Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Moose Creek Fish Barrier Installation Project

Project No.: 1991-019-03

Project Manager: Virgina Preiss, EWM-4

Location: Flathead County, Montana

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 Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to install a fish barrier on Moose Creek in the North Fork of the Flathead River on Flathead National Forest (FNF) lands, approximately 30 miles north of Columbia Falls, Montana. The fish barrier, which would be implemented in cooperation with FNF, would protect native westslope cutthroat trout in the upper 6 miles of Moose Creek from hybridization with non-native rainbow trout. Rainbow trout are found in the North Fork of the Flathead River and have hybridized westslope cutthroat populations in tributaries lower in the North Fork drainage. FWP conducted genetic analysis to determine that the cutthroat population within Moose Creek are currently genetically pure.

The proposed project would be located approximately 6.3 stream miles up Moose Creek from its confluence with the North Fork of the Flathead River. The proposed project would construct a 40-foot-wide by 1-foot-thick by 10-foot-high (5 foot above and below the upstream channel bed) concrete barrier across the channel and floodplain. The structure would include a 4-to-5-foot drop onto a 16-foot-wide concrete apron to prevent scouring, and an integrated fish trap bypass to support future fisheries monitoring. The structure would block upstream fish passage at all flow levels, would allow water to flow unimpeded, accommodate up to a 100-year flood, and create a backwater area of about 0.4 acre in size during 2-year flow levels.

During construction, Moose Creek would be placed in a stream bypass using a hydrobladder to temporarily divert the creek into a pipe around the west side of the project area. Fish and aquatic species would be salvaged from the isolated area and translocated downstream.

In-stream excavation and ground disturbance, including grading and excavation immediately adjacent to the creek, would be approximately 0.1 acre and would include removing trees and vegetation. A 0.1 acre equipment staging and material storage area would be established on FNF Road 5234 near the approach to Moose Creek.

The proposed project would include temporarily reopening 235 feet of a bermed, decommissioned road (FNF Road 5234) between FNF Road 210C and Moose Creek to allow equipment access. The proposed barrier would be installed at a former bridge site on FNF Road 5234. Reopening the 235 feet of FNF Road 5234 on the west side of Moose Creek would involve clearing some vegetation with hand tools and blading the road with heavy equipment. Once the project is

complete, the status of FNF Road 5234 would change from impassable to closed year-round with a gate. Vehicles would not be able to cross the fish barrier; therefore, the rest of the road segment on the east side of Moose Creek would remain impassable.

Construction of the proposed project would require the use of heavy equipment, such as excavators, concrete trucks, and pumps, and is expected to take 40 to 60 days. Implementation would occur between July 15 and December 31, 2026, and incorporate minimization measures including the work area isolation and fish salvage, erosion control best management practices, native revegetation of all disturbed areas, and constructing in water during the instream work window to minimize effects to westslope cutthroat trout.

Following implementation, a Memorandum of Understanding between the FWP and FNF would facilitate regular inspection and maintenance of the structure to minimize potential damage and allow for passage of woody debris.

Funding the proposed activities would support BPA'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 *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.

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Brenda Aguirre
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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Katey C. Grange
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: Moose Creek Fish Barrier Installation Project

Project Site Description

The project site is located on Moose Creek at approximately River Mile (RM) 6.3 within the North Fork Flathead River – Kintla Lake Watershed of the North Fork Flathead Subbasin. Moose Creek is a tributary to the North Fork Flathead River, which enters the Flathead River at approximately RM 117. The legal description of the project site is T35N, R22W, Sec 5. The elevation of the site is about 4,600 feet. The project site is located on FNF, Glacier View Ranger District, and is surrounded by FNF lands managed for timber production. Recreation within the project area is classified as low with occasional hunting and fishing. The topography of Moose Creek at the project site consists of a steep, narrow valley bottom which continues upstream and a moderately steep, open mountainous terrain downstream. Vegetation at the project site is intact riparian forest of multiple species and age classes. Vegetation surrounding the project site is intact upland Douglas fir forest primarily of a single age class.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: FNF was the lead-federal agency for conducting National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 consultation. On March 4, 2024, the FNF Heritage Program determined, in accordance with the Region One Programmatic Agreement (R1PA) with Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), that the project is an undertaking, as defined in § 800.16(y), but it would have no effect to historic properties because a field inventory did not identify historic properties. On March 9, 2026, the FNF issued a Finding of Applicability and No Extraordinary Circumstance (FANEC) for the Moose Creek Fish Barrier citing no extraordinary circumstances associated with cultural or historical resources.

Notes:

- If cultural resources are encountered during project implementation, all work would halt, and the FNF Heritage Program and District Ranger would be notified. The FNF would fulfill the requirements of post-review discovery specified at 36 CFR 800.13, in coordination with BPA.

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 during construction. All project activities would employ best management practices during all applicable activities which would include erosion control during construction and post-project stabilization (grass seeding, water bars, etc.). In addition, best management practices would include stabilization of the site with an erosion blanket and wattles and seeded with native grasses. Operation of the barrier would not further disturb soils as operations would stay within the construction footprint. Effects of the proposed work on soils and geology would be low for both construction and the operation of the fish barrier.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: FNF was the lead-federal agency for conducting Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 consultation and evaluating impacts on forest and state special-status species and habitats. On February 26, 2025, the FNF determined the proposed project would have "no effect" on ESA-listed Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) and whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*), their habitat, or potential habitat for these species. No at-risk or sensitive plant species have been documented in this location. The proposed actions would have "no effect" on plant Species of Conservation Concern.

There would be temporary and permanent impacts to existing vegetation during and after construction activities. Upland and riparian vegetation would be removed from the staging area, stream bypass along the right bank of the creek, and along the access route on FNF Road 5234. Based on the two-year flow, an approximate 2-foot-high band of riparian vegetation would be lost along the perimeter of the 0.4-acre backwater area upstream of the barrier. Likewise, riparian vegetation would be lost where the abutments of the fish barrier would be located. The project would seed and plant all disturbed areas with native plants after construction, which would help reestablish plant communities in the project area. The effects of the proposed action on existing vegetation would be low. Operation of the barrier would have a low effect on vegetation as all operations are designed to stay within the construction footprint.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: FNF was the lead-federal agency for conducting ESA Section 7 consultation and evaluating impacts on forest and state special-status species and habitats. On August 7, 2025, the FNF determined the proposed project was consistent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) US Forest Service Region One 2020 and 2024 Programmatic Biological Opinions for Activities that are Not Likely to Adversely Affect Listed ESA-listed grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and Canada lynx critical habitat, and wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*). Additionally, on November 21, 2025, the FNF determined the proposed project would have "no effect" on ESA-listed meltwater lednian stonefly (*Lednia tumana*) and yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). On November 24, 2025, the FNF determined the proposed project is "not likely to jeopardize" ESA-proposed endangered Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bombus suckleyi*) and would have "no effect" on ESA-proposed threatened Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*).

There would be temporary and permanent impacts to existing wildlife during and after construction activities. Human presence and activity associated with construction would temporarily disturb and displace resident wildlife, but long-term displacement resulting in competition for nearby habitats is unlikely. Based on the two-year flow, an approximate 2-foot-high band of riparian vegetation would be lost along the perimeter of the 0.4-acre backwater area upstream of the barrier, and where the abutments of the fish barrier would be located. This small loss of riparian vegetation may displace some resident wildlife, though there is ample adjacent habitat. The effects of the proposed action on wildlife would be low. Operation of the barrier would have a low effect on wildlife as all operations are designed to stay within the construction footprint.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: FNF was the lead-federal agency for conducting ESA Section 7 consultation and evaluating impacts on forest and state special-status species and habitats. The FNF analyzed the effects of the proposed action on federally listed species and determined the proposed project "may affect but is not likely to adversely affect" bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and bull trout designated critical habitat due to elevated sediment during

construction that could be transported downstream and reach the mouth of Moose Creek where bull trout have been observed. On November 21, 2025, FNF submitted a request for consultation with USFWS. On April 23, 2026, the USFWS concurred with FNF's determination. The only fish present within the project area are the native, state species of concern westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewis*) and the native, apparently secure sculpin (*Cottus bondi*).

There would be temporary and permanent impacts to existing fish during and after construction activities. To mitigate temporary impacts, installation of the fish barrier would occur at low flows and would require diversion of the creek flow around the construction site. Fish removal would also occur and be completed via electrofishing before work within the stream channel begins. Electrofishing is stressful on fish and potentially harmful, but the number of fish affected would be few and from only a small area of the stream. In the long term, approximately 6 miles of stream habitat would be lost to the fish located downstream. However, the fish trap would allow FWP and FNF to pass native westslope cutthroat trout above the barrier, as needed. The overall effect on westslope cutthroat trout from the barrier would be beneficial from blocked access by non-native trout and the prevention of hybridization. The effects of the proposed action on fish would be low in the short-term during construction due to the implementation of the minimization measures and beneficial in the long term. The project would comply with the Clean Water Act and falls under the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Regional General Permit 02 (RGP-02-MT).

Notes:

- Prior to in-water construction, FWP and FNF would obtain an approval letter from the Corps that the project falls under RGT-02-MT.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is not located near a wetland; therefore, the project would have no effect on wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The placement of the fish barrier in the channel may result in minor impacts to groundwater and aquifers by encouraging greater amounts of water to seep into the ground and aquifers behind the barrier. The long-term increase in groundwater would benefit groundwater and aquifer recharge and function.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Permanent changes to land use would occur on FNF Road 5234 being changed from impassable to closed status. Based on the placement of the gate and year-round closure, the function of the road would be similar to pre-project. There are no specially-designated areas within the project area and forest users would not be disrupted by project construction.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary and permanent changes would occur at the project site. Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as increased activity, vehicles, and equipment in the project area. Any impacts associated with construction would be short-term and minor, lasting only as long as the construction phase of the proposed project. Long-term changes to the project site would occur due to vegetation removal and the addition of the permanent structure at the project site. To minimize these

visual impacts, all disturbed areas would be revegetated with native vegetation following construction activities. Visual quality associated with the fish barrier would have a long-term, low effect for forest visitors in the immediate vicinity of the project site. The fish barrier would, however, appear compatible with existing features within the managed forest such as concrete culverts at road crossings.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor increases in local air pollution during project activities due to exhaust and dust from vehicles. These effects would be limited in scope and duration and cause no long-term impacts on air quality.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from crews and equipment would be short-term and temporary 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 public. Operating vehicles and equipment inherently carry 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.

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 area is located on FNF managed land. FWP would implement the project in conjunction with the FNF and therefore have permission from the land manager to conduct project activities.

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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