

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Poison Creek Culvert Removal and Bridge Installation

Project No.: 2010-072-00

Project Manager: Eric Leitzinger, EWM-4

Location: Lemhi 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 Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to replace an undersized culvert conveying Poison Creek under U.S. Route 93 (Hwy 93) in Lemhi County, Idaho. The culvert is perched and is a barrier to fish passage, including for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*).

As Poison Creek nears Hwy 93, it makes a sharp turn to parallel the highway to the north for about 100 feet before reaching the existing culvert and flowing into the Salmon River on the other side of the highway. The culvert is a corrugated metal pipe (CMP) with a diameter of 5 feet and length of 60 feet. Starting approximately 70 feet to the south of the existing CMP, IDFG would excavate an area of about 40 feet wide by 14 feet deep through the existing road, road prism, and any natural materials to just below the streambed elevation of Poison Creek to prepare for bridge installation. IDFG would construct a 45-foot-wide by 50-foot-long clear span bridge with reinforced concrete parapet railings. A concrete abutment would be constructed at each corner of the bridge to support the bridge deck. These walls would extend 3 feet to 4 feet above the road prism when complete to serve as a retaining wall. The CMP would be removed. The CMP and the bridge approaches would be filled and graded to match the existing road prism and paved to match the existing road surface. All bridge and road construction would be according to Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) standards.

Streambed material would be added to the new stream section under the bridge and graded to match the existing stream bed. Upstream from the new bridge, along approximately 220 feet of Poison Creek, the channel and banks would be regraded to address incision and realign the channel to allow better access to the floodplain. A riffle would be constructed at the upstream end, and eight rock weirs would be constructed between the end of the riffle and the connection with the new segment of stream at the bridge site. Rock weirs would be buried in the stream bed to help control grade and support sediment transport. Single logs would be buried in banks on the downstream side of alternating weirs, with rootwads angled into the stream. Trenches filled with live willow stakes would be added to the other weirs, extending between the end of the weir and the bank. Individual boulders (less than 10) would be placed in the stream bed to provide cover for fish. Willow clumps and cottonwood trees (5-gallon containers) would be planted along both banks.

If invasive plants are present in the project area, they may be treated with herbicides prior to construction to minimize spread of seeds. Prior to construction of the bridge, a temporary bypass culvert would be installed in the section of Poison Creek running parallel to the highway to allow for construction equipment access. Poison Creek would be diverted 220 feet up from the proposed bridge location into a bypass pipe on the north bank of the creek. The outlet for the pipe would be located at the beginning of the temporary bypass culvert. Cofferdams or another similar isolation method would be used to divert the creek and isolate the bridge construction area from the creek on the east side of the highway (at the end of the bypass pipe) and from the Salmon River on the west side of the highway. Stranded aquatic organisms would be captured and moved out of the construction zone prior to dewatering any areas.

After bridge construction is complete, the cofferdams and the bypass pipe would be removed to rewater Poison Creek. The temporary bypass culvert would be removed and the section of Poison Creek running parallel to the highway would be filled and graded to match existing ground. All compacted areas outside existing roadways and road prisms would be roughened and seeded or hydroseeded with a native plant seed mix. IDFG would monitor success of establishment of native plants in the project area for several years and do additional seeding or planting if needed. If monitoring finds that invasive plants are beginning to reestablish in the project area, the invasive plants would be treated with herbicides.

Culvert removal and construction would entail the use of heavy equipment such as an excavator and dump truck. Erosion controls would be installed prior to any construction per approved plans. The site would be accessed via Hwy 93 and a private gravel road (Poison Creek Road). The project would use one staging area (less than one acre) located on private pasture land south of the proposed bridge. The project would temporarily widen the northbound lane of Hwy 93 to allow for staged construction of the bridge. The widened area would need to be compacted and surfaced with temporary pavement that would be removed at the end of the project. Bridge construction would occur one lane at a time and highway traffic would be restricted to one lane. Lane closures would follow an approved traffic control plan that meets ITD requirements. Construction would occur during the Salmon River in-water work window (July 15 – March 14). Poison Creek does not have an in-water work timing restriction. Project elements that do not require any in-water work or would occur only around Poison Creek, including installing the temporary bypass culvert, widening the northbound lane, planting and seeding, and paving the highway over the new bridge and old culvert area, would occur before or after the Salmon River in-water work window.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 NMFS Columbia River System Biological Opinion and 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.

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

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: Poison Creek Culvert Removal and Bridge Installation

Project Site Description

The culvert is located on Hwy 93, about 24 miles south of Salmon in Lemhi County, Idaho. The highway, managed by ITD, is bordered to the west by the Salmon River. The Salmon River is an important migratory corridor for adult and juvenile Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout. Land east of the highway, bordering Poison Creek, is comprised of agricultural and residential areas. The habitat in Poison Creek is largely intact as only the lowest reaches are developed for irrigation and agriculture. The culvert under Hwy 93 inhibits year-round connectivity between Poison Creek and the Salmon River. Fish surveys in the lower two miles of Poison Creek that occurred prior to passage being blocked suggest that it supports adult steelhead spawning and juvenile Chinook salmon and steelhead rearing. Poison Creek is characterized by an intact riparian zone dominated by willow and cottonwoods. Vegetation is lacking along the highway prism and at the outlet of the existing culvert.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: NMFS completed Section 106 consultation for the project. BPA reviewed the consultation package and determined it meets BPA's needs, so tiered a review to NMFS' consultation (BPA Cultural Resources No. ID 2025 040). On February 20, 2025, NMFS initiated consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Warm Springs, Shoshone Paiute Duck Valley, Shoshone Bannock, Salish and Kootenai, and Nez Perce Tribes and determined the project would have no adverse effect on historic properties. On February 28, 2025, SHPO concurred with NMFS' determination of no adverse effect. The 30-day consultation period ended on March 21, 2025. NMFS did not receive any objections or requests for further consultation from consulting parties.

