

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Mike White Creek Barrier Replacement and Channel Restoration

**Project No.:** 1996-077-02

**Project Manager:** Virginia Preiss, EWM-4

**Location:** Idaho County, ID

**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 (the Tribe) to restore a portion of Mike White Creek to improve habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed salmonids in the Clearwater River basin. The Tribe would work with partners at the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to install a new culvert and construct a new stream channel to provide access to additional high-quality habitat for fish. Funding for the proposed actions would support the conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) on the operations and maintenance 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. 839 et seq.).

Mike White Creek currently passes underneath Forest Service Road 100 (FS 100) through an undersized corrugated metal culvert that is perched more than 18 inches above the stream, creating a barrier for fish passage. Additionally, the channel of Mike White Creek that flows into this culvert was diverted from its historical location and currently sits in an incised bypass channel disconnected from its historical floodplain. To restore this portion of Mike White Creek, the Tribe would construct a new channel in the historical floodplain and install a new culvert for passage under FS 100.

The new culvert would be located roughly 100 feet north of the existing culvert. The culvert would be an open-arch metal culvert with a diameter of 10 feet and a simulated natural streambed bottom to provide fish passage at flow levels of Mike White Creek up to at least a 100-year flood. Roughly 350 feet of new channel along the path of the historical channel for the creek would be excavated above and below this culvert. In the new channel, the Tribe would place woody debris and small boulders to create natural habitat-forming channel roughness. Since Mike White Creek is currently diverted through the existing bypass channel, all excavation would be done out-of-water. Once construction of the new channel and culvert is complete, the Tribe would redirect the creek from the bypass channel into the new channel and de-water the bypass channel.

Any in-water work, such as fish salvage in the bypass channel prior to de-watering, would be done during the local in-water work window between July 15 and August 31. Installation of the new culvert would take approximately two weeks, with two additional weeks for excavation of the new

channel. All disturbed areas would be seeded with native grass and forb seed and planted with native shrubs following construction. The Tribe and USFS would monitor and adaptively manage the area to ensure habitat restoration goals are being met in future years.

**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.

Thomas DeLorenzo  
Environmental Policy Analyst

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: Mike White Creek Barrier Replacement and Channel Restoration

### Project Site Description

Mike White Creek is a tributary of Lolo Creek located wholly in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest in central Idaho. The creek passes underneath FS 100 roughly 100 feet upstream from its confluence with Lolo Creek at an elevation of roughly 3,000 feet above sea level. USFS's Musselshell Meadow recreation area – a popular camping, hiking, and fishing spot – is roughly two miles north of the project site across Lolo Creek. The area directly surrounding the FS 100 crossing is largely unimproved natural forest.

### Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

#### 1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: USFS was the lead Federal agency for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act. USFS determined that the proposed actions would have no adverse effect on historic and cultural resources and consulted with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Nez Perce Tribe. SHPO concurred with the determination on December 23, 2024. No other comments were received. A BPA archaeologist reviewed the USFS consultation documentation (BPA CR No. ID 2026 040).

#### 2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Installing the new culvert and excavating the new channel would require earthmoving that would disturb local soil. These effects would be mitigated to the greatest extent possible by excavating only the minimum amount required to fully implement the proposed actions, making the effects localized and not significantly affecting the geology of the surrounding area. Installation of wood and rock in the new channel would help retain sediment in the stream and reduce scour, improving long-term soil retention in the area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: USFS was the lead Federal agency for ESA review of the proposed actions. USFS identified no ESA-listed plants in the proposed project area.

USFS sensitive plant species deerfern (*Struthiopteris spicant*), mountain moonwort (*Botrychium montanum*), green bug-on-a-stick moss (*Buxbaumia viridis*), Constance's bittercress (*Cardamine constancei*), clustered lady's slipper (*Cypripedium fasciculatum*), light hookeria (*Hookeria lucens*), and naked-stem rhizomnium (*Rhizomnium nudum*) were identified by USFS as potentially affected by the proposed actions. A USFS biologist prepared a Biological Evaluation (BE) that evaluated the effects of the proposed actions on these species and determined that they would not significantly contribute towards Federal listing or loss of viability of a population of these species.

