

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Middle Lemhi Hayden Reach Phase 3 Restoration

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 implement a stream habitat restoration project on the Lemhi River upstream of its confluence with Hayden Creek in Lemhi County, Idaho. The project would enhance and increase natural channel function, reconnect the floodplain, and add instream structures, while maintaining sufficient winter flow velocities in the main channel to reduce the likelihood of ice collecting in the channel. The intent is to improve suitable habitat for rearing Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed summer steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), spring Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*), and bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*).

Project activities would occur along about 1,200 feet of the Lemhi River and encompass about 9 acres. The project area is downstream of two prior phases of the overall project. Phase 1 included construction of an interwoven series of main and side channels adjacent to the severely channelized Lemhi River, floodplain grading, and habitat structure construction. Phase 2 included improvements to Phase 1 to limit ice formation risks, connection of the new channels with the former river channel, introduction of flows into the new channels, placement of wood structures, and replacement of an undersized bridge. Phase 3 would continue realignment of the main channel and creation of side channels; construct instream riffles, gravel bars, and large wood habitat structures; regrade the floodplain to elevations effective for connection with the river at various flows; reshape and reinforce banks using wood and vegetated bank treatments; place large woody debris in the river, along banks, and in the floodplain; and revegetate the riparian areas with native plantings and seeding.

During construction, approximately 3,600 cubic yards (cy) of material would be excavated for main channel realignment, side channel creation, and floodplain grading. Excavated materials would be used to fill areas in the floodplain and existing channels, create or stabilize banks, and stabilize wood structures. The project would construct riffles and gravel bars in and along most of the new main and side channels using imported material (about 2,300 cy of riffle material and 800 cy of gravel bar material).

A variety of wood structures (about 38) would be constructed in the channels and along banks. Wood structures would range in size from simple, three log structures to more complex log jam structures with up to 10 logs. Structures would be partially buried into banks, backfilled with excavated material, and planted with live willow cuttings after installation. Large woody debris (about 35 single logs or whole trees) would be placed on the floodplain or partially buried into banks and placed in the channel. Live willow cuttings would be planted around these logs. Approximately 150 feet of beaver dam analogs (BDAs) would be constructed in three areas. BDAs would be constructed by partially burying a series of overlapping logs across the channel and nearby floodplain on each bank. The structure would be backfilled with native materials, interwoven with slash woody material (shorter and thinner logs or branches), and planted with live willow stakes. Structures would extend about 2 feet above ground level. There would be breaks in the length of each BDA to accommodate flows.

Bank treatments would be installed to help stabilize newly created banks, limit erosion, and support establishment of vegetation. Treatments would consist of logs and live willow stakes buried along banks, live willow stakes and slash material planted in trenches and backfilled, or placement of sod along the tops of banks. There would be one or more bank treatments installed along about 3,700 feet in the main and side channels. Approximately 1,400 feet of existing fence between the project and the highway would be removed during construction and replaced with a new, wildlife-friendly fence once construction is finished.

Equipment needed to complete the project includes bulldozers, excavators, loaders, and a variety of service vehicles. The project would use two material and equipment staging areas that were previously established. One staging area is across the highway and was established by IDFG to support multiple habitat restoration projects in the vicinity. The other was established during and is in the Phase 2 project area. Two new temporary construction entrances would be constructed to allow access to this staging area from the highway. A third temporary construction entrance from the highway would be constructed in the downstream project area. Proposed channel alignments (main and side channels) and areas designated for fill would be used as temporary access routes during construction, so no additional access routes would be constructed in areas not already being disturbed by construction activities. A temporary bridge would be installed during the initial sequencing step and would require temporary abutments at each end that would be partially buried (up to 4 feet deep) on the banks. This temporary bridge may be moved to a downstream location for subsequent sequencing steps, again with temporary abutments.

Depending on site conditions, herbicide treatments for invasive plants would be applied a few weeks prior to any ground disturbance to prevent distribution of invasive species during construction. After construction, disturbed areas would be de-compacted (up to 8 inches) then seeded and mulched. Selected areas would also be planted with live stakes, plugs, and containerized native plants. Protective fencing or other deterrents may be used to protect plants from browsing wildlife.

The site would be monitored for several years after construction is complete. If failures occur, such as in system function, structure function, or integrity; or if there is an increase in risk to infrastructure, riverscape processes, or fish passage; adaptive management procedures would be implemented. These procedures may include installation of new structures of the same type as originally installed, modification of structures, grading, or a combination of multiple procedures. Adaptive management procedures (replanting, reseeding) may also be implemented if the native plant community is slow to establish or there is low survival in restored areas. If needed, additional herbicide applications would be applied in subsequent years if monitoring shows encroachment by invasive species.

Funding for this project would fulfill commitments under the 2020 NMFS Columbia River System Biological Opinion and support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Columbia River System Biological Opinion. 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.

JACQUELYN SCHEI
Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist

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Concur:

KATEY GRANGE
Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

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Date: 2026.09.30 11:49:22 -07'00'

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: Middle Lemhi Hayden Reach Phase 3 Restoration

Project Site Description

The project is about a mile north of the town of Lemhi in Lemhi County, Idaho. The project area is on land owned by IDFG and includes part of an existing 6-acre public fishing and camping site (Hayden Creek Access Area). The Lemhi River is a tributary to the Salmon River, about 27 miles downstream of the project area. It supports populations of ESA-listed Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout, as well as westslope cutthroat trout (*O. clarkii lewisi*) and other resident fish. Historical impacts have resulted in a homogenous, single threaded, high velocity river with little floodplain connection or diversity of depth, cover, or other aquatic habitat values. Railroad, highway, and levee construction have resulted in realignment, channelization, and disconnection of the river from the floodplain. Highway 28 runs parallel to the existing Lemhi River channel throughout the project reach, with the left bank of the river and the road prism being nearly indistinguishable from one another. Additionally, the project area contains components of a historic-era fish weir constructed in 1964. There is louver trap/array, upstream migrant barrier rack, bypass channel, holding pond, foot bridge, weir house, outhouse, and outlet turnout. The pond and bypass channel are largely filled with fine sediments but remain perennially connected to the river. Surrounding land is predominantly used for agriculture and irrigated with water from the river. The riparian corridor is narrow and discontinuous, resulting in bank instability, channel widening, and lack of shade.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On April 10, 2023, BPA sent a cultural resources inventory report and letter to the Shoshone Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) with a summary of the efforts made to identify historic properties and BPA's finding of no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA Cultural Resources No.: ID 2022 049). The report identified two resources within the project area—one agricultural waterway (the L-42 ditch) and the Lemhi River Fish Weir. The L-42 agricultural waterway had been previously determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and BPA determined the Lemhi River Fish Weir was eligible for listing in the NRHP. The Lemhi River Fish Weir is composed of eight character defining features including; a louver trap/array, upstream migrant barrier rack, bypass channel, holding pond, foot bridge, weir house, an outhouse, and outlet turnout. None of these resources would be impacted by the project. On April 28, 2023, Idaho SHPO concurred with BPA's determination. No response was received from the tribes.

Notes:

- Components of the Lemhi River Fish Weir would be avoided, moved, or incorporated into the project design as follows:
 - The catwalk (foot bridge) would be temporarily removed during construction to avoid damage and replaced when construction is complete.
 - Move the outhouse feature approximately 80 feet to 100 feet west, closer to the weir house (Feature 6) to ensure avoidance.

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 construction equipment used to excavate soils for channel realignment, creation of side channels, and installation of wood structures and bank treatments. There would also be temporary impacts to soils from planting activities. Erosion and sediment control best management practices would be implemented prior to work to minimize potential for instream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Work areas would be contoured to match the surrounding grade following construction and seeded and planted with native riparian or upland plant species to facilitate soil recovery.

Impacts to biological components of soils from herbicide use would be minimized by application according to manufacturer's labels and compliance with the conservation measures in BPA's Habitat Improvement Program ESA Section 7 programmatic consultations (HIP BiOps), including minimizing drift and overspray.

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. Minor and temporary vegetation impacts would occur due to construction vehicles and equipment accessing the site and crushing existing vegetation, excavation activities removing vegetation, and work crews trampling vegetation. Impacts would be minimized by using existing access routes where possible and decompacting soils in work areas and seeding after construction with a native plant seed mix.

Herbicide use would result in plant mortalities, mainly invasive species, but there may be some overspray onto native vegetation. Impacts would be minimized by applying according to the manufacturer's label and following conservation measures from BPA's HIP BiOps such as having a licensed applicator and minimizing drift and overspray. In the long term, the project would have a beneficial effect on vegetation through seeding and planting of disturbed areas with native plants and the removal of invasive plant species during subsequent monitoring, as needed.

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 in the project area. 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 in the project area. The potential of any of these species to be in or moving through the area is low and the project would occur for a limited duration and would be unlikely to impact these species. Therefore, there would be no effect to ESA-listed or proposed wildlife species from the project.

