

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Lake Creek at Weller Road Fish Passage Improvements

Project No.: 1990-044-00

Project Manager: Elizabeth Santana, EWM-4

Location: Kootenai 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 Coeur d'Alene Tribe (CDAT) to replace an aging, undersized culvert on Lake Creek at its intersection with Weller Road. The project would support improved passage for aquatic organisms, including westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii*), and reduce streambed scour and bank erosion occurring during high flows.

The existing culvert is a metal arch pipe that is 10 feet wide by 6 feet tall by 47 feet long. Work would entail excavating about 10 feet deep through the existing roadway fill to remove the existing culvert. The project would install an aluminum box culvert (25 feet wide by 10.5 feet tall by 48 feet long) in the same alignment. The culvert would sit on about 3 feet of compacted, crushed stone (aggregate). Inside the culvert, about 3 feet of streambed and bank material would be added and graded to match the upstream and downstream segments of Lake Creek. Crushed aggregate would be used to backfill around and over the new culvert. The final elevation of Weller Road over the culvert would be about 2 feet higher than existing elevation. Material would be sloped and graded to meet the existing road prism. The road would be resurfaced to match the existing roadway.

Construction would require the use of heavy equipment, such as excavators and dump trucks. No temporary access routes would be needed. Staging would be adjacent to the project area on Weller Road. Weller Road would be temporarily closed for the duration of the project (about 2 weeks). The closure and alternate routes would follow an approved Traffic Control Plan developed by the Worley Highway District. The project area and staging area on Weller Road would be restored to original or better conditions and disturbed areas would be seeded with a native seed mix after construction. Work would take place between August and September.

Funding the proposed actions would support 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.

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Project Site Description

The project is in the Lake Creek watershed within the Coeur d'Alene Tribal reservation in southwestern Kootenai County, Idaho, less than a mile east of the Washington-Idaho border. Lake Creek is a tributary of the Kootenai River and flows into Lake Coeur d'Alene about 7 miles from the project. Weller Road is managed by the Worley Highway District and the project would be completed with support from the District. The project area is surrounded by agricultural fields with a sparsely forested area near the creek. There is very little vegetation in the riparian area. Lake Creek provides habitat for native westslope cutthroat trout that migrate only in river systems (fluvial) and those that migrate between the lake and the creek (adfluvial).

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA met with the CDAT Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) on September 24, 2024, to discuss the project, and conducted a site visit at that time. BPA subsequently initiated Section 106 consultation with CDAT and THPO and determined that implementation of the undertaking would result in no historic properties affected, in a letter dated January 28, 2025 (BPA Cultural Resources No. ID 2024 058). On January 29, 2025, the THPO sent an email concurring with BPA's determination. No response was received from CDAT by the end of the 30-day consultation period.

Notes:

- CDAT shall coordinate with the THPO for cultural training and monitoring prior to implementation of the project.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor and short-term soil impacts resulting in increased erosion potential from construction activities would occur during the culvert replacement. Sediment control best management practices would be implemented prior to starting construction to minimize potential for instream turbidity or runoff during construction, including installing erosion control fencing in work areas, protecting existing mature vegetation, and controlling dust with water. After construction, work areas would be decompacted and seeded with native plant species to facilitate soil recovery.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status plant species or those listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) are known to be present in the project area. Construction vehicles would use existing roads and shoulders to the extent practicable for site access and staging. Some minor and short-term impacts to vegetation would occur, including crushing and removal by heavy equipment and trampling from work crews. Mature trees along the creek would be

avoided to the extent practicable. Disturbed areas would be seeded with a native plant seed mix to reestablish local vegetation in affected area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed or state special-status wildlife species or habitats are present within the project site. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool 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 either species in the project area and no confirmed presence in the project area. The project is on an established county road and surrounded by agricultural fields. It is highly unlikely plants and habitat needed for either species would be present in or near the project. Therefore, there would be no effect to ESA-proposed wildlife species from the project.

IPaC information indicates that bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) may be present year-round in Kootenai County. There is no confirmed presence of nests or previously used nest sites in the project area. If an active nest is observed in the project area, the project 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 eagles.

Resident wildlife species may experience temporary disturbance or displacement during construction; however, this disturbance would be limited and would not permanently displace wildlife in the project area. Since the project is on a county road, wildlife in the area are acclimated to regular traffic and should return quickly to the area upon completion of construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed fish species occupy the project area, which is currently blocked to the passage of anadromous fish species due to downstream dams. Excavation for culvert removal and replacement would have temporary negative impacts to fish and fish habitat, specifically sediment transport and delivery and displacement of individuals. The project would adhere to applicable site-specific best management practices (BMPs) to prevent sediment from entering Lake Creek and turbidity would be monitored. The creek would be diverted with cofferdams at each end of the project area and a temporary bypass pipe would be installed to convey water downstream. Fish salvage would occur prior to the work area being dewatered. Resident fish, such as westslope cutthroat trout, may experience short-term displacement during construction. Long term, the project would improve fish passage and reduce streambed scour and bank erosion by replacing the undersized culvert with a structure that can handle high flows.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area contains a freshwater emergent wetland around Lake Creek (as catalogued in the USFWS National Wetland Inventory) that would be temporarily disturbed during replacement of the culvert. The project would disturb less than one-tenth of an acre and would qualify as non-reporting under Nationwide Permit (NWP) 60 issued in March 2026 and is authorized to proceed under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA). The project would obtain water quality certification under Section 401 of the CWA from the Environmental Protection Agency. To reduce wetland impacts, CDAT would implement all CWA permitting and certification terms, conditions, and requirements. In the long term,

wetland function would benefit from improved flows through the culvert and reduction in streambed and bank erosion.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No groundwater withdrawals would occur under the proposed action. Potential groundwater contamination from fuel, fluid drips, or spills from the construction equipment would be minor. BMPs such as onsite spill containment kits would minimize the potential for such drips or spills.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area includes the public road and right of way. The road would be closed for about two weeks during construction and traffic rerouted according to a traffic control plan. The underlying land use would not change. The project is not located in a specially-designated area or Wild and Scenic River.

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 a temporary bypass route for traffic. The proposed work would have little effect on long-term visual quality. The structural changes for the culvert replacement would be made within the footprint of the existing roadway and would not change the overall visual character of the landscape as seen from the roadway.

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. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be minor, 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, nor does it result in any health or safety risks to the public. Operating construction vehicles and equipment inherently carries potential safety risks to operators; staff training and implementing BMPs, such as daily on-site safety precautions, would minimize that risk during construction activities. The detour route for traffic would be implemented according to an approved traffic control plan and would have adequate signage to warn drivers.

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 work would take place on the county road or within Kootenai County's right of way for the road. Designs have been coordinated with the Worley Highway District and construction would be completed with support from the Worley Highway District.

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