

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Elk Creek Bridge Replacement

**Project No.:** 2010-086-00

**Project Manager:** Matthew Schwartz, EWM-4

**Location:** Idaho 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) proposes to fund the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) to replace an undersized bridge across Elk Creek and a concrete sill on the stream bed with a larger bridge and no sill. Elk Creek is a tributary of the American River within the city limits of Elk City, Idaho (ID). The existing bridge backs up flows during high waters and introduces high amounts of sediment into Elk Creek. The sill is a fish passage barrier at low flows for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Snake River steelhead and Columbia River Basin bull trout.

The existing bridge is located on Sweeny Hill Road. The bridge and sill would be replaced with a 45-foot-long, 28-foot-wide prefabricated steel bridge supported by concrete footings and a natural stream bed. The natural stream bed would be shaped with native cobble material. Rock weirs would be installed for streambed stability and fish-rest-stop rocks would be added for fish habitat. Elk Creek's flows would be routed out of its channel and redirected through a pipe or pumped around the construction site to protect aquatic species and provide a dry work site. Fish would be captured and relocated out of the construction site prior to the site being drained. A temporary single-lane detour road 400 feet in length and channel-spanning bridge may be constructed upstream to allow for the flow of traffic during construction, or a detour on existing roads may be used.

All access would be along existing roadways (Sweeny Hill Road and ID State Highway 14). Staging for equipment and materials would be along Sweeny Hill Road and previously disturbed areas adjacent to the construction area. The project would be completed using a metal-tracked excavator operating with support equipment (loader or skid steer), dewatering pumps, and human labor. Implementation would begin July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026. Instream work would occur between July 15<sup>th</sup> and August 15<sup>th</sup>.

After construction, Elk Creek would be redirected back into its original channel. The roadway approaches would be reconstructed and the road surface asphalted. The temporary road and bridge, if constructed, would then be removed and the area regraded. All disturbed surfaces would be seeded with native grass and forb seed with stream banks planted with native riparian shrub species. Inspection and maintenance of the project site would occur annually and could include minor on-site adjustments to streambank or stream bed conditions within, above, and below the

bridge as needed to maintain project success along with additional seeding or planting as needed to ensure successful revegetation of the site.

These actions would support conservation of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also 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 1021.102 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.<sup>1</sup>

Brenda Aguirre  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> 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 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: Elk Creek Bridge Replacement**

### **Project Site Description**

Project actions would occur within the county right-of-way on Sweeny Hill Road about 250 feet northwest of its intersection with ID State Highway 14 in the remote, mountainous community of Elk City at an elevation of approximately 3,940 feet. The upstream (northeast) side of the project site is adjacent to private land consisting of livestock pasture and hay production, riparian vegetation, and Elk Creek. The downstream (southwest) side of the project is adjacent to private land consisting of outbuildings, pasture, riparian vegetation, and Elk Creek; and another track of private land consisting of business buildings and a parking lot. Low growing riparian shrubs, grasses, and forbs exist along Elk Creek and its inset floodplain at the project site. Outside of the creek and floodplain, vegetation is primarily native and non-native grasses and hay meadows.

### **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

#### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA consulted with the NPT and Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on June 14, 2023, on the Area of Potential Effects (APE) and effects of the project based on an intensive survey conducted by an NPT Archaeologist. No cultural resources were identified. Idaho SHPO concurred with BPA's APE and determination of no historic properties affected on July 6, 2023. No other responses were received within the comment period ending July 14, 2023 (ID 2022 043).

#### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary displacement and compaction impacts to soil from the operation of heavy equipment needed for this action, and an 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. The entire work area would be contoured to the surrounding floodplain following construction, hand seeded, and hand planted with native riparian species to facilitate soil recovery.

#### **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 plant species, are present. There would be temporary impacts to existing vegetation during construction activities. Post construction plantings and long-term monitoring (with replacement plantings as needed) would re-establish native riparian 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. 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. The project area is near an existing highway, county road, and businesses and local wildlife is likely habituated to human presence and noise. Additional 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 (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and Columbia Basin bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are present in the project area. The project was reviewed and consulted under BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) biological opinions from NMFS and USFWS. 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 area.

The project would require the redirection of Elk Creek flows away from the construction area through a pipe, or pumped, during construction to effectively de-water the construction site. This de-watering would be done following fish capture ("fish salvage") and relocation of captured fish to free-flowing portions of the stream. HIP conservation measures would be followed to herd fish downstream from the channel as it dewateres. Fish salvage involves electro-shocking, capture, and handling fish during their relocation. This is stressful on individual fish, but less so than stranding them without water if fish salvage and relocation were not to be conducted.

The new bridge and stream bed would then be constructed primarily "in the dry" with no construction disturbance to fish or fish habitat until completion when the stream would be rerouted into its reconstructed channel.

Some aquatic invertebrates and amphibians may be displaced or killed by mechanical activities at the site and where the stream would be dewatered, but quick re-occupation of these small sites by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following construction is anticipated.

There would be no net rise in floodplain elevations.

In the long term, the project would improve water quality and fish passage.

### Note:

- The project sponsor would obtain a Clean Water Act Nationwide Permit 27 for aquatic habitat restoration activities prior to any in-water work, and all permit conditions would be implemented.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the project area. There would be no effect.

## **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 construction activities, but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater are unlikely.

## 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 on specially-designated areas. Through the temporary use of reroutes and/or the temporary access road and bridge, traffic in the area may have a minor increase in travel time, but overall, traffic flow would be maintained.

## 9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No visually prominent vegetative, landform, or structural change would be made. Bridge 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 bridge replacement, but these are short-term actions, and no long-term source of emissions or exhaust would be created. Vehicles used to transport workers, supplies, and equipment to the site would be another potential source of exhaust and greenhouse gas emissions, 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 bridge replacement, but this type of noise is consistent with that of common livestock pasture and haying operations in this 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. Appropriate road closure and detour signage would be installed to prevent road users from entering the work areas.

### **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 Elk Creek bridge replacement is on a county road and designed in cooperation with the North-Central Idaho Transportation Department, 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:

Brenda Aguirre  
Environmental Protection Specialist