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 bridge, temporarily widen the highway for construction access, construct or improve stream elements, and plant willows and cottonwoods. 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, including the area widened next to the highway, would be decompacted and seeded with native plant species after construction to facilitate soil recovery. Impacts to biological components of soils from herbicide applications would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels and using best management practices. Herbicide treatment would be intended to improve long-term habitat conditions by preventing further establishment of invasives.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: NMFS has assumed Lead Federal Agency (LFA) responsibilities for ESA and would exercise full ESA oversight of the actions within their authority. NMFS would adhere to the Programmatic Restoration Opinion for Joint Ecosystem Conservation by the Services (PROJECTS) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Using the Partners for Fish and Wildlife, Fisheries, Coastal, and Recovery Programs and NOAA Restoration Center Using the Damage Assessment, Remediation and Restoration Program (DARRP), and Community-Based Restoration Program (CRP) in the States of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho (NMFS reference NWR-2013-10221 and USFWS reference 01EOFW00-2014-F-0222).

There are no ESA-listed plant species in the project area. The equipment operations necessary for replacement of the culvert, construction of the bridge, filling in the abandoned section of Poison Creek, and work from the banks of Poison Creek would crush or destroy existing vegetation. Impacts of herbicide applications would be minimized by implementation of proposed actions according to the PROJECTS programmatic, including compliance with all label instructions, use of approved herbicides, having a licensed applicator, and minimizing drift and leaching.

These areas would be revegetated with native seed mixes and native plants. There would be beneficial effects from removal of competitive invasive plants, allowing native plant communities to establish themselves after construction to support improved habitat and help prevent streambank erosion in the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: NMFS has assumed LFA responsibilities for ESA and would exercise full ESA oversight of the actions within their authority and adhere to the terms and conditions in the PROJECTS programmatic. No ESA-listed or state special-status wildlife species or habitats are known to be within the project area. 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 designated 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 area's lack of native vegetation and proximity to Highway 93, agricultural operations, and residences, it is highly unlikely these species would be present. Therefore, there would be no impact 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 in or near the project area for several months of the year, including when proposed activities would occur. There is no confirmed presence of nests or previously used nest sites for either species in the project area. If a nest is observed in the project area, IDFG 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.

Herbicide application would have short-term impacts to wildlife that would be minimized by following the conservation measures in the PROJECTS programmatic, including compliance with all label instructions, use of approved herbicides, having a licensed applicator, and minimizing drift and leaching. 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.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: NMFS has assumed LFA responsibilities for ESA for the culvert replacement and stream restoration and would exercise full ESA oversight of the actions within their authority and adhere to the terms and conditions in the PROJECTS programmatic. ESA-listed Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout are found in the project area. Excavation for culvert removal, bridge construction, and stream restoration; soil disturbance from planting; and herbicide application would have temporary negative impacts to fish and fish habitat, specifically sediment transport and delivery, erosion, and displacement of individuals. Impacts would be limited to the time of implementation and would not be expected to last more than several hours. Erosion control measures would be used throughout project construction. Work areas would be isolated prior to construction, and an aquatic organism salvage would occur prior to dewatering the area. Some aquatic invertebrates and amphibians may not be salvaged and would be displaced or killed by mechanical activities. Re-occupation of the area by the same or other members of the same classes of animals immediately following construction is anticipated.

The project would adhere to all applicable conservation measures included in the PROJECTS programmatic, including turbidity monitoring requirements, approved work timing, and work area isolation. Herbicide application impacts would be minimized by following the conservation measures in the PROJECTS programmatic, including compliance with all label instructions, use of approved herbicides, having a licensed applicator, and minimizing drift and leaching. No herbicide would be applied in water. Overall, the proposed actions would improve long-term conditions for fish by removing a passage barrier and providing access to upstream habitat. 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.

Notes:

- Prior to in-water construction, the project 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 identifies much of the floodplain in the project area as freshwater forested-shrub wetlands (about 5 acres). By design, proposed actions would include excavation and discharge of materials below the ordinary high-water mark and within wetlands. 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. Minor and temporary wetland vegetation disturbances would occur as part of herbicide application but would have short-term effects. Impacts of herbicide applications would be minimized by implementation of proposed actions according to the PROJECT programmatic. Restoration activities would support improved wetland and riparian structure and would not have adverse impacts to wetlands.

Notes:

- Prior to construction activities in wetlands, the project would obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit and Section 401 certification and adhere to all terms and conditions.

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. Herbicide impacts to groundwater and aquifers would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label and following the PROJECTS programmatic requirements.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use (agriculture, highway) 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 signage related to the temporary traffic change. In the long term, a new bridge and increased native vegetation along Poison Creek would be noticeable to highway users.

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 and from herbicide applications. Herbicide effects would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label and following the PROJECTS programmatic requirements. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be some 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. Operating construction vehicles and equipment inherently carries potential safety risks to operators, however, staff training and implementing best management practices, such as daily on-site safety precautions, would minimize that risk during construction activities. The traffic change to one lane only on the highway would be implemented according to an approved traffic control plan and have adequate signage and traffic control to warn drivers. Herbicide application poses a slight risk of skin and eye irritations. Work would follow PROJECTS programmatic requirements, including having a licensed applicator that would develop an herbicide transportation and safety plan before transporting or 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: The project actions would occur in coordination and with written approval from private landowners. IDFG would obtain required permits from ITD 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.

Signed:

Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist