

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Bia Po'i Naokwaide Aquatic Organism Passage Improvement Project

Project No.: 2010-072-00

Project Manager: Virginia Preiss, EWM-4

Location: Lemhi 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) along with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund proposes to fund the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to replace two undersized culverts with two bridge crossings on Bia Po'i Naokwaide, a tributary to the Salmon River in the Salmon-Challis National Forest (SCNF) in Lemhi County, Idaho. The undersized culverts are limiting passage and access to upstream habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), steelhead (*O. mykiss*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) and isolating fish in Bia Po'i Naokwaide.

The culverts are corrugated metal pipes that sit less than 300 feet apart under two U.S. Forest Service (USFS) roads near the confluence of Bia Po'i Naokwaide and the Salmon River. Culvert removal and bridge construction would take place in succession, with the crossing nearest the Salmon River being replaced first. The culverts would be removed and disposed of offsite. Two prefabricated, modular steel bridges (approximately 24-foot-wide by 44-foot-long and 18-foot-wide by 38-foot-long) set on concrete abutments and steel piles would be installed. Abutments would be buried up to 3 feet deep, outside the channel. Steel piles would be driven into the ground up to 25 feet on each end of the bridges. Large angular rock would be placed between the steel piles and the channel banks. The streambed and banks at the crossings plus 100 feet upstream and downstream would be graded, realigned, and reconstructed with native materials to match natural conditions in Bia Po'i Naokwaide. One log weir and nine rock weirs would be installed upstream and downstream of both crossings to control the grade of the channel, create pools, and ensure bed stability and structure integrity. Fill material around the bridges would be sloped and graded to match the existing road prisms. The roads would be resurfaced to match the existing roadways.

Construction would require the use of heavy equipment, such as excavators, dump trucks, and lowboy trailers. For each crossing, a temporary bypass road would be constructed to reroute traffic during construction and temporary signage would be installed along roadways. The temporary bypass roads would be constructed in the shoulders of the existing roads by clearing vegetation, grading, and adding crushed rock to create a one lane bypass during construction. Staging areas would be in existing pull outs, parking areas, or roads. After construction, temporary bypass roads would be removed and disturbed areas outside the road prism would be seeded with a native seed mix.

Funding the proposed activities fulfills commitments under the 2020 NMFS Columbia River System Biological Opinion and would support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. These actions also 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.

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Environmental Protection Specialist

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Concur:

KATEY GRANGE
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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: Bia Po'i Naokwaide Aquatic Organism Passage Improvement Project

Project Site Description

The project site is in the SCNF about 20 miles northwest of Salmon, Idaho. One culvert is located on Salmon River Road (USFS Road 60030), which runs along the Salmon River. The other is approximately 300 feet upstream on USFS Road 60039, which runs along Bia Po'i Naokwaide in a valley bottom. The confluence of Bia Po'i Naokwaide and the Salmon River is at about 3,500 feet in elevation. There is little vegetation near the mouth of the creek, but the upstream culvert site is surrounded by mature trees, sagebrush, and grasses. The USFS Indianola Ranger Station is about 900 feet northeast of the project site on Salmon River Road. There is also a public boat ramp immediately downstream of the mouth of Bia Po'i Naokwaide, between Salmon River Road and the Salmon River. The boat ramp is a large, graveled parking area with a boat launch into the Salmon River. This section of the Salmon River is in the Recreational portion of the river designated a Wild and Scenic River (of a 125-mile stretch of river, 46 miles are designated Recreational and 79 miles are designated Wilderness). Both USFS roads are graveled and open to vehicles year-round.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: SCNF and BPA agreed that SCNF would be the lead federal agency for Section 106 compliance (BPA Cultural Resources No.: ID 2025 048). Pursuant to the 2021 Programmatic Agreement between the SCNF and Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the SCNF Heritage Program initiated Section 106 consultation on Sept. 17, 2024, with a summary of the USFS's efforts to identify historic properties in the Area of Potential Effects (APE). Five historic properties were identified in the APE. The SCNF Heritage Program continued to consult and determined that through avoidance there would be no adverse effect to historic properties on May 19, 2025. SHPO concurrence with this determination was received May 19, 2025.

Notes:

- Access and staging of all heavy equipment would be restricted to open USFS roads and designated staging areas.
- In coordination with the SCNF Heritage Program, a trained heritage professional would flag sensitive areas for avoidance and monitor excavation near this area.
- If cultural material is inadvertently encountered during the implementation of this project, the SCNF Heritage Program would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds and that the Heritage Program and District Ranger be immediately notified, who would coordinate with BPA and appropriate consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be temporary impacts on geology and soils due to displacement and compaction of soil from the operation of heavy equipment to remove the existing culverts, install bridge crossings, and create temporary bypass roads during construction. Erosion and sediment control best management practices would be implemented prior to work to

minimize potential for instream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. The road prisms and surfaces would be constructed and graded to match the existing roadways. Disturbed areas would be decompacted and seeded with native plant species after construction to facilitate soil recovery.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: No ESA-listed or special-status plant species are present in this location, including species of concern for the USFS. There would be temporary impacts to existing vegetation from excavation and establishing temporary bypass roads for each culvert. Impacts would include crushing and removal by heavy equipment and trampling from work crews. Mature trees along the creek would be avoided to the extent practicable. Impacts would be minimized by using established roads to access the site, confining excavation to within the road right of way, staging in established road shoulders and parking areas, and decompacting soils in work areas and seeding after construction with a native plant seed mix. Any imported fill materials needed for the project would be sourced from a USFS approved location and certified weed free.

Notes:

- Should previously unknown occurrences of USFS sensitive plant species be found in the project area during any stage of implementation, the USFS would work with the project to determine protective measures and remedies if needed.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed, state special-status, or USFS sensitive wildlife species of concern are within the project site. The USFWS Information for Planning and Conservation (IPaC) tool lists the Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and the North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), both ESA listed Threatened, as having the potential to be in the project area. In addition, IPaC 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 critical habitats for ESA-listed or proposed species in the project area and no confirmed presence of any of the species in the project area. Human recreational activity here is high, the ranger station is nearby, and the roads are open and traveled year-round. The incremental disturbance from proposed culvert replacements would be inconsequential. Presence of ESA-listed or proposed species near enough to the proposed activity for them to be disturbed would be very unlikely, and there would thus be no effect.

IPaC information indicates that golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) may be present near the project area, but mainly in May, which is prior to the start of work. 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 golden eagles.

No wildlife habitat would be modified to a degree that would permanently displace resident wildlife, though some may be temporarily displaced by disturbance from construction activities and human presence. Wildlife in the area are acclimated to similar disturbances (regular road use, human presence at the boat launch and ranger station) and should return quickly to the area upon completion of construction.

Notes:

- Use erosion control products approved by the USFS to ensure wildlife entrapment or injury does not occur with installation of erosion control devices.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: ESA-listed Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout and their designated critical habitat are found in Bia Po'i Naokwaide, as well as west slope cutthroat trout (*O. clarkii lewisi*). In addition, white sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*), Pacific lamprey (*Entosphenus tridentatus*), and ESA-listed sockeye salmon (*O. nerka*) can be found in the Salmon River.

The USFS has assumed lead agency responsibilities for ESA. The USFS would require that IDFG adhere to the terms, conditions, and conservation measures in the USFWS "Restoration Activities at Stream Crossings on USFS and BLM lands in Idaho and Nevada" programmatic consultation (2022-0035034-S7-001-R001) and the NMFS "Restoration Activities at Stream Crossings on USDA Forest Service and USDI Bureau of Land Management Public Lands in Idaho" programmatic consultation (WCRO-2022-03653). The project has received approval to work past the typical in-water work window date and work would start in the fall.

Excavation for culvert replacements and restoration of the stream bed would have temporary negative impacts to fish and fish habitat, specifically sediment transport and delivery and displacement of individuals. The work area would be isolated prior to construction, and a fish and aquatic organism salvage would occur prior to dewatering the area. Some aquatic invertebrates may not be salvaged and would be displaced or killed by mechanical activities, but immediate reoccupation of the area is anticipated. Ground-disturbing activities would increase the risk of erosion and sedimentation during and immediately after excavation activities. This increase would be limited to the time of construction, primarily during excavation, would not be expected to last more than several hours, and would be mitigated using erosion control measures throughout project construction. The project would obtain a required permit issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and a Section 401 water quality certification from Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. The project would adhere to all requirements and prescriptions set forth in the permit and certification. Overall, the proposed actions would improve long-term conditions for fish by removing partial passage barriers and providing access to upstream habitat.

Notes:

- Prior to in-water construction, the project would obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit and Section 401 certification and adhere to all terms and conditions.
- All work being performed within the stream channel would be monitored by a USFS representative.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The USFWS National Wetlands Inventory information shows that no wetlands are present in the project area. Therefore, the project would not have an impact on wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or uses of groundwater are proposed. There would be potential for contamination of groundwater from fuel or fluid drips or spills from the heavy equipment used, but spills and drips with the volume necessary to contaminate groundwater are unlikely. Onsite spill kits would also minimize the potential for spills and drips to be of sufficient quantity to contaminate groundwater.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The underlying land use would not permanently change. With the installation of temporary bypass roads during construction, road users would still be able to travel on both USFS roads and access USFS lands and the nearby boat launch. There may be minor delays due to decreased speeds in construction areas. All areas would be signed to warn of the construction and bypass routes.

The project is along a 125-mile-long section of the Salmon River that was designated a Wild and Scenic River in 1980 (Congressional designation under Public Law 96-312: Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980). The Salmon River's Wild and Scenic River values would be unaffected or improved over existing conditions by the proposed project. The project would not change the status of the Salmon River as a free-flowing river. The project may result in minor, temporary changes in water quality, specifically increases in turbidity during construction. This increase would be less than typical high flow events in the river during the year, would not be expected to last more than several hours, and would be mitigated by isolating work areas and the use of erosion control measures throughout project construction. The project would have minor and temporary impacts on fisheries as described above but would benefit fish in the long term by providing improved passage and access to over 9 miles of critical habitat for fish. The project would not change geologic or cultural values, as described above. The project would not change recreational values. The public would still be able to travel along the USFS roads and the nearby boat launch would continue to be accessible during project construction. To ensure the project does not impact scenic values, the new bridges would have weathered steel, or a treatment that was naturally appearing, to mimic the aged appearance of existing bridges within the Wild and Scenic River corridor. Thus, the project would not change any Wild and Scenic River values of the Salmon River.

Notes:

- Weathered steel, or a treatment that is naturally appearing, would be used to mimic the aged appearance of existing bridges within the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

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 temporary bypass routes 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 roadways and would not change the overall visual character of the landscape as seen from the roadway. The new bridge crossing on USFS Road 60039 might be seen from Salmon River Road but this wouldn't be much different than seeing the culvert and they would be able to see a free-flowing stream restored to more natural conditions. Salmon River users would be able to see the new bridge crossing on Salmon River Road and a section of stream restored to more natural conditions. The bridges would have weathered steel, or a treatment that was naturally appearing, to mimic the aged appearance of existing bridges within the Wild and Scenic River corridor.

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 best management practices, such as daily on-site safety precautions, would minimize that risk during construction activities. The temporary bypass routes for traffic would be implemented according to a traffic control plan approved by the USFS 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: IDFG has coordinated the design and development of the project with the SCNF, and construction would occur in coordination with SCNF staff. The SCNF sent details via email of the proposed project in a scoping announcement to 178 subscribers including members of the public; non-governmental organizations; local, state, and federal agencies; and local, state, and federal government representatives and their staff. Three copies of the announcement were sent out via U.S. mail. Two separate letters went to the Nez Perce Tribe and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. There was one response to the request for comments. The respondent expressed support for the project.

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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