

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Warm Springs Bridge Installation

Project No.: 2007-268-00

Project Manager: Eric Leitzinger – EWM -4

Location: Custer 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: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), in partnership with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), proposes to fund the Custer Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD) to remove two culverts that limit fish passage on Warm Springs Creek, a tributary to the Salmon River, and install two bridges as replacements. In addition, CSWCD would remove weeds in the fields surrounding the construction areas to limit spread. Replacement of the culverts would allow access to upstream habitat by Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Snake River Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), Snake River steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*). The habitat would support spawning and consistent water temperatures, critical for overwintering juveniles when the Salmon River experiences icing.

To remove the culverts, either a new segment of channel would be excavated alongside the culvert, or a bypass pipe would be installed, to redirect water and isolate the work areas before removal. Native streambed material would be placed in any excavated channel segments. If a new channel was excavated, the trench from the culvert removal would be backfilled. Otherwise, the bypass pipe would be removed and the flow allowed to slowly return to the previously culverted channel. The total disturbed area around each culvert would be approximately 0.2 acre.

Two prefabricated steel bridges (14-foot-wide by 33-foot-long and 14-foot-wide by 25-foot-long) set on concrete perched abutments would be installed across the creek. The bridges would be in different locations than the culverts but would still provide access for users to the agricultural fields on the other side of the creek. The bridge footers would be above the channel and should require little instream activity. If in-water work is necessary, the stream would be diverted using coffer dams and aquatic organisms would be salvaged before dewatering of the work areas. The total disturbed area around each bridge for excavation and installation of footings would be approximately 0.2 acre. A new road (approximately 1,200 linear feet) would be developed to connect the bridges to existing roads and would have crushed aggregate on top of a compacted subgrade. The roads leading to and from the culverts would be abandoned and decommissioned by removing the gravel, decompacting the road prism, and integrating them into surrounding agricultural fields. Approximately 1,850 linear feet of road would be decommissioned. All construction areas would be graded to match existing grades.

Culvert removal, bridge installation, and road construction would entail the use of heavy equipment such as an excavator, backhoe, and dump trucks. Erosion controls would be implemented during construction. Topsoil would be stockpiled onsite for final grading. Weed treatments would include disking and herbicide application to fields adjacent to the culvert removals and bridge installations. The project would start during the approved state in-water work window and has received approval from NMFS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to work beyond the in-water work window until the ground freezes (around early November). Since the downstream culvert blocks fish passage, work above the culvert would be completed first. A redd survey below the downstream culvert would be conducted prior to construction and if redds are present, removal of the downstream culvert would be delayed until the state-approved in-water work window the following year.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 NMFS Columbia River System Biological Opinion and the 2020 USFWS Columbia River System BiOp. These actions also support ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System 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; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024), 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. ¹

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

¹ BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to DOE's own regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021, to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 *et seq.*

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: Warm Springs Bridge Installation

Project Site Description

The project would occur on private property approximately three miles east of Challis, Idaho, in Custer County. The project area is in a farmstead with a private residence located approximately 800 feet east of Warm Springs Creek and farm outbuildings located both downstream and upstream of the proposed construction areas. The creek is incised and has little lateral connection to the floodplain. It is surrounded by farmland and the buffer between farmland and the creek consists primarily of grasses and sedges. There is no mature woody vegetation in the project area. The area where the new bridges and road would be constructed, while considered riparian, is drier and mainly consists of bunchgrass and sagebrush.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no historic properties affected on December 1, 2023 (BPA CR Project No.: ID 2023 044). Consulting parties included Shoshone Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). BPA received concurrence from SHPO on December 5, 2023. No other responses were received within the 30-day consultation period.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary impacts to geology and soils due to displacement and compaction of soil from the operation of heavy equipment, as well as during disking the fields to remove weeds. There would also be an increased erosion potential during construction activities. Erosion and sediment control best management practices would be implemented prior to work to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Herbicide impacts to biological components of soils would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels and compliance with BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) conservation measures. Work areas would be contoured to match the surrounding grade following construction and seeded with native, riparian plant species to facilitate soil recovery.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed species or state special-status plants are known to be present in the project area. There would be temporary impacts to existing vegetation including crushing and removal by heavy equipment, excavation, trampling from work crews, and possible death from herbicide use. In the long term, the project would result in a beneficial effect to

vegetation through the removal of invasive plant species combined with post-construction seeding of disturbed areas that would help reestablish native plant communities.

