

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Lostine River #8047 Fish Screen Replacement

Project No.: 2023-003-01

Project Manager: Jennifer Lord, EWU-4

Location: Wallowa County, Oregon

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 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to replace the Lostine River #8047 Fish Screen in Wallowa County, Oregon. The project would be constructed on privately owned land where an irrigation ditch seasonally diverts water from the Lostine River, a tributary of the Wallowa River in the Grande Ronde River basin.

The project would replace an aging fish screen structure built in 1995. The existing screen is a gravity paddle wheel system with a concrete screen box and dual steel drum screens that are 2.5 feet in diameter by 10 feet wide. The new screen would be an in-kind replacement installed within the same footprint as the existing structure.

Construction would occur outside of the irrigation season and behind a closed headgate when the ditch is fully dewatered. After the work area is isolated from the Lostine River, the existing concrete screen structure would be removed. A backhoe or mini-excavator would then be used to grade the ditch to the correct elevation for the new screen structure, generally requiring excavation no greater than three feet deep. A compacted gravel base would be placed, followed by construction of concrete forms, which would be tied with rebar for strength. The concrete screen box would then be poured in place. Once the concrete has cured, the forms would be removed and the new screen components installed. A bypass pipe would be set at the proper grade (typically less than two feet deep) to return fish that reach the front of the screen to the river.

Fish screens are structures that prevent fish entrapment in irrigation ditches or irrigated fields; BPA's purpose in funding them is to prevent entrapment and mortality of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish including Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead trout (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*). The design of the proposed fish screen aligns with criteria in the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) *Anadromous Salmonid Passage Facility Design Manual* (NMFS, West Coast Region, Portland, Oregon 2023).

These actions would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with both NMFS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also 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 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.

John Vlastelicia
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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: Lostine River #8047 Fish Screen Replacement

Project Site Description

The project site is located about three quarters of a mile south of the city of Lostine in Wallowa County, Oregon. The existing fish screen is situated on private land in a valley bottom near the head of an irrigation ditch that diverts and conveys flows on the west side of the Lostine River, just west of Lostine River Road. Vegetation surrounding the ditch at the screen site consists primarily of grasses, with various trees including oak, cottonwood, and pine in the general vicinity and particularly along the Lostine River to the east. Surrounding lands are primarily rural residential and agricultural.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA determined that the proposed project would result in no historic properties affected, based on background research and a site survey completed in 2024. BPA consulted with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and affected Tribes on this project and several other ODFW fish screen projects as part of a National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) Section 106 consultation process (BPA CR Project No. OR 2024 209). BPA submitted a determination letter and survey report to the consulting parties on March 20, 2025. SHPO concurred with BPA's determination on April 18, 2025 (SHPO Case No. 24-1771). No other responses related to the Lostine River fish screen were received during the consultation process.

Notes:

- Protocols would be in place requiring that, if cultural material is inadvertently encountered during construction, work must be stopped until the findings can be assessed by BPA in coordination with the appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would disturb soils during construction due to the excavation and grading required to replace the screen structure within the irrigation ditch and install the associated fish bypass pipe. Construction-related ground disturbance is expected to be less than a quarter acre and would occur within an area previously disturbed for the construction of the existing fish screen in 1995. Erosion and sediment control best management practices would be followed to minimize the physical extent, severity, and duration of soil disturbance.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction activity would involve some vegetation disturbance along the irrigation ditch to replace the fish screen structure. Existing vegetation in proposed disturbance areas consists mostly of grasses. Gravel driveways and two-track access routes provide access

to the screen site from Lostine River Road to the east. The project area is within the geographic range of the federal ESA-listed Threatened Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*), but there are no documented occurrences of this species within several miles of the project site, and the project is expected to have no effect on Spalding's catchfly. There are no documented occurrences of state-listed plant species at the project site.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction of the screen replacement could temporarily displace wildlife from the project area, due to noise and visual disturbance from equipment operation and human activity. Some small animals (e.g., mice and moles) could be killed by equipment operation. The existing screen would be replaced in its current footprint, and there would be no long-term effects to wildlife or habitat once construction is complete.

The North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*) is the only federal ESA-listed (Threatened) wildlife species with a geographic range that overlaps the project area. The wolverine is also an Oregon state-listed Threatened species. Wolverine have been observed in the Wallowa Mountains south of the project area, but there are no known sightings in the project area. The project site is in an agricultural valley bottom at an elevation of under 3,500 feet, and it does not provide the alpine forest conditions and deep, persistent spring snowpack that is typical suitable habitat for wolverine denning. The project area is not within mapped wolverine maternal or primary habitat, and their limited numbers in Oregon and lack of previous activity in the project area make it extremely unlikely they would be encountered during project construction. The project would therefore have no effect on North American wolverine.

