# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

**Proposed Action:** Musselshell Creek Bridge Replacement Project

**Project No.:** 1996-077-02

**Project Manager:** Ryan Ruggiero, EWM-4

**Location:** Idaho County, Idaho

**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:** BPA proposes to fund the Nez Perce Tribe to replace an old, unsafe, wooden bridge on a private road in Clearwater County, Idaho. The bridge crosses Musselshell Creek, a tributary to Lolo Creek, (Lat 46.344282° Long -115.778531°) eight air miles east of Weippe, Idaho. Road users have begun using an adjacent unimproved ford rather than the unsafe bridge, which together are degrading habitat for ESA-listed Snake River steelhead. A catastrophic bridge failure during a high flow event would have the potential to restrict or severely compromise fish passage. Replacement of the bridge would ensure continued passage to approximately 30 miles of habitat including more than 5.7 miles of NOAA-designated Critical Habitat for Snake River steelhead. The existing bridge and its approaches also hinder proper downstream functioning of the stream channel and floodplain, preventing development of spawning and rearing habitat for Snake River steelhead and other aquatic species.

The existing bridge would be replaced with a 65-foot-long steel modular bridge atop two concrete abutments. Two 48-inch-diameter culverts would be placed in the bridge approaches on either side to allow more natural floodplain connections at high flows. The construction would occur at low flows and would require diversion of the creek by pumping and piping the creek flow around the construction site. Before beginning work within the stream channel, a Clean Water Act Nationwide Permit would be obtained to ensure the project meets national water quality standards, and fish capture and relocation would be completed via electrofishing to protect ESA-listed fish species.

The project would remove the unimproved ford and a rock weir beneath the bridge (presumed to be of recent recreational origin) and reconstruct about 125 feet of the stream channel from upstream of the bridge to downstream of the ford. This reconstruction would include reshaping the stream bed and banks, constructing two instream riffles with a pool beneath each, constructing point bars on both sides of each riffle, and rehabilitating the banks at the ford site by constructing fabric-wrapped banks on each side revegetated with live willow stakes.

This Proposed Action fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Columbia River System Biological Opinion and would support 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/ Robert W. Shull*
Robert W. Shull
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
CorSource Technology Group

Reviewed by:
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Concur:
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Katey C. Grange 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:** Musselshell Creek Bridge Replacement Project

## Project Site Description

The project area is located in a privately owned commercial forest used for timber production, livestock grazing, and a variety of recreational activities. Though timber harvest has occurred in nearby upland areas, no recent logging activity has occurred in the floodplain and the stream supports a robust woody riparian plant community around most of the project area. Much of the area immediately around the crossing, however, consists of a maintained clearing featuring grasses and low shrubs.

## Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

### 1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA consulted with the Nez Perce Tribe and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on October 25, 2023 on the effects of the project based on intensive surveys of the site by the Nez Perce Tribe Cultural Resource Program. Previous archeological surveys identified no indigenous cultural resources recorded within the area of potential effect (APE), but one indigenous cultural resource had been identified within one mile of the project area. The survey found no additional archeological resources or historic properties located within the APE, and BPA determined that no historic properties would be affected by this project. Nez Perce Tribe concurred with this determination on October 25, 2023. SHPO concurred with this determination in their letter on December 22, 2023 (SHPO Rev. No.: 2024-43).

### 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 best management practices (BMPs) would be installed prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Work areas 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 from heavy equipment excavation for bridge construction, culvert installations, and the 125 feet of stream channel reconstruction. Post-construction plantings and long-term monitoring would re-establish native and riparian plant communities on disturbed soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No Federal/state special-status wildlife species or habitats are known to occupy the project area. 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 with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed Snake River steelhead and their designated critical habitat are present in the project area. The project is covered under the HIP Biological Opinion under Section 7 of the ESA. The project sponsor 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. No state-listed special-status species occupy the project areas.

Electrofishing for fish salvage during dewatering of the construction area would be stressful on fish and potentially harmful, but the number of fish affected would be few and from only a small area of the creek.

Some aquatic invertebrates and amphibians may be displaced or killed by the excavations for the new bridge abutments and culvert installations, but quick re-occupation of these small sites by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following construction is anticipated.

In the long term, the project would enhance fish habitat by removing sources of unnatural sediment inputs, improve local habitat conditions for adult and juvenile fish and would ensure continued passage to approximately 30 miles of habitat including more than 5.7 miles of NOAA-designated Critical Habitat for Snake River steelhead.

Notes:

Prior to construction in the waterbody or adjacent wetlands, the sponsor would obtain applicable Clean Water Act permitting.

## 6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Streamside and floodplain wetlands are present in the project area, and would be disturbed during construction activities. These wetland sites would not be eliminated, but rather restored following construction and ultimately increased in area by improved floodplain connections following project completion.

## 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 bridge replacement and culvert installations, but spills and drips with the volume

necessary to contaminate groundwater is unlikely. Onsite spill kits would also minimize the potential for spills and drips to be of sufficient quantity to contaminate groundwater.

## 8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

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.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually-prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made. Bridge replacement and culvert installation would not change the overall 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 bridge replacement and culvert installation, 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 bridge replacement and culvert installations, but this type of noise is consistent with that of routine logging operations 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 Musselshell Creek bridge replacement is on a private road and designed in cooperation with the private land owner, who would be notified 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/ Robert W. Shull* *02/28/2024*
Robert W. Shull Date
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