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 within the project site. The USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists the North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) and the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), both ESA-listed Threatened, as having the potential to be in the project area. In addition, IPac lists the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), ESA-proposed Threatened, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*), ESA-proposed Endangered, as having the potential to be present in the project area. There are no critical habitats for ESA-listed or proposed species in the project area and no confirmed presence of any of the species in the project area. Due to current agricultural land use practices and nearby residences, it is unlikely these species would be present in the project area and the project would have no effect to ESA-listed wildlife species.

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 Snake River Chinook salmon, Snake River steelhead, and bull trout are downstream of the project area, but are unable to pass the downstream culvert to gain access to the project area. No state special-status species occupy the project area. The project was reviewed and consulted on under BPA's ESA Section 7 HIP biological opinion and would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures and terms and conditions, including turbidity monitoring requirements, herbicide application requirements, approved work timing, and work area isolation.

Replacing the stream crossings would result in temporary negative impacts to fish and fish habitat, specifically sediment transport and delivery and displacement of individuals. Some aquatic invertebrates and amphibians may be displaced or killed by mechanical activities, but quick re-occupation of this small site by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following construction is anticipated. Ground-disturbing activities would increase the risk of erosion and sedimentation during and immediately after culvert replacements. This increase would be limited to the time of construction, primarily during the removal of the existing structures and the construction of the new structures and would not be expected to last more than two days. Impacts due to herbicide application would be minimized by following label instructions and HIP conservation measures. No herbicide would be applied in water.

Overall, the proposed actions would improve long-term conditions for fish, including ESA-listed fish, because removal of the downstream culvert would open access to suitable fish habitat and consistent temperatures from the spring-fed creek. The project was given an exemption from Section 404 of the Clean Water Act permit requirements from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in accordance with 33 CFR 323.4(a)(6), construction or maintenance of farm roads.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands were identified in the project area. The riparian areas adjacent to the stream are drier with upland vegetation characteristics. The project would not have any impact on these riparian areas.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or uses of groundwater are proposed. There would be 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 are unlikely. Onsite spill kits would also minimize the potential for spills and drips to be of sufficient quantity to contaminate groundwater. Possible herbicide impacts to groundwater and aquifers would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's label.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

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

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary and permanent changes would occur during project implementation. Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as work zone conditions, vehicles, and equipment. Removal of the culverts return the stream to a freer flowing form and remove the ponding issue caused by the failing culverts. The new bridges would be a permanent change that could possibly be seen from the nearest road, 0.25 miles away. However, this would be a minor change to the existing agricultural landscape in the project area. No visually prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the project site would be very minor and short-term during construction but would return to normal conditions once the project is completed. There would be minor, temporary effects to the air quality due to herbicide applications. Effects would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's label. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from construction equipment would be short-term and temporary during daylight hours and would cease following project completion. Noise from construction is not expected to exceed the typical noise from agricultural equipment operating in the area.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the public. All personnel would use best management practices to protect workers' health and safety during construction activities. Herbicide application would follow HIP BiOp conservation measures, including having a licensed applicator that would develop an herbicide transportation and safety plan before applying any herbicides, thus making the risk from herbicides insignificant.

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: CSWCD holds a conservation easement (CE) over approximately 214 acres along the east bank of the Salmon River, including the project area. BPA holds third party rights of enforcement over the encumbered area (Warm Springs Conservation Easement Property, BPA Tract TMPRJ-WL-1, acquired in 2005). CSWCD submitted a Land Use Agreement Request to BPA with details of the proposed project and BPA determined the actions fall within the CE agreement.

The CE is considered a “working lands easement” in that conservation purposes such as fish and wildlife habitat, scenic values, and open space are prioritized while productive, agricultural uses of the CE area are expressly limited to those which are not in direct conflict with the primary conservation purposes that justified investment in the CE in the first place. Consistent with the terms of the CE, the current owners cultivate and harvest hay from portions of the CE area annually. CSWCD has coordinated with the owners during project planning. Changes to road use on the easement to access agricultural fields would be documented in an agreement between the owners and CSWCD.

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

Signed:

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist