Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Spring Tributary Culvert Replacement

Project No.: 1992-010-00

Project Manager: Verl Miller, EWM-4

Location: Bannock County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to replace an undersized culvert at the crossing of Sheepskin Road and an unnamed tributary to Spring Creek, approximately 12-miles northwest of Pocatello, in Bannock County, Idaho. The culvert acts as a partial passage impediment to Yellowstone cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus virginalis bouvieri*). Replacing the culvert would provide passage during all conditions to Yellowstone cutthroat trout and other native fish.

Funding the proposed actions would support Bonneville's commitments to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in the Columbia River Fish Accord, as amended, while also supporting 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*.).

The existing culvert consists of a 20-foot-long, 3-foot-diameter, smooth-bore, corrugated plastic pipe. The culvert would be replaced with a 16-foot-long, 8-foot-wide, 6-foot-high, reinforced concrete box culvert (RCBC). The RCBC includes 6-foot-long reinforced concrete wingwalls at the inlet and outlet for a total overall length of 28 feet. A stream channel approximately 5 foot wide and 0.5 foot deep would be constructed inside the RCBC using streambed material specifically designed to provide grade control and bed scour protection and to resist movement and relocation by beaver. Staging and access would occur along Sheepskin Road.

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) 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), BPA has determined that the proposed action:

1) fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D (see attached Environmental Checklist);
2) does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal; and
3) has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.[1]

ISRAEL DURAN

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Israel Duran
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

KATEY GRANGE

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Katey C. Grange
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

[1] BPA is aware that the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), on February 25, 2025, issued an interim final rule to remove its NEPA implementing regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508. Based on CEQ guidance, and to promote completion of its NEPA review in a timely manner and without delay, in this CX BPA is voluntarily relying on the CEQ regulations, in addition to DOE's own regulations implementing NEPA at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021, to meet its obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Checklist

This checklist 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: Spring Tributary Culvert Replacement

Project Site Description

The culvert would be replaced at an unnamed tributary to Spring Creek (Spring Tributary), approximately 12 miles northwest of Pocatello, in Bannock County, Idaho. Spring Tributary and the other spring-fed streams on the Fort Hall Bottoms were likely active side channels of Spring Creek, which is a tributary to the Snake River. The construction of the Snake River Dams reduced flood discharges and changed the character of the Fort Hall Bottoms from frequently inundated floodplains to drier uplands with localized spring-fed streams; the spring-fed stream channels have subsequently become oversized relative to the reduced spring-fed discharges they currently convey.

The Project is also located near the upstream limits of the American Falls Reservoir backwater influence, which results in additional habitat degradation largely caused by the reservoir's rapidly varying pool elevation. Spring Tributary is flanked by narrow strips of riparian vegetation, which generally include sparse hawthorn, willow, alder, and few cottonwood trees with an understory of riparian grasses, rushes, sedges, and shrubs. Additional other anthropogenic impacts include removal of beaver, instream wood removal, stream channelization projects, riparian timber harvests, and past grazing management practices, which have altered fluvial and geomorphic processes within the Fort Hall Bottoms.

Currently, the existing Spring Tributary culvert is perched approximately 3 feet above the streambed and acts as a partial impediment to upstream passage. The culvert services Sheepskin Road, a primitive, dirt/gravel road that provides vehicular access to the American Falls Reservoir and to traditional and customary hunting and fishing grounds and tribal grazing allotments. Beaver routinely block the upstream end of the culvert.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA initiated consultation with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and BPA made a determination of no historic properties affected on June 9, 2024 (BPA CR Project No.: ID 2024 032). BPA did not receive a response to the determination correspondence from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes within the 30-day consultation period.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Heavy equipment such as an excavator and dump truck would be utilized during construction activities. Replacement culvert would be contained entirely within the existing road prism and would be located within the footprint of the existing structure. There would

be minor, temporary impacts to soil from increased erosion potential during construction activities. Sediment control best management practices would be put in place prior to project implementation to minimize potential for in-stream turbidity or excessive runoff during construction. Work areas would be isolated by rerouting water around the work area to minimize erosion and turbidity. Overall, short- to long-term sediment delivery would be reduced because the potential for culvert blockage/failure and the associated sedimentation would be reduced by replacing the culverts.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ute ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*) is a native orchid that is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Ute ladies'-tresses are restricted to sporadically located microhabitat along riparian edges, gravel bars, old oxbows, high flow channels, and moist to wet meadows along perennial streams. It typically occurs in stable wetland and seep areas associated with old landscape features within historical floodplains of major rivers. It is also found in wetland and seep areas near freshwater lakes and springs. No Ute ladies'-tresses orchids have been observed within the project area and suitable habitat is not present. Non-ESA-listed vegetation would be crushed or destroyed by equipment operations necessary for replacement of the culvert. These areas would be revegetated with native seed mixes and native plant material

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: ESA-listed Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), yellow-billed cuckoo (Coccyzus americanus) and their respective designated critical habitats and Threatened North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*), may be present within Bannock County, but suitable habitat is not located within or near the Project site, and the Project would thus have no effect on these species. No other ESA-listed, state-listed, or other sensitive wildlife species are present within the Project area. Non-ESA-listed wildlife species would be temporarily displaced due to elevated noise or human presence during construction activities. Wildlife would return upon project completion and would have alternate habitat available during the temporary construction period..

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ESA-listed anadromous fish species occupy the project area, which is currently blocked to the passage of anadromous fish species due to downstream dams. The Yellowstone cutthroat trout is classified as an imperiled subspecies by the State of Idaho, a sensitive species by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and a rangewide/globally imperiled species by the Bureau of Land Management. No other ESA-listed fish or special-status species are present in project area. Short-term negative effects, such as displacement due to dewatering and construction activities, to fish are expected to have long-term benefits post-project implementation. All work would occur within the local in-water work window. Waterbodies and floodplains would not be affected by the actions.

Notes:

- Adhere to Special Conditions under the US Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permit No. 27 (Aquatic Habitat, Restoration, Establishment, and Enhancement Activities) and No. 03 (Maintenance) authorizations for the project.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would not change the hydrology within the project area. No fill, excavation, or destruction of wetlands would occur.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed actions would not result in an increase in groundwater use and would not change the hydrological regime and, therefore, would not affect groundwater and aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Access on existing road networks and all activities are compatible with local land use. Land use would not change. The project is not located in a specially-designated area or Wild and Scenic River. The proposed work would result in temporary disruption due to sharing the local road with vehicles transporting workers and equipment to and from the project area, and road closures from one to three days during construction, but this would be limited to the extent possible and alternate roads would be available for users. There are other recreational opportunities in the area to serve as alternatives during the temporary impacts. No long-term change in land use or recreation would occur. No specially designated areas are present.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Temporary impacts would occur during culvert replacement. Short-term changes to the landscape would occur during construction, such as work zone conditions, vehicles, and equipment. In the long term, the new culvert would look slightly different than the previous culvert, but it would be visually consistent and not represent a major change to the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A temporary increase in emissions and dust from vehicles accessing the project site would be very minor and short-term during construction. A negligible amount of temporary dust and vehicle emissions could be generated during project activities. Emissions and dust levels would return to normal conditions immediately once the project is completed.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed work 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. Personnel are trained in proper equipment management techniques, and all applicable safety regulations would be followed. There would be no soil contamination or hazardous conditions and no CERCLA sites within the project area.

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: The project actions are proposed by the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to be implemented in the Fort Hall Bottoms of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation.

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

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