Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Sweetwater Creek Ford Removal and Bridge Install (Update to previous CX determination issued February 12, 2026)

Project No.: 1999-017-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss, EWM-4

Location: Nez Perce 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: BPA proposes to fund the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT) to replace an agricultural ford on Sweetwater Creek with a new bridge to improve fish passage and instream habitat conditions. The ford is used to move agricultural equipment across Sweetwater Creek and gravel is regularly added to build up the ford for equipment use, resulting in consistent damage to that section of the creek, compacted sediments, and deterioration of passage by aquatic organisms. Sweetwater Creek provides habitat for a variety of anadromous and resident fish, including rearing and spawning habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*). This CX has been updated to reflect changes in site access routes.

A 22-foot-wide steel modular bridge with a 65-foot span would be installed approximately 190 feet downstream of the ford. A 35-foot-long by 3-foot-wide precast concrete abutment would be buried at each end of the bridge, along the stream bank, and protected with rip rap. There would be excavation of up to 8 feet along the slope on the inside of the abutment (between abutment and channel). A total of approximately 75 cubic yards of existing soil would be excavated. This area would be backfilled with structural fill under the abutments and up to the bridge deck elevation and rip rap between the abutments and stream.

The ford is on a two-track private dirt road accessed via Webb Road (county managed). New road segments would need to be constructed on either side of the bridge to connect to the private road and Webb Road (about 800 feet in total). Up to 18 feet of fill would be added to existing ground to create the new road prism, with the majority of fill being added near the Webb Road approach to match the elevation of Webb Road. A new culvert, about 106-foot long and 24-inch-diameter, would be installed under the new road at the Webb Road approach to support drainage. Fill would be graded to create a road embankment, sloping down to meet existing ground. The new road surface would be approximately 34 feet wide at the approach to Webb Road, narrowing to 20 feet wide before meeting the new bridge, and remaining that width on the other side of the bridge until it meets the existing private road. The road surface would be graveled and graded to match the existing private road and to meet Webb Road per County requirements.

Gravel from a 105-foot-long stream segment would be excavated to remove the ford and any impacted streambed immediately upstream and downstream of the ford. Streambed simulation material sourced from onsite excavated materials, if possible, would be added in layers and

graded until it matches the existing streambed on either side and slope of the stream. Each layer would be compacted and washed with fines before the next layer is added. About 18 boulders, 30 to 36 inches in diameter, would be partially buried in the streambed material throughout the reconstructed segment to match similar features in upstream and downstream of the ford. The segments of the private road used to access the ford for construction would be decompacted and seeded with a native plant mix (about 585 feet) and returned to use as a pasture. The approach to Webb Road (from the ford) would be removed and the road prism for Webb Road would be graded to match the slope of the existing prism.

Work would be performed during the approved in-water work window, July 1 to September 30. Project activities would be completed using a metal-tracked excavator operating with support equipment, such as a loader or skid steer, and hand-operated equipment and tools. Work areas would be isolated from the active channel using isolation barriers such as sandbags, precast concrete barriers, or water-filled impervious barriers. Aquatic species in isolated areas would be encouraged to move out using blocks and nets. Electrofishing would be used to capture any individuals that do not move out willingly. Individuals would be placed back in the stream, downstream of the construction area. Two equipment staging and material storage areas, each about 0.1 acre in size, would be established near the ford and the new approach to Webb Road. A temporary bridge would be installed over the existing ford for use by construction equipment. Temporary footers would not be needed but there would be minor grading along the bank to level the bridge. Fencing moved for construction would be returned to its original or better condition.

After construction, all disturbed surfaces would be seeded with native grasses. Shrubs in the construction area would be salvaged using a tree spade or excavator and replanted post-construction. NPT would also plant live stakes of native, riparian trees in the construction area. NPT would monitor the project site for several years after construction and reseed or replant as necessary.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 National Marine Fisheries Service Columbia River System Biological Opinion (2020 NMFS CRS BiOp). 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

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Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

KATEY GRANGE

Digitally signed by KATEY GRANGE
Date: 2026.06.03 14:55:28 -07'00'

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.

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Project Site Description

The project site is located on private property within the Nez Perce Reservation boundaries, near the intersection of Webb Road (county managed) and Webb Creek Lane (private road). The site is approximately 6 miles southwest of the town of Lapwai on Sweetwater Creek in Nez Perce County, Idaho. Sweetwater Creek is part of the Lapwai Creek watershed and a tributary of the Clearwater River. The site is at an elevation of approximately 1,500 feet and land use in the area is primarily agricultural. The riparian area along the creek includes mature trees but is constrained by anthropogenic impacts including agricultural activity, flow diversion, grazing, road development, and timber harvest, which have isolated Sweetwater Creek from its historical floodplain extents and caused channel incision and isolation. Historically, hydrology in the Sweetwater Creek basin was characterized by peak flows in late spring and early summer. However, in recent years the flow regime has been characterized by high magnitude, short duration spring flows, followed by low flows in summer.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation on January 22, 2025, with the Nez Perce Tribe and the Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) and made a determination that the project would result in no historic properties affected. THPO concurred with the determination on January 23,2025. No response was received from the Nez Perce Tribe before the end of the 30-day consultation period.