IPaC information indicates that bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) may be present year-round in Lemhi County. Their breeding season is generally January to August. Initial work would occur outside these timeframes (starting around September), but later work would occur in July of the following year. There is no confirmed presence of nests or previously used nest sites for either species 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 and 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. Conservation measures would be used to minimize impacts. Equipment use would occur after nesting and breeding seasons of migratory birds. Wildlife would likely use adjacent suitable habitat if displaced during construction and would reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed activities. Due to the close proximity to Highway 28 and the existing public access area and residence, wildlife in the area are acclimated to temporary disturbances and should return quickly to the area upon completion of construction. Herbicide application would have short-term impacts to wildlife that would be minimized by following manufacturer's labels and conservation measures from BPA's HIP BiOps, such as not applying herbicides during migratory bird nesting season and minimizing overspray and drifting. The proposed project is expected to improve aquatic and riparian habitat, which would have a beneficial effect for wildlife species in the long term.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground-disturbing activities would increase the risk of erosion and sedimentation during construction. Instream activities to construct riffles, gravel bars, wood structures, and bank treatments would result in temporary negative impacts to fish and fish habitat, specifically sediment transport and displacement of individuals. Connecting existing channels to newly excavated channels would increase the risk of erosion of soils into the stream and sedimentation, as well as increased turbidity from introducing water to newly excavated areas. Implementing conservation measures, such as staged rewatering, outlined in the HIP BiOps would help mitigate effects of these actions. Herbicide application may have effects for fish and other aquatic species in the project area. However, the project would follow the conservation measures in BPA's HIP BiOps to minimize impacts. No herbicide would be applied in water, and buffer zones would be observed.

ESA-listed Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout are found in the project area, as well as designated critical habitat for all three species. The project was reviewed and consulted on under BPA's HIP BiOps 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, fish salvage, staged rewatering of work areas, and minimization measures for herbicide application. Instream work would occur during the approved work window (July 1 to August 23) and work outside the active channels may take place before or after that. Instream work areas would be isolated with coffer dams and aquatic invertebrates would be salvaged from the isolated areas before dewatering occurs.

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, temporary, moderately adverse effects to fish occurring during construction would be offset by floodplain and side channel reconnection and enhanced habitat complexity that would lead to low to moderate long-term beneficial effects to fish and the aquatic environment.

Notes:

- 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 and adhere to all requirements and prescriptions set forth in the permit and certification.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The USFWS National Wetlands Inventory shows 2.8 acres of freshwater forested-shrub wetlands. During project design, it was determined that floodplain activation of these areas does not occur until the 50- to 100-year flood event; therefore, they lack the appropriate hydrology to classify as wetlands. There was also a series of test pits dug throughout the project area. Soil profiles transitioned quickly from a thin, organic topsoil layer to gravel and alluvium, showing limited to no indicators of wetland soil types. Therefore, the project would have no impact to wetlands and in the long term, project activities would support reconnection of the floodplain at average flow, which would lead to development of wetlands in these areas. Herbicide impacts to any new wetland areas would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label and following requirements in BPA's HIP BiOps.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater are proposed. The proposed project would have no negative impact on groundwater or aquifers and would have a long-term benefit from improving groundwater exchange in newly inundated areas. Herbicide impacts to groundwater and aquifers would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label and following requirements in BPA's HIP BiOps.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is on land (two parcels) owned by IDFG. Most of the project area is within one parcel purchased for river restoration and conservation purposes. The downstream portion of the project area lies within the second parcel that is used as a public camping and fishing area. There would be temporary changes to this land use, as the project would use one of the existing gravel drives in this public area to access the downstream extent of the project. The public would still have access to the IDFG land but would be excluded from construction zones. Proposed activities would occur during daylight hours only and noise from equipment and crews would be heard by anyone using the public access area and may cause temporary disruption. Construction would occur over about 16 weeks during non-consecutive fall and summer periods and on weekdays which are non-peak periods and there are alternate recreation sites in the area. Temporary signage would be installed to inform the public of access changes during construction. After construction, the gravel drive would be returned to pre-project condition or better and both IDFG parcels would be open to public access. The project is not located in a specially-designated area or Wild and Scenic River.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary and permanent changes to visual quality would occur during and after the construction. Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as work zone conditions, vehicles, equipment, and exposed soils. The straightened main channel would be permanently realigned to have a more natural meander with multiple side channels. Large wood structures, bank treatments, additional water inundation in the floodplain and side channels, and native plants would be visible. These components would return the project area to a more natural condition, which would improve overall visual quality in the long term.

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, as well as from herbicide applications. Herbicide effects would be minimized by application according to the manufacturer's label and following BPA's HIP BiOp requirements. Normal conditions would return upon project completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work would result in a temporary increase in ambient noise. Any noise emitted from crews and equipment would be short-term and temporary, 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. Use of heavy equipment would have some known risks that could be mitigated with best management practices employed by crews working on the project to protect worker health and safety. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions. There would be construction signage placed along the highway and in the IDFG public access area. The public would still be able to access the IDFG land but would be excluded from the construction zone for the duration of construction. Herbicide application poses a slight risk of skin and eye irritations. Effects would be minimized by having a licensed applicator that would develop an herbicide transportation and safety plan before transporting or applying any herbicides, thus making the risk from herbicides insignificant.

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 owns the properties where the project would occur and has designated them for fish and wildlife conservation purposes.

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

Signed: **JACQUELYN SCHEI**
Jacquelyn Schei
Environmental Protection Specialist

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JACQUELYN SCHEI
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