

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: East Fork Salmon River Fish Screen Replacement 2025

Project No.: 2007-399-00

Project Manager: Eric Leitzinger, EWM - 4

Location: Custer County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance, B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to replace a fish screen along the East Fork of the Salmon River on private land in Custer County, Idaho. The proposed actions would improve fish passage at the irrigation diversion for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*O. mykiss*), bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), and resident fish; protect fish from entrapment in the irrigation ditch and field; and ensure proper functionality of the fish screen for future years.

The site currently supports an aging fish screen (screen ID: SEF-15) that would be replaced with a newly designed screen that adheres to the criteria in the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) "Anadromous Salmonid Passage Facility Design Manual" (last updated February 2023) and would be installed according to all relevant criteria in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinions. Construction activity for screen removal and new installation would disturb less than 0.5 acres of land in total, although the area where work would be completed would be across several acres. Construction would require removal and back fill of the existing fish screen including the associated ditch alignments and sediment basin, clearing and grubbing the new screen site with a track hoe, excavating the site for the screen structure, new ditch alignments and a sediment basin, preparing the subgrade, installing and backfilling a new double bay concrete fish screen and control structure in the ditch, and trenching to install bypass pipeline to connect the structure to existing diversion infrastructure and the river. Construction would occur behind a closed diversion in the dry season, so instream work would not be required at the site.

The site would be accessed via existing roads. Any existing fencing that would need to be moved for screen installation would be replaced in the same location or nearby. The sites would be restored by hydro-seeding following final grading.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp) and the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Columbia River System BiOp (2020 FWS CRS BiOp). These actions also support BPA's commitments to the State of Idaho in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as

amended, while also supporting 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 *DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Implementing Procedures* (dated June 30, 2025), 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.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 the interim final rule to revise DOE NEPA regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021 and NEPA Implementing Procedures (dated June 30, 2025), 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.

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Project Site Description

The project site is located on an existing irrigation ditch in conjunction with irrigation water diversion infrastructure on a previously disturbed cattle grazing property along the East Fork Salmon River, approximately 9 miles south of Clayton, Idaho. The site is in a broad riparian floodplain within a sagebrush steppe ecosystem. Much of the floodplain and surrounding land have been converted to agricultural and grazing uses supported by irrigation diversions from the river. The footprint of construction activity is occupied by low-growing grass, forbs, and shrubs.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA made a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties on July 14, 2025 (BPA Cultural Resources Project No.: ID 2025 030) and sent consultation letters and a cultural resources inventory report to the Shoshone Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation, Nez Perce Tribe, and Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). On July 24, 2025, SHPO requested additional information about historic properties in the vicinity of the Area of Potential Effects (APE). On August 14, 2025, the initial 30-day response period expired, and no comments were received from the Shoshone Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation or the Nez Perce Tribe. On September 2, 2025, BPA provided the additional information requested by SHPO to consulting parties in a revised report. The initial project determination of no adverse effect remained unchanged. On September 5, 2025, SHPO provided concurrence with BPA's determination.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Soils would be displaced, compacted, and mixed by the actions of construction equipment. Impacts would mainly occur in areas that have been previously disturbed by heavy construction equipment when the original fish screen was constructed and when the irrigation ditch was excavated. The bypass pipe for the replacement screen would require trenching in a new location through an agricultural field that has been previously plowed and tilled, so impacts would be minor. Construction would disturb less than 0.5 acres. Impacts from construction actions would be minimized by the application of best management practices to control erosion and prevent spills.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, or state special-status plant species are present in project locations. The screen site is in, or near, the riparian area, but the land has been previously disturbed by agricultural and grazing activities. There would be minor impacts to vegetation from excavation and trampling by vehicles and crews. No native shrub or woodland riparian plant communities would be impacted and disturbed soils would be planted with a native seed mix after construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no ESA-listed or state special-status wildlife species or their habitats known to occur in the project area. The USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tools 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 any of the project areas and no confirmed presence of any of the species in the project areas. Due to current agricultural/grazing land use practices, it is unlikely these species would be present in the project area and the actions would have no effect to ESA-listed or proposed wildlife species.

Construction would occur in late summer or fall; thus, no disturbance of nesting birds would occur. There would be some home range destruction and displacement of small terrestrial wildlife within the construction footprint, but this loss would be a few hundred square feet at most and would be of minimal effect to animal populations in the project area. Larger wildlife using riparian habitats nearby may be disturbed and temporarily displaced by noise and human presence during the construction actions. These larger species would likely not be displaced from their home ranges, though they may temporarily relocate as long as active construction is occurring.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Fish screen construction would be in and along the existing irrigation ditch near the East Fork Salmon River where ESA-listed spring Chinook, steelhead, and bull trout are present. Work would typically be done outside of flowing water, usually outside of the irrigation season or with the ditch flows turned off, and would have no impact to ESA-listed fish. Conservation measures from BPA's HIP ESA consultations would be applied to minimize impacts. In the long term, there would be a benefit to fish species by improving fish passage and reducing entrainment into the irrigation ditch. There would be no impact to water bodies or floodplains from the proposed activities.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present at the project site. All sites have been previously disturbed and are now used for agricultural purposes. There would be no effect to wetlands from the proposed actions.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would have no potential to impact groundwater or aquifers. The screens do not withdraw water from either surface or groundwater sources. The operation of construction equipment activities may have short-term potential for minor impacts to water quality from possible fuel or other fluid drips or spills, but conservation measures from BPA's HIP ESA consultations would be applied that would prevent or minimize this potential.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no change to land use. The fish screen would be constructed on private agricultural lands and is intended to support continued agricultural activities by protecting ESA-listed fish during delivery of irrigation water.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The fish screen would not be changing the visual quality at the project site as the equipment would essentially be the same as what is there now. Most work would be underground and not visible after construction. There would be no long-term impact to visual quality. There would be short-term scenery impacts from the presence of construction equipment and vegetation removal.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicles and construction equipment used for the project would produce emissions, but the amount would be minimal and short-term, and consistent with that produced by local agricultural activities.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Trucks and construction equipment would produce noise, but it is expected that it would be consistent with that produced by local agricultural activities and would be short-term and minor. These impacts would occur during daylight hours during the summer and fall months.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed screen installation work is not considered hazardous, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the public. No long-term public safety hazards would be created. Routine, short-term, safety hazards would be expected from the incremental addition of truck traffic on local roads, the operation of construction equipment, and the use of hand tools. All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and 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: IDFG has coordinated with the private landowner to develop plans and identify specific locations where proposed actions will be implemented. Construction schedules and mobilization of heavy equipment would be coordinated with the landowner.

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