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. There would also be an increased erosion potential during construction activities, including adding and shaping fill for the new road, installation of a temporary bridge over the ford, removal of the ford, and reconstruction of the channel. Erosion and sediment control best management practices would be implemented prior to and during construction to minimize potential for instream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Work areas, including decommissioned road segments, would be decompacted and contoured to match the surrounding grade following construction and seeded and planted with native plant species to facilitate soil recovery.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed species or state special-status plants are known to be present in the project area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), ESA-listed Threatened, as having the potential to be in the project area; however, there is no designated critical habitat in the

project area and no documentation of species presence in the project area. The bulk of the work would occur in the creek, riparian area, or surrounding land currently used for grazing. This is not suitable habitat for Spalding's catchfly. Typically, the species is present in bunchgrass grasslands or sagebrush-steppe regions, not near streams. Presence of cattle also reduces the likelihood of Spalding's catchfly being in the project area. Therefore, the project would have no impact on ESA-listed plant species. Minor and temporary vegetation impacts would occur due to construction vehicles and equipment accessing the site, excavation activities, and fill for the new road. The project would seed and plant disturbed areas with native plants after construction, which would help reestablish plant communities in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed species or state special-status wildlife are known to be present in the project area. IPaC lists the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), ESA-proposed Threatened, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee (*Bonbus suckleyi*), ESA-proposed Endangered, as having the potential to be present in the project area. There is no designated critical habitat for either species in the project area and no confirmed presence in the project area. Due to current agricultural land use practices, it is unlikely plants these species depend on for feeding and breeding would be present in the project area. Therefore, the project would have no effect on ESA-proposed wildlife species.

Wildlife may be temporarily disturbed by crews accessing sites during daylight hours, from the noise of construction equipment, and excavation activities. However, there is abundant similar habitat nearby and it is unlikely the project would result in long-term displacement of wildlife. The ford may be used during construction to move materials across the creek. Flows are expected to be low during the construction period, but aquatic invertebrates and amphibians may be displaced or killed by these activities. Rapid reoccupation of these areas by the same or other members of the same classes of animals following construction would be likely and the removal of the ford would increase aquatic habitat for these species over the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Snake River Basin steelhead and their designated critical habitat are found in Sweetwater Creek. There are no other federal or state special-status fish species in the project area. The project was reviewed and consulted on under BPA's ESA Section 7 Habitat Improvement Program (HIP) programmatic biological opinion and would adhere to all applicable site-specific conservation measures and terms and conditions, including turbidity monitoring requirements, erosion control, approved work timing, work area isolation, and fish salvage. The project would also obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and adhere to all terms and conditions.

Ground-disturbing activities would increase the risk of erosion and sedimentation during construction. Instream construction activities to construct the bridge and remove the ford would result in temporary negative impacts to fish and fish habitat, specifically sediment transport and displacement of individuals. Grading to level the bank near the ford to place a temporary bridge would increase the risk of erosion of soils into the stream. The addition of fill for the new road may also create increased risk of sedimentation during and immediately after construction in those areas closest to the bridge. Implementing conservation measures outlined in the HIP programmatic biological opinion would help mitigate overall effects of these actions. Overall, the proposed actions would improve long-term conditions for fish because agricultural equipment would use the bridge instead of driving through the creek and there would be no need for landowners to continue adding rock to the ford each year. This would improve fish passage and instream habitat conditions in the long term.

Note: Prior to in-water construction, the NPT 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: No wetlands were identified in the project area using the National Wetlands Inventory; therefore, the project would have no effect on wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater are proposed. The proposed project would have no impact on groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The underlying land use would not change and no impact on specially-designated areas would occur as a result of this project. Some of the land used for agricultural purposes in the project area would be converted to use as a private roadway to be used for agricultural purposes and the existing private road to the ford would be abandoned and converted back to agricultural use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary and permanent changes would occur during project implementation. Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as increased activity, vehicles, and equipment in the project area. Removal of the ford would return the stream to a freer flowing form. The new bridge would be a permanent change that would be seen from Webb Road and by the landowner. However, this would be a minor change to the existing agricultural landscape in the project area. No visually prominent vegetative or landform change would be made. The proposed work would have little to no effect on visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor temporary effects on air quality from exhaust due to vehicle and equipment use during construction. This is not expected to be more than from agricultural equipment used during the year. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would result in a minor, short-term increase in ambient noise due to human presence and use of vehicles and equipment. This is not expected to be more than from agricultural equipment used during the year or traffic on the nearby roadway. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Use of heavy equipment and hand-operated equipment would have some known risks that could be mitigated with best management practices. All personnel would use best management practices to protect worker health and safety.

The project would obtain an Approach Permit from Nez Perce County before construction, which outlines minimum requirements for access roadways and driveways to residential properties. The County would review plans for compliance with county standards for road approaches and drainage. Upon approval, the project would adhere to all requirements set forth in the permit.

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 NPT has coordinated with the landowner during project planning and design. Construction schedules would be coordinated with the landowner to avoid conflicts with agricultural operations.

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

Signed: JACQUELYN SCHEI

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Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist