

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: McInernie Creek Culvert Replacement Project

Project No.: 1991-019-03

Project Manager: Cecilia Brown, EWM-4

Location: Flathead County, Montana

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of Cultural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to replace an undersized culvert on McInernie Creek, a tributary of Hungry Horse Reservoir, approximately 15 miles southeast of Hungry Horse, Montana. The existing culvert is a barrier to aquatic organism passage, including westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisii*), a Montana State Species of Concern. The existing culvert would be replaced with an open-bottom arch pipe culvert placed on pre-cast concrete footers, with natural-functioning stream channel features beneath the arch. The new open-bottomed culvert would be 16 feet wide, 8 feet 4 inches high, and 110 feet long. The proposed replacement activities would occur on United States Forest Service, Flathead National Forest (FNF) lands.

McInernie Creek would be diverted around the construction site to reduce potential impacts to fish. Rerouting the flow requires the installation of cofferdams and a diversion pump. Fish would be captured and relocated from the construction site prior to that site being drained to allow for construction. The project would be completed using a metal-tracked excavator (CAT 320 or similar) operating with support equipment (loader or skid steer), dewatering pumps, and human labor.

After construction, McInernie Creek would be redirected back into its original, but now reconstructed channel. The reconstruction would involve a section immediately above the culvert (approximately 10 feet long), a simulated stream channel under the new culvert and a short (approximately 10 foot long) reconstructed stretch of channel below the new culvert.

All disturbed surfaces would be replanted with native seed and plants. Inspection and maintenance of the project site would occur annually, and could include minor on-site adjustments to streambank or channel bed conditions within, above, and below the culvert as needed to maintain project success, and additional vegetation plantings if needed.

This proposed action would support conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System, while also supporting ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the FCRPS on fish and wildlife in the mainstem Columbia River and its tributaries

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.

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Project Site Description

The project area reach of McInernie Creek is located within heavily forested lands. The primary land use in the area is forestry with moderate seasonal recreational use. Dense riparian vegetation is located along the stream and accompanying floodplain throughout the entire reach. Beyond the floodplain, the contributing area consists of steep alpine/sub-alpine terrain.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: By agreement with the FNF, BPA is the lead federal agency for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for this project. BPA determined that implementation of the proposed undertaking would result in no historic properties affected and completed consultation under Section 106 on August 15, 2022 (MT 2021 001). Consulting parties included the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, FNF, and Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). FNF concurred with BPA's effects determination on July 15, 2022 and SHPO concurred on August 15, 2022. No other responses were received during the 30-day comment period, which ended August 14, 2022.

Notes:

- In the unlikely event that cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, BPA requires that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by a professional archaeologist. MFWP to have a copy of BPA's Inadvertent Discovery Protocol on site during project implementation.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary, impacts to soil from increased erosion potential during construction activities. Sediment control BMPs would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Work area would be isolated by rerouting water around the work area to minimize erosion and turbidity.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status plants, including Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species, are known to be present. There would be temporary impacts to existing vegetation during

construction activities. Post construction plantings and long-term monitoring would re-establish native upland and riparian plant communities.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed grizzly bear, Canada lynx and Canada lynx critical habitat are present within or near the project area. The project is covered under the HIP Biological Opinion under Section 7 of the ESA with Project Notification Form No. 2022082. MFWP would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval.

No habitats would be modified to any degree that might permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from construction activities.

Human presence and activity associated with construction would temporarily disturb and displace nearby wildlife, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed bull trout and state-listed special-status westslope cutthroat trout are present in the project area. The project is covered under BPA's HIP Biological Opinion with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under Section 7 of the ESA with Project Notification Form No. 2022082. MFWP would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures identified in the HIP consultation and approval, including turbidity monitoring requirements and in-water work timing.

Culvert replacement would occur at low flows and would require diversion of the creek by pumping and piping the creek flow around the construction site. Fish removal would be completed via electrofishing before work within the stream channel begins. Electrofishing is stressful on fish and potentially harmful, but the number of fish affected would be few and from only a small area of the stream.

Some aquatic invertebrates and amphibians may be displaced or killed by the culvert installation at the inlet and outlet of the culvert, but quick re-occupation of these small sites by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following construction is anticipated.

MFWP obtained a Clean Water Act Nationwide Permit 27 from the Corps of Engineers to ensure the project meets national water quality standards.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no groundwater withdrawal.

There would be some miniscule potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills from the equipment used for culvert replacement, but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater is unlikely.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Explanation: The project would not change the capability of the land to be used as it was prior to project actions.

There would be no land use changes, and no impact to specially designated areas.

There would be minimal effect on recreation from the proposed project. Temporary displacement of recreational users (archery hunters, anglers, hikers, campers, horse packers) would occur for about 3 weeks during project activities. Recreationalists could use an alternate route on the west side of the reservoir during the displacement. Access would return to normal conditions once the project is complete

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made.

Culvert replacement would not change the visual character of the landscape along, or as seen from, local roads.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some exhaust and greenhouse gas emissions from the motorized equipment used for culvert replacement, but these are short-term actions, and no long-term source of emissions or exhaust is created.

Vehicles used to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the site would be another potential source of exhaust and greenhouse gasses, but this also would be minimal and short-term.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some short-term noise impacts from the heavy equipment used for the culvert replacement, but this type of noise is not inconsistent with that of common logging in the local area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicle and excavator operation, and working with hand and power tools have their attendant risks to equipment operators, but there would be no condition created from this action that would introduce new human health or safety hazards or risk into the environment.

No condition created by this action would increase the burden on the local health, safety, and emergency-response infrastructure.

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 McInernie Creek culvert replacement is on a FNF road, and was designed in cooperation with FNF. MFWP would notify the FNF prior to construction activities.

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

Signed: /s/ Brenda Aguirre
Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist

August 16, 2022
Date