Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Kinnikinic Creek Culvert #2 Replacement

Project No.: 2007-268-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss, EWM-4

Location: Custer County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 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) along with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery fund proposes to fund the Custer County Soil and Water Conservation District (Custer SWCD) to replace an undersized culvert on Kinnikinic Creek at its junction with Kinnikinic Creek Road. The existing culvert is a partial barrier to fish passage and high flows often exceed the elevation of the culvert, resulting in water flowing into, and eroding, the roadway and contributes sediment to the creek. Kinnikinic Creek has designated critical habitat that would support spawning and rearing for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha),* steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*).

The existing culvert is a corrugated metal pipe (CMP) with a diameter of 5 feet and a length of 25 feet. The project would remove the CMP and replace it with an open bottom metal arch with a span of 18 feet, a rise of 8 feet, and a length of 45 feet. The arch would be set on pre-cast concrete footings buried in the stream banks. Existing ground would be excavated about 8 feet deep for the removal and installation. Large boulders (12 inches or larger) collected during excavation would be placed around the footings. Kinnikinic Creek Road has eroded around the culvert, so the road prism over the culvert would be reconstructed and widened by about 10 feet, matching the material and grade of the existing gravel road. The stream bed and banks under the new structure (approximate length of 120 feet) would be filled with native materials and graded to match the existing stream.

Work would occur in the existing road prism of Kinnikinic Road and extend into the stream and banks below and on both sides of the road. Prior to construction, a temporary creek bypass and a temporary bypass road would be installed. The creek would be dewatered in the work area by routing flow through a 36-inch diameter by 125-foot-long pipe. A trench (4 feet wide by 2 feet deep) would be excavated along the east side of the creek for the pipe and would be routed under the temporary bypass road. The temporary bypass road (about 200 feet long) would reroute traffic on Kinnikinic Road around the construction area. The road bypass would be constructed by adding and compacting fill (less than 3 feet) as needed depending on ground elevation. The surface of the road would be covered with gravel and graded to connect to Kinnikinic Road.

Construction and site restoration would occur between September and December and require the use of heavy equipment such as excavators, backhoes, and dump trucks. The site would be accessed on existing roads. An area (about 800 square feet) along the shoulder of Kinnikinic Road, east of the creek, would be used for staging materials and equipment. Another staging area (about 150 square feet) would be established just off the shoulder of the road on private property west of the creek. After construction, the temporary bypass road would be removed and all compacted areas outside the existing roadway and creek would be roughened and seeded with a native plant seed mix.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 NMFS Columbia River System Biological Opinion and supports conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Columbia River System Biological Opinion. These actions also support Bonneville's 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 1021.102 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; 90 FR 29676, July 3, 2025 [Interim Final Rule]) and the current *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures*, BPA has determined the following:

1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021;
2) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion; and
3) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal (see attached Environmental Evaluation).

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

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Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

KATEY GRANGE
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Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Evaluation

This evaluation 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: Kinnikinic Creek Culvert #2 Replacement

Project Site Description

The culvert is located on Kinnikinic Creek Road in the town of Clayton (Custer County, Idaho). Kinnikinic Creek flows from the north into the Salmon River, after passing under State Highway 75 (Hwy 75). The culvert on Hwy 75 (about 750 feet downstream of the project area) is a barrier to fish passage and is scheduled to be replaced in 2027 by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Replacement of both culverts would open about 8 miles of quality fish habitat in Kinnikinic Creek for ESA-listed Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout, as well as other fish. Kinnikinic Creek Road is a gravel road managed by the Custer County Roads Department. Construction would mainly occur in the road right-of-way, with minimal overlap of three private parcels—two owned by a mining company and the other a private residence. Historic land use in the area was mining. The project area has been previously disturbed by construction of mining businesses (and subsequent abandonment, collapse, and removal of buildings), road development, and trash dumping. Kinnikinic Creek flows through a relatively steep valley with a narrow valley bottom (about 300 feet wide and at an elevation of 5,500 feet in the project area). The floodplain is disconnected due to the incised creek, the road flanking one side of the creek, and bank armoring. There is limited mature woody vegetation along the creek, resulting in very little instream wood and unstable banks with little to minimal overhead cover.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On February 6, 2026, BPA sent a cultural resources inventory report and letter to the consulting parties (the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation and the Idaho Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)) with a summary of the efforts made to identify historic properties and BPA's finding of No Historic Properties Affected (BPA Cultural Resources No. ID 2025 050). On February 12, 2026, SHPO concurred with BPA's determination. No comments from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation were received by the end of the 30-day review period.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary impacts on geology and soils due to displacement and compaction of soil from the operation of heavy equipment to remove the existing culvert, install a new open box culvert, and create a temporary bypass road. Erosion and sediment control best management practices would be implemented prior to work to minimize potential for instream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. The road prism and surface would be constructed and graded to match the existing roadway. Work areas would be decompacted and seeded with native plant species after construction 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 from excavation and establishing a temporary bypass road, including crushing and removal by heavy equipment and trampling from work crews. Mature trees along the creek would be avoided to the extent practicable. Impacts would be minimized by using established roads to access the site, staging in established road shoulders, and decompacting soils in work areas and seeding after construction with a native plant seed mix.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or state special-status wildlife species or habitats are within the project site. The USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists the Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and the North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), 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 the project's location on an established county road, proximity to a nearby residence (about 300 feet), lack of native vegetation, and proximity to Hwy 75 and the town of Clayton, it is highly unlikely these species would be present in or near the project. Therefore, there would be no effect to ESA-listed or proposed wildlife species from the project.

IPaC information indicates that bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) may be present year-round in Custer County but mainly May through July. Their breeding season is generally January to August. Work would occur outside these timeframes (September to December). There is no confirmed presence of nests or previously used nest sites for either species in the project area. If an active nest is observed in the project area, the project would employ protection measures (*e.g.,* timing, distance) as necessary to ensure eagles would not be harmed as a result of the project. Therefore, the project would have no adverse impacts to bald and golden eagles.

No wildlife habitat would be modified to a degree that would permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from construction activities and human presence. Due to the close proximity to Hwy 75 and existing roads and residences, wildlife in the area are acclimated to temporary disturbances and should return quickly to the area upon completion of construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Critical habitat for ESA-listed Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout has been designated in the lower reaches of Kinnikinic Creek, near the confluence with the Salmon River. ESA-listed species are not currently present in the project area due to the downstream culvert on Hwy 75 blocking fish passage. These species are present in the Snake River. The project was reviewed and consulted on under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program ESA Section 7 programmatic consultations and would adhere to all applicable conservation measures, including turbidity monitoring requirements, work area isolation, erosion controls, and staged rewatering of isolated work areas. The project would obtain a required permit issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and a Section 401 water quality certification from Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. The project would adhere to all requirements and prescriptions set forth in the permit and certification.

Excavation for culvert removal and replacement would have temporary negative impacts to fish and fish habitat, specifically sediment transport and delivery and displacement of individuals. The work area would be isolated prior to construction, and a fish and aquatic

organism salvage would occur prior to dewatering the area. Some aquatic invertebrates may not be salvaged and would be displaced or killed by mechanical activities, but immediate reoccupation of the area is anticipated. Ground-disturbing activities would increase the risk of erosion and sedimentation during and immediately after excavation activities. This increase would be limited to the time of construction, primarily during excavation, would not be expected to last more than several hours, and would be mitigated by the use of erosion control measures throughout project construction. Overall, the proposed actions would improve long-term conditions for fish by removing a partial passage barrier and providing access to upstream habitat.

Notes:

- Prior to in-water construction, Custer SWCD would obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit and Section 401 certification and adhere to all terms and conditions.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The USFWS National Wetlands Inventory information shows that no wetlands are present in the project area. Therefore, the project would not have an impact on wetlands.

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 heavy equipment used, 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.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area includes the public road, right of way, and three private parcels. Two private parcels are owned by a mining company and mining operations have not occurred there for many years. The other private parcel is residential. With the installation of a temporary road during construction, there would be no road use disruption to the underlying and nearby landowners and users. The underlying land use would not change. The project is not located in a specially-designated area or Wild and Scenic River. There are no public recreational opportunities in the project area.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as work zone conditions, vehicles, equipment, and a temporary bypass route for traffic. The proposed work would have little effect on long-term visual quality. The structural changes for the culvert replacement would be made within the footprint of the existing roadway and would not change the overall visual character of the landscape as seen from the roadway.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, temporary effects to air quality from exhaust and dust from vehicles and equipment. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, short-term noise impacts from the heavy equipment used for the project. Noise emitted from equipment would be temporary and occur during daylight hours and would cease following project completion.

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 general public. Operating construction vehicles and equipment inherently carries potential safety risks to operators; staff training and implementing best management practices, such as daily on-site safety precautions, would minimize that risk during construction activities. The temporary bypass route for local traffic would be implemented according to an approved traffic control plan and would have adequate signage to warn drivers.

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: Custer SWCD has been in contact with the private landowners and provided copies of plans for review and comment. The project has been designed in coordination with the Custer County Roads Department. Custer SWCD has provided status updates on the project since June 2025 during their monthly public meetings. An open public meeting for Clayton was held in June 2026 and included information about the project and timing of construction. Custer SWCD would obtain required permits from Custer County prior to any construction.

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

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