Non-listed plants would be disrupted by construction. The Tribe would salvage and avoid plants in excavation areas to the greatest extent possible, but some vegetation would be removed for the newly constructed stream channel. To mitigate for these effects, the Tribe would replant disturbed areas with native shrubs following construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: USFS was the lead Federal agency for ESA review of the proposed actions. USFS identified North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) as the only ESA-listed or state-special status wildlife species potentially present in the proposed project area. USFS determined that the proposed actions would not affect wolverine due to the project site's elevation being far below the typical habitat for wolverine and the unlikelihood of encountering wolverine during construction.

USFS sensitive wildlife species flammulated owl (*Psiloscops flammeolus*), long-legged myotis (*Myotis volans*), fisher (*Pekania pennanti*), western pearlshell mussel (*Margaritifera falcata*), and western toad (*Anaxyrus boreas*) were identified by USFS as potentially affected by the proposed actions. A USFS biologist prepared a BE that evaluated the effects of the proposed actions on these species and determined that they would not significantly contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability of a population of these species.

Non-listed wildlife would be temporarily disturbed by noise and human presence during construction. Any disturbance would be short term, and wildlife would be expected to use adjacent habitat. These effects would be mild and would not persist beyond implementation of the proposed actions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: USFS was the lead Federal agency for ESA review of the proposed actions. USFS identified ESA-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) as potentially affected by the proposed actions. USFS determined that these species were not likely to be adversely affected by the proposed actions. NMFS and USFWS reviewed the proposed actions and determined that the effects on ESA-listed species fit within USFS's Idaho Restoration Programmatic biological opinions (NMFS Consultation No. WCR-2018-9898, USFWS Consultation No. OIEIFW00-2014-F-0456).

USFS sensitive species westslope cutthroat trout (*O. clarkii lewisi*) and Pacific lamprey (*Entosphenus tridentatus*) were identified by USFS as potentially affected by the proposed actions. A USFS biologist prepared a BE that evaluated the effects of the proposed actions on these species and determined that they would not significantly contribute to a trend towards Federal listing or loss of viability of a population of these species.

Effects on non-listed fish would be functionally identical, limited to short-term disruption from noise, human presence, and dewatering of the existing bypass channel. The long-term effects on fish would be positive by improving local habitat and removing a passage barrier to farther upstream habitat.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Mapped wetlands are present near the Mike White Creek channel (USFWS National Wetlands Inventory). These wetlands would be disrupted by construction and excavation of the new stream channel. These effects would be mitigated to the greatest extent possible

by excavating only the minimum amount required to fully implement the proposed actions and salvaging and avoiding wetland vegetation present throughout the area. Additionally, the Tribe would replant disturbed areas with native vegetation following construction.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or groundwater use are proposed. No changes in the stream volume of Mike White Creek are proposed and excavation would not be deep enough to significantly affect the local water table.

## **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions are located wholly on USFS-maintained land. Ownership and use of this land would not change. FS 100 would be temporarily closed for approximately two weeks while the new culvert is constructed. USFS would notify the public of the closure via signage and public notices, and alternate routes would be available. No long-term changes to local access and traffic patterns are proposed.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Changes to local visual quality would be mild. While the new culvert would be larger than the existing stream crossing, it would not be out of character for the area, which features numerous small streams passing underneath USFS-maintained roads through similar culverts. Disturbed areas would be revegetated following construction and restored to a similar aesthetic quality to that which currently exists.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Equipment and machinery used for construction would produce exhaust that would affect local air quality. These effects would be temporary, localized, and mild. No long-term changes to air quality would occur.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Equipment and machinery used for construction would produce noise that would affect local noise levels. These effects would be temporary, localized, and mild. No long-term changes to local noise levels would occur.

## **12. Human Health and Safety**

Potential for Significance:

Explanation: All personnel would use best practices to ensure human health and safety. All machinery would be used solely by trained and licensed (when applicable) personnel.

## **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: All proposed actions would take place on USFS-managed land. The Tribe would coordinate with USFS as necessary. USFS would notify the public of the temporary closure of FS 100 for construction via signage and public notices. No other outside coordination is required.

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

Signed:

Thomas DeLorenzo  
Environmental Policy Analyst