

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Cottonwood Field Office
1 Butte Drive, Cottonwood, Idaho 83522

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

Partridge Creek Bridge Repair Project
DOI-BLM-ID-C020-2016-0005-EA

Finding

Based upon review of the environmental assessment (EA), I have determined that the Partridge Creek Bridge Repair Project will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required. As described and analyzed in the EA, no environmental effects meet the definition of significance as defined by regulations to implement NEPA found at 40 CFR 1508.27. This finding is based on my consideration of both the context and intensity of the project, as described below.

Context. This means that the significance of an action was analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the local rather than in the world as a whole. Both short-and-long-term effects are relevant.

Intensity. This requirement refers to the severity of impact. The following factors are considered in evaluating intensity.

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The purpose of this project is to provide a safe bridge crossing of Partridge Creek for motorized vehicle use and access to the Partridge Creek area. The bridge provides the only motorized access to the Partridge Creek drainage and is currently used primarily by private land owners, BLM, and Idaho Department of Lands. Scouring (3-4 feet) has occurred under one of the bridge abutments making it unsafe for vehicles and is at risk for additional scouring which would further jeopardize bridge integrity. Conducting bridge repair work to stabilize the scoured undercut abutment and placement of rock to stabilize an eroding streambank immediately upstream from the bridge would be beneficial in providing safe motorized vehicle access and curtailing abutment scouring and streambank erosion (EA Section 7.7). Project design features would minimize adverse impacts and short term discountable erosion, sediment, and turbidity would occur during construction and long term benefits from reduced erosion would occur (EA Section 7.5). Negligible potential for disturbance to riparian dependent wildlife (EA Section 7.5) and negligible impacts to Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed fish and aquatic habitats is expected to occur from project implementation (EA Section 7.4).

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) engineers while conducting routine scheduled bridge inspections identified maintenance and repair needs for the Partridge Creek Bridge. Scouring (3-4 feet) has occurred under one of the bridge abutments making it unsafe for vehicles and is at risk for additional scouring which would further jeopardize bridge integrity. An emergency

closure and restriction order was issued by the Cottonwood Field Office January 27, 2016. Partridge Creek Bridge #1 is now closed to all motorized traffic because of safety concerns. Not implementing required maintenance and repair on the Partridge Creek Bridge will preclude access to BLM managed public lands, IDL managed lands, a private residence and private agricultural lands. Thus impacting access to a residence used seasonally located on the east side of Partridge Creek, a recreational cabin, hay fields, ranching/farming activities, recreational, timber harvest activities, and fire suppression activity on private and public lands. The 2015 Tepee Springs Fire burned approximately 82% of the drainage with the majority rated as moderate to high severity. Consequently, the drainage is at increased risk for higher peak flows and additional risks from channel scouring and flood damage to the bridge. Implementation of the proposed bridge repair project will provide for safe motorized vehicle access to the Partridge Creek drainage (EA Section 7.7).

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There are no historic sites, park lands, prime farmlands, or ecologically critical areas within the affected area (EA Section 5.3). There would be short term discountable or no effects to the outstanding remarkable values (ORVs) identified for the Salmon River that have been determined as suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation (EA Section 7.9). Project related impacts would have no impact to short term discountable effects to the important resource values that occur in the Upper Salmon River Area of Critical Environmental Concern (EA Section 7.9). Long term benefits would occur to Partridge Creek from actions that stabilize an eroding streambank and prevent additional scouring of the bridge abutment (EA Section 7.9). Adverse effects to wetlands or riparian areas within the affected area would be avoided or minimized with implementation of proposed project design features (EA Section 7.5 and 7.6).

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects of the project are limited to the Partridge Creek project area, and private land owners, Idaho Department of Lands, and BLM. Project scoping has identified Idaho County Commissioner's, private land owner, and Idaho Department of Lands support for repairing the bridge. The effects of this project do not represent a controversial impact upon the quality of the human environment, provided the environmental design and monitoring measures outlined in the EA (Section 6.1) are implemented.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The BLM has a long history of implementing stream crossing activities (i.e., bridge and culvert repair, maintenance, and replacement) that occur in north-central Idaho. The direct and indirect effects as disclosed in the EA are not highly uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. The technical analyses conducted to determined impacts to the affected resources are supportable with use of accepted techniques, reliable data and professional judgment.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The proposed action would not establish a precedent. As described in Section 4.0, the proposed actions conform to direction from the BLM Cottonwood RMP to maintain existing access easements and to implement road management Best Management Practices for road planning, design, and maintenance. The proposed bridge repair project is designed to include applicable design measures to mitigate (avoid or reduce) negative impacts on affected resource values, and includes monitoring and evaluation.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

Other past, present and foreseeable actions are described and cumulative effects on affected resources are analyzed in Section 7 of the EA. The project includes project design measures to minimize potential impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat and conserve special status fish and wildlife species. Short term negligible or discountable impacts to water quality, aquatic habitats, and special status fish and wildlife are expected to occur from project implementation. Project implementation would result in beneficial effects from the stabilization of an eroding streambank and curtailing additional abutment scouring. Implementation of the proposed bridge repair project would not result in cumulatively significant impacts.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

A review by the cultural resource staff and consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office indicates there are no known cultural resources listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat that has been determined under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended.

Viable populations of species would be maintained as required by the ESA and BLM Special Status Species policy (BLM MS 6840). For ESA-listed fish species, the EA includes an analysis for ESA-listed fish (Section 7.4), and incorporates information from a biological assessment (BA) that BLM submitted pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for bull trout and designated critical habitat, and the National Marine Fisheries Service for sockeye salmon, fall Chinook salmon, spring/summer Chinook salmon and steelhead trout and their designated critical habitat. In addition, the BA for spring/summer Chinook salmon included an analysis for essential fish habitat pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which is defined as “those waters and substrate necessary for fish for spawning, breeding, feeding, or growth to maturity.” The BA was cooperatively prepared by the BLM, NMFS, and USFWS biologists and included all agreed upon project design measures and effects analysis information.

The proposed bridge repair project was concluded to have a determination of *may affect - likely to adversely affect* for spring/summer Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, designated critical habitat, and essential fish habitat. A *may affect – not likely to adversely affect* determination was concluded for bull trout and designated critical habitat. A *no effect* determination was concluded for sockeye salmon and fall Chinook salmon. Project design and monitoring measures identified in the environmental analysis, biological assessment and terms and conditions identified in the NMFS Biological Opinion have been incorporated into all treatment activities to avoid or

minimize potential for adverse effects occurring from incidental take, erosion/sediment, and disturbance to riparian vegetation.

A “no effect” determination is concluded for all ESA-listed wildlife species, as analyzed in Section 7.5 of the EA. For several BLM-sensitive species, the analysis concludes that the project “may impact individuals or habitat but is not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing or reduce viability for the population or species.”

Special status plants are analyzed in Section 7.3 of the EA. The project area has been surveyed and no ESA listed plant populations have been found, so the project would have no effect on the threatened MacFarlane’s four- o’clock and Spalding catchfly or candidate Whitebark pine. Surveys of the project area have not found any BLM sensitive species and no impact to BLM sensitive plants is concluded from project implementation.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

As described in the EA, the BLM has planned the project to incorporate applicable Federal, State and local requirements and best management practices to ensure management activities do not violate any law, and that the project meets objectives to maintain riparian, soil, water, aquatic resources (Sections 7.2, 7.5 and 7.6). In addition to protection imposed under the ESA as discussed for factor 9, this includes meeting requirements of the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Idaho State Water Quality Standards, and Idaho Stream Channel Protection Act. The project area occurs in the Partridge Creek watershed which flows into the Salmon River. In the Idaho Water Quality Standards, Partridge Creek is included in water body identification number and assessment unit IDI7060209SL021_03 and is protected for cold water aquatic life and contact recreation presumed beneficial uses. Project implementation will have no adverse effects on beneficial uses or adversely impact water quality conditions and beneficial uses in Partridge Creek or the Salmon River. An in-depth discussion of effects on aquatic resources is included in the EA Section 7.5 (Water Resources), and as discussed for factor 9, the analysis in EA Section 7.6 (Fisheries, Aquatic Habitats, and Special Status Species).

Signature

/s/

2/19/16

Robbin B. Boyce
Acting Field Manager

Date