There are no documented occurrences of other state-listed Threatened or Endangered wildlife species in the project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The fish screen replacement would occur within an irrigation ditch that diverts water from the Lostine River, which is designated critical habitat for federal ESA-listed Threatened Snake River steelhead trout, Snake River Chinook salmon, and bull trout. The river also provides habitat for coho salmon (*O. kisutch*) and redband trout (*O. mykiss*). In the long term, the project would benefit fish species, including ESA-listed species, by improving screen function.

The proposed fish screen would benefit fish by preventing their access to and entrapment within the irrigation ditch and irrigated fields. Screen replacement work is authorized under NMFS and USFWS Biological Opinions issued for BPA's Habitat Improvement Program (HIP). HIP conservation measures would be incorporated into the project, including compliance with NMFS fish screen criteria. Construction of the screen replacement would occur outside of the irrigation season, behind a closed headgate when the ditch is dewatered and isolated from Lostine River flows.

The project is an in-kind replacement of an existing fish screen structure, would not involve a net fill in the floodplain, and is not expected to impact flood water surface elevations on surrounding properties. The project is an exempt category of activity under U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permitting requirements, as "construction or maintenance of irrigation ditches" and associated elements. Additionally, the Oregon DSL has determined that irrigation ditches are not jurisdictional under Oregon's Removal-Fill Law if they are operated and maintained for the primary purpose of irrigation and are dewatered for the non-irrigation season.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: National Wetland Inventory mapping identifies the project irrigation ditch as a riverine wetland and does not identify wetlands outside of the irrigation ditch in the project footprint. The project would not result in loss of wetland area or permanent impacts to wetland functions. Removal of the existing fish screen and installation of the new replacement fish screen would involve temporary disturbance within the irrigation ditch outside of irrigation season. The project is an exempt category of activity under USACE CWA Section 404 permitting requirements, as “construction or maintenance of irrigation ditches” and associated elements. Additionally, the Oregon DSL has determined that irrigation ditches are not jurisdictional under Oregon’s Removal-Fill Law if they are operated and maintained for the primary purpose of irrigation and are dewatered for the non-irrigation season.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The fish screen replacement would have no effect on groundwater or aquifers. The screen is associated with a surface water diversion (with surface water rights), and the project does not involve groundwater withdrawals or discharges to groundwater. The project site is not within a Groundwater Restricted Area designated by the Oregon Department of Water Resources or a Sole Source Aquifer designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the existing uses of the fish screen site or surrounding lands. The screen replacement would support continued delivery of irrigation water to agricultural lands in a manner that is protective of ESA-listed fish using the Lostine River. Construction of the screen replacement is scheduled to occur outside of the irrigation season to avoid temporary disruptions to irrigation water users.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would replace an existing, aging fish screen with a new fish screen in the same location. The visual quality of the area would not substantially change. Temporary construction activities to replace the fish screen may be visible to traffic on Lostine River Road. The project is on private property and would not interfere with scenic public views.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The fish screen replacement would not introduce new operational sources of air emissions or otherwise affect air quality in the long term. Minor temporary increases in site emissions from gasoline and diesel-powered construction equipment and vehicles would occur during construction. Dust emissions from construction activities would be minor based on the small area of ground disturbance and location within an irrigation ditch. The project site is not located within an area designated by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as a Non-Attainment or Maintenance Area with current or historic issues meeting ambient air quality standards.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not introduce new permanent sources of noise to the project area and would not otherwise change noise levels in the long term. Temporary increases in noise would be expected from equipment and vehicle operation during construction. Construction would be performed during daylight hours, minimizing impacts to rural residences in the general vicinity of the project. There are no other noise-sensitive receptors such as schools, libraries, or hospitals near the project site.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No permanent public health or safety hazards would be created by replacing the fish screen at the project site, which is on private property. Temporary safety hazards typical of construction activities would be expected from the operation of heavy equipment and tools used to remove the existing fish screen and install the new screen.

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: ODFW has been in communication with the landowner regarding the project. Construction activities would be coordinated with the landowner prior to the start of work, which is scheduled to occur outside of the irrigation season.

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

Signed:

John Vlastelicia
Environmental Protection Specialist