

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Palisades Creek and Rainey Creek Weir Replacements

Project No.: 2007-170-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss – EWU - 4

Location: Bonneville 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 Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to replace aging fish weirs and supporting infrastructure at Palisades Creek and Rainey Creek. The weirs serve as selective fish passage barriers that protect Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT) spawning habitat—a core component of IDFG’s YCT conservation strategy. These projects would improve operational efficiency and mitigate issues such as scour, sedimentation, and fish mortality. These actions would contribute to ongoing efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) 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.).

The proposed projects would include the following activities at both sites:

- **Demolition:** Demolish and remove the existing concrete weirs, wingwalls, fish traps, barrier structures, metal hardware, electrodes, and electrical components.
- **Channel Grading:** Channels would be graded to align the streams with the weirs, remove sediment, and mitigate bank erosion. Existing streambed materials (rocks, cobbles, and boulders) would be salvaged and replaced following grading.
 - Palisades Creek: Grading limits extend 45-feet downstream and 150-feet upstream
 - Rainey Creek: Grading limits extend 12-feet downstream and 9-feet upstream
- **Bank Stabilization:** Banks would be sloped, compacted, and layered with geotextile, armored with Class V riprap and coarse wood, and planted with live native vegetation to stabilize and prevent channel shift.
- **New Weir Construction:** New concrete sill-mounted electrical fish barriers equipped with modernized fish raceway traps, wingwalls, and automated electrical deterrence grids would be constructed within the footprint of the existing weirs.
 - Palisades Creek Footprint: Approximately 34-feet wide by 32-feet long
 - Rainey Creek Footprint: Approximately 12-feet wide and 30-feet long
- **Cast-in-place concrete:** Cast-in-place concrete would be poured for the weir floors, cutoff walls, discharge aprons, wingwalls, fish traps, and joint seals.

- Restoration: Disturbed soil would be reseeded with native seed mix and live cuttings upon completion.

Equipment used would include dump trucks, excavators, hydraulic attachments, concrete saws, pneumatic breakers, skid steers, hand tools, and welders. The sites would be accessed by vehicle via public and designated private roads with landowner agreements. Staging areas would be located within established on-site parking lots. Work would occur in Fall, outside the YCT migration and spawning period, with in-water-work limited to the approved in-water-work window.

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.

Lindsey Mills
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: Palisades Creek and Rainey Creek Weir Replacements

Project Site Description

The project areas are located near Swan Valley, Idaho, within the South Fork Snake River Valley between the greater boundary of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest (CTNF) to the west, and the Bridger-Teton National Forest to the east.

Palisades Creek Weir: Approximately 0.5 miles upstream from the South Fork Snake River confluence at an elevation of approximately 5,400 feet on IDFG-owned land. The site is characterized by a dense, multi-layered mountain riparian forest and contains palustrine wetlands.

Rainey Creek Weir: Approximately 0.75 miles upstream from the South Fork Snake River at an elevation of approximately 5,330 feet on a parcel of U.S. Forest Service (USFS)-owned land under the jurisdiction of the CTNF. The surrounding vegetation is sparse and characterized as a low-gradient, marshy wetland riparian meadow containing an upper perennial riverine wetland.

Within the immediate project footprints, vegetation is sparse and potential habitat is limited due to infrastructure development, physical barriers, noise, graveled surfaces, and consistent human activity. Surrounding land uses include rural residential, agricultural, and public and private recreation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No historic properties would be affected during the proposed weir replacements.

Palisades Creek Weir: BPA made a determination of no historic properties affected on March 4, 2026 (BPA CR Project No.: ID 2025 046). Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with BPA's determination on March 27, 2026. The 30-day response period expired on April 3, 2026; no additional comments were received from the consulting parties.

Rainey Creek Weir: An agreement between BPA and CTNF established that CTNF would be the lead Federal agency for National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 compliance. The CTNF Heritage Program initiated Section 106 consultation and determined that proposed the undertaking would result in no historic properties affected on May 11, 2026. The SHPO concurred with the determination on May 28, 2026. No additional comments were received.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary and permanent impacts on geology and soils would occur during the weir replacement activities. Operation of heavy equipment would result in soil displacement and compaction. Erosion and sediment control best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to minimize potential turbidity or excessive runoff. All activities would be confined to previously-compacted and disturbed soil. Disturbed areas would be either restabilized with geotextile and rock laying or planted with native vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing vegetation would be disturbed during the weir replacement activities.

Impacts would include crushing and removal by heavy equipment, excavation, and trampling by work crews. Impacts would be minimized by use of existing parking lots for staging areas and compacted access routes. A large portion of the project areas are developed, and disturbance would be limited to localized previously-disturbed areas.

Federal Species: Both weir project areas are within the geographical range of Ute ladies'-tresses. Ute ladies'-tresses are commonly found in active floodplains, near streams, wetlands, and areas with full-sun exposure and high-water tables. Though both project areas contain potentially suitable habitat and Ute ladies'-tresses have been documented within the Swan Valley along the South Snake River, no Ute ladies'-tresses have been identified during targeted botanical surveillance of Palisades Creek or Rainey Creek. The immediate project areas also lack suitable habitat, as all soil has been previously-disturbed or resurfaced and surrounding riparian vegetation prevents required light conditions. Any riparian soil temporarily exposed during construction activities would be replanted to stabilized banks and prevent the spread of invasive species. Therefore, this project will have no effect on Ute ladies'-tresses.

Idaho & USFS Species: No state or USFS special-status species or habitats are known to be present in project areas. No special-status species would be impacted.

Disturbed areas would be replanted with native vegetation following construction to prevent erosion and the spread of non-native plant species. Overall, the proposed projects would have a neutral to beneficial impact on vegetation.

Notes:

- An ESA No Effect memo was written July 16, 2026.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Wildlife may experience temporary disturbances and displacement during the weir replacement activities due to increased noise, human presence, traffic, and heavy equipment operation.

Federal Species: The weir replacement project areas are within the predicted geographical range of grizzly bear (threatened), North American wolverines (threatened); two proposed species, the monarch butterfly (threatened) and the Suckley's cuckoo bee (endangered); bald and golden eagles (Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act); and several birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). No designated critical habitats are present.

Grizzly bears are typically found in high elevations (6,000-8,000 feet) in late Summer and Fall. Though grizzly bears have been documented in the adjacent CTNF, due to high human activity (residential, high-traffic recreation, and agriculture), lack of suitable habitat, lower elevations, and project timing, grizzly bears are highly unlikely in the proposed project areas. Furthermore, these projects would not remove, degrade, or fragment suitable grizzly bear foraging, cover, or denning habitat. Therefore, this project would have no effect on grizzly bears.

Wolverines are typically found in remote, high elevation (7,000-12,000 feet) environments undisturbed by human presence. While suitable dispersal habitat is modeled in the adjacent national forests, dispersal typically occurs in Spring when no construction would occur. No wolverines have been documented in or around the project areas and due to the high human activity, lack of suitable habitat, low elevation, and project timing, presence of wolverines is highly unlikely in the proposed project areas. Furthermore, these projects would not remove or degrade existing suitable wolverine habitat. Therefore, this project would have no effect on North American wolverines.

The project areas lack suitable habitat and vegetation for monarchs & Suckley's cuckoo bee, and no occurrences have been reported. No impact would be expected.

Although bald eagles, golden eagles, and various migratory birds¹ are known or expected within or around the project areas, potential impacts would be minimal. Nesting and roosting habitat conditions are limited within the immediate, developed project areas, and the proposed construction would occur in Fall, outside of active breeding and nesting seasons. Furthermore, many of the species would be absent during the Fall construction period due to seasonal migration. While birds in adjacent areas may experience minor short-term disturbances that may discourage foraging or hunting, no lasting impact would be expected.

Idaho & USFS Species: The weir replacement project areas are within the known or predicted geographical range of several species identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need² (SGCN) by the Idaho State Wildlife Action Plan and the USFS Intermountain Region Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species Program (TES)³. Due to the lack of suitable habitat, man-made infrastructure, fencing, and barriers, no SGCN or USFS TES species are expected to inhabit the immediate project areas. Furthermore, some of the species are nocturnal and all work would occur during the day and thus, the potential of interactions is unlikely. SGCN in the surrounding areas may experience minor short-term disturbances, but no lasting impact would be expected. No USFS special-status species are known to be present in project areas. No USFS special-status species would be impacted.

Following construction, baseline habitat conditions would remain largely unchanged and wildlife activities would resume. Overall, the proposed projects would have a neutral to no effect on wildlife.

Notes:

- An ESA No Effect memo was written July 16, 2026.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The weir replacements would permanently modify engineered portions of Palisades Creek and Rainey Creek and would disrupt aquatic life. Construction activities would have temporary impacts such as increased turbidity, increased physiological stress to aquatic life, short-term floodplain vegetation loss, and localized bank instability.

Federal Species: No federally listed species or designated critical habitats are known to be present in project areas. No Federal species would be impacted.

Idaho & USFS Species: Palisades Creek and Rainey Creek are critical migration and spawning habitats for Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT), a species identified as SGCN in Idaho and by the USFS TES. Although YCT may be present, Fall construction would avoid the Spring and Summer spawning, egg incubation, and rearing periods, and fish passage would be maintained during construction. Short-term disruption may occur but replacing the aging weirs would benefit the YCT by conserving native spawning habitat.

Impacts would be short-term, localized, and minor; work zone isolation, fish passage, and BMPs would be used to minimize impacts. Overall, weir replacements would improve conditions for fish by improving water quality, reducing fish injury and mortality, and protecting YCT habitat.

¹ Migratory Bird Treaty Act Species: yellow-billed cuckoo, trumpeter swan, Lewis's woodpecker, peregrine falcon, bobolink, broad-tailed hummingbird, Cassin's finch, rufous hummingbird, California gull, Calliope hummingbird, evening grosbeak, and Williamson's sapsucker.

² Idaho Species of Greatest Conservation Need: Townsend's big-eared bat, Yuma myotis, little brown myotis, silver-haired bat, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, moose, American pika, boreal chorus frog, northern leopard frog, western tiger salamander, and western toad.

³ USFS TES: pygmy rabbit, spotted bat, boreal owl, great sage grouse, harlequin duck, and Columbia spotted frog.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed weir replacement projects occur within areas mapped as a wetland by the National Wetland Inventory. While the majority of construction would occur within the footprint of the existing weirs, temporary, localized, and minor disturbances to the instream substrates and riparian vegetation would occur. BMPs and work-zone isolation would be used to minimize erosion. All disturbed areas would be reseeded and replanted with native riparian vegetation. No permanent loss of wetland acreage or ecological function would occur, allowing baseline conditions to resume shortly following project completion. Overall, the weir replacements would have no adverse long-term effects on wetlands in the project areas.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed weir replacements would have negligible to no impact on groundwater resources or regional aquifers. No deep drilling or groundwater extraction would occur, leaving aquifer systems unaffected. Although localized, short-duration dewatering may temporarily draw-down the water tables. Water tables would recover to baseline conditions upon completion. To mitigate the risk of groundwater contamination, standard BMPs would be enforced. BMPs would include off-floodplain fueling, on-site spill kits, and concrete wash containment. Post-construction long-term weir operations would be consistent with the existing weirs and would have no adverse impact.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The weir replacements would occur within the existing developed footprint of active fish-management facilities; there are no specially-designated areas in the project areas and no change in land use or ownership would occur. Therefore, the proposed actions would not impact land use.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed weir replacements would have temporary, localized impact on visual quality, with no long-term adverse changes to the scenic character of either site. During construction, heavy equipment, materials staging, vegetation removal, and demolition of the existing weirs would be short-term and minor and end upon completion. In the long term, the existing aging weirs would be replaced with modern, low-profile weirs within the small footprint, which would maintain or possibly improve the visual quality of the waterway.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles and heavy equipment would be minor and short-term during construction. Conditions would resume to normal immediately once the project is completed.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The weir replacements would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from construction 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 general public. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions and no CERCLA sites.

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: IDFG would coordinate activities with the USFS (for the Rainey Creek site on CTNF land), adjacent private landowners, and municipal stakeholders. Prior to construction, all access agreements would be secured. IDFG would notify adjacent landowners of work schedules and place on-site public signage for the public.

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

Signed:

Lindsey Mills
Environmental Protection Specialist