include surveying, collecting and capturing, handling, tagging, biosampling, holding, transporting, releasing, and salvaging bull trout in the project area.

All in-water work would be conducted and supervised by trained personnel to minimize negative impacts to fish species from project activities. Data gathered from project activities would be used to inform potential fish bypass development for Albeni Falls Dam, which would have long-term positive benefits to resident fish in the Pend Oreille basin.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No project activities would take place in wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or groundwater use are proposed.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No changes to existing land uses are proposed.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new equipment installation or habitat altering activities are proposed. As a result, no changes to visual quality would occur.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicles (trucks, boats) would generate exhaust emissions during project activities. These emissions would be minor and temporary and have no long-term impacts on air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicles (trucks, boats) would generate noise during project activities. This noise would be minor and temporary and have no long-term impacts.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All personnel would use best practices to ensure human health and safety. All electrofishing would be conducted and supervised by trained personnel to ensure safety.

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: Access to project locations would be along existing public roads. Most project activities would take place in public waterways. Boat launches are owned by the Tribe or other public entities (Pend Oreille County, U.S. Forest Service) for public use. The Indian Creek storage barn is located on Tribal property. No external coordination would be required.

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

Signed: /s/ Thomas DeLorenzo May 11, 2022
Thomas DeLorenzo, ECF - 4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist