

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Pacific Region
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon, 97232**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for Russell Bar Nez Perce Tribe Fall Chinook Salmon Acclimation Facility
NEPA Unique Identifier: DOI-BLM-ID-C020-2025-0005-EA**

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Lower Snake River Compensation Plan (LSRCP) is evaluating a proposed project for the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT), in conjunction with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), to construct and operate a fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility at Russell Bar. The NPT requested that the Pittsburg Landing acclimation facility be moved to the Salmon River because natural production of fall Chinook salmon appears adequate along Snake River reaches in the Pittsburg Landing – Hells Canyon area. The Russell Bar project area is located adjacent to the Salmon River (river mile 62.2), approximately six air-miles south of the community of White Bird, Idaho (Idaho County).

The USFWS-LSRCP administers the Fall Chinook Acclimation Program, which is operated by the NPT. The lead federal agency, the BLM, in cooperation with the cooperating agency, USFWS-LSRCP, has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to disclose and analyze the environmental consequences of funding and granting a right-of-way (ROW) for the construction and operation of the fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility as proposed by the NPT.

USFWS, through the LSRCP, will decide whether to provide funding to the NPT for this proposed project. Prior to making a funding decision, USFWS is required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to assess the potential environmental effects related to USFWS's funding of the project. The purpose of this document is to enable USFWS to determine whether these potential impacts are not significant, allowing the agency to rely on the EA and issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). If, however, USFWS determines that any of these potential impacts are significant, USFWS will proceed with preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed project.

BLM and USFWS-LSRCP completed an EA on the proposed funding, construction and operation of an acclimation facility by the NPT at Russell Bar. This FONSI is directly related to EA, Alternative B, Proposed Action and project design measures (Selected Alternative) which are described below. A No Action Alternative, Alternative A, was also evaluated as part of the EA. No other alternative locations were evaluated in the EA.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The proposed project was posted on BLM ePlanning on April 29, 2025, with comments due by June 4, 2025. Notification of the proposed project and ePlanning posting of proposed action and public

comment period were sent to interested publics and groups, BLM Salmon River outfitters, and representatives of Idaho Transportation Department, Idaho Conservation League, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, U.S Army Corps of Engineers, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Bonneville Power Administration, and Idaho County Commissioners. Primary consultation and coordination were conducted with NPT, USFWS-LSRCP, USFWS, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), Idaho Transportation Department (IDL), and Idaho Power. Most issues addressed in the EA were identified from consultation and coordination with the above agencies and including internal scoping with NPT, USFWS-LSNRCP, and BLM.

A total of five comment submissions were received from public scoping and a summary of the main issues identified are listed below.

- The proposed project is adjacent to the Salmon River (Slate Creek to Rice Creek) assessment unit (AU) and designated beneficial uses include cold water aquatic life, contact recreation, and domestic water supply.

Response: Project construction and operation would have design measures to avoid or minimize potential adverse impacts and not impair identified designated beneficial uses that include cold water aquatic life, contact recreation, and domestic water supply.

- This AU (Salmon River – Slate Creek to Rice Creek) is listed in Category 5 as impaired by mercury and temperature in Idaho’s 2022 Integrated Report. Category 5 means the water body does not meet applicable water quality standards for one or more beneficial uses due to one or more pollutants and is on the Environmental Protection Agency’s 303(d)impaired and threatened waters list.

Response: Project design measures and evaluation of the proposed project in the EA addressed these pollutants to ensure that operation and objectives of the fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility is not at risk from these pollutants and do not contribute adverse effects to these pollutants.

- Ensure that all state, federal, and local permits have been obtained, regulations met, and reviews are completed for the construction and operation of the proposed fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility.

Response: The proposed action and project design measures identified that state, federal, and local permits must be obtained prior to construction and operation of the proposed fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility.

- Support actions for recovery of salmon species.

Response: The proposed action supports recovery of ESA-listed fall Chinook salmon and the acclimation and release of subyearling fall Chinook salmon is beneficial to the health of fish and survival. Project design measures would result in negligible negative impacts to Salmon River ESA-listed fish and designated critical habitats.

ALTERNATIVE B, PROPOSED ACTION

Construction and operation of the acclimation facility would include: (1) road improvements for providing access to the site; (2) providing electrical power and backup power (generator) for the facility; (3) sixteen-acclimation tanks; (4) water supply (Salmon River) for the facility; (5) staff quarters for operating the facility; and (6) installation of vault toilet at the day use – kiosk area; and annual acclimation and release of approximately 650,000 subyearling fall Chinook salmon (see Appendix A, Maps 3 and 4).

Construction activity for the Russell Bar Fall Chinook Salmon Acclimation Facility may potentially start in 2026, pending acquisition of all required BLM, federal, state, and county required permits and authorizations. Construction activity is dependent on funding, logistics, and available work force and would occur in phases during 2026 and/or 2027. Earliest potential release for fall Chinook salmon subyearlings would be during the spring of 2027.

Initial work would be for improvement of access roads and pads for placement of tanks, trailers, and equipment. Work for installation of power supply and power poles to the facility would also occur simultaneously. Potential work (i.e., placement of rip rap) below Salmon River mean high water levels would occur during low water periods during winter, early spring, summer, and fall periods. It is expected that riprap placement below the river mean high water level would occur in the "dry", or minimal work in river (<5-10%). Except for riprap placement, construction activity would occur above mean high water level. During operation the water intake pipes and water/fish discharge pipe(s) (from fish tanks) would occur below mean high and in the Salmon River. The water intake pipes and water/fish discharge pipe would be moved periodically and would be dependent on river flows.

Construction would start in 2026 or 2027. After construction is completed, the first group of 650,000 subyearling fall Chinook salmon would be acclimated starting in the spring of 2027 and released into the Salmon River (late May/early June). Subject to available funding, the operation of the acclimation facility would be long term (e.g., 20+ years) and authorized with a BLM rights-of-way. Specifics of the project are summarized below.

Facility Set up/Construction:

- Before equipment comes to the site it must be inspected by a qualified inspector for weeds.
- All 3-inch minus and ¾-inch minus gravel and road rock must be weed free and inspected for weeds prior to use on the site.
- Access road from the BLM gate area and day use area to the location of the staging area and acclimation tanks: (1) On the primary access road (700± feet) going west and southwest from the day use area add 3-inch minus base gravel and add topcoat of ¾-inch minus gravel over geotextile; and (2) On the secondary access road (745± feet) going south from the day use area and paralleling the water pipeline to the fish tanks and staging area add 3-inch minus base gravel and add a topcoat of ¾-inch minus gravel over geotextile. These roads are located above mean high water level and provide access for

staff, equipment, materials, staff camp trailer, fish tanks, and fish trucks.

- The road (1,480± feet) from Rodeo Drive to the existing buck and pole fence day parking area will require a layer of 3-inch base gravel, topcoat of ¾-inch gravel, over geotextile.
- A short segment of road (approximately 150-feet in length) occurring under the bridge is narrow and would require widening of the road to facilitate access for acclimation facility materials, equipment, and fish tank truck. Such widening may require placement of riprap on the downslope side and/or placement of a gabion on the upslope side of road. Potential riprap placement may result in approximately 125 cubic yards below mean high water level. Riprap placement below mean high flow level would occur during lower water periods during the winter, early spring, summer or fall and it is expected that all or most would be placed in the “dry” or very small amount in water (up to 15%). The majority of riprap would be placed on top of existing riprap material and as needed some movement of existing rock or excavation to key riprap into bank would occur and removal of few small trees or shrubs. Placement of 3-inch minus rock/gravel (or other suitable size) material may be required on top of riprap to provide suitable road base and graveling with ¾-inch material on road surface (similar to existing access road).
- Installation and construction of a vault toilet located at the Russell Bar kiosk and day use parking area. The vault toilet would be available for use by the public and NPT staff. In addition, the NPT would also be responsible for obtaining a porta-toilet located near acclimation tanks and camp trailer for use by staff. The BLM would be responsible for any future maintenance and pumping of the vault toilet.
- Install gate in buck and pole fence to provide access for vehicles and trucks to access the facility area to install tanks, bring in equipment and materials, camp trailer access, gravel, fish trucks, and provide staff access to the site. Access through the gate would be for NPT staff and administrative purposes. This gate would be locked when not in use and would not be available for public access.
- Prior to placing fish tanks at the site, the soil surface would have 3-inch base gravel and ¾-inch gravel placed on top of soil surface and the staging area and camp trailer site would also have the same gravel placement. Fish tank area and staging area totals 0.67 ± acre in size. Base timbers would be placed on top of surface gravels and would provide support for tanks.
- The sixteen acclimation tanks are currently located at Pittsburg Landing and would be hauled by truck to the Russell Bar acclimation site for installation along with any other facility equipment and materials.
- Power supply: upgrade existing three phase power, conducted by Idaho County Light and Power, to include single phase overhead power to be delivered to approximately 650 feet downriver to camp trailer and fish tanks. This power supply would also be used for water pumps, and a portable generator would be placed near electrical boxes for backup power supply in the event of overhead power failure. The portable generator would have a double walled belly tank and fuel storage in the tank would be

less than 250 gallons. The generator would be located on level ground. The portable generator would be parked in a spill containment berm that would provide for a minimum 125 percent of tank volume.

- At the day use parking area two interpretive signs for the fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility would be installed to highlight the value of the facility, importance of salmon to the NPT, and actions to support recovery for ESA-listed salmon. Other opportunities for interpretive value that can be addressed include tribal cultural importance of the Salmon River and Russell Bar area.
- Remove fence paralleling the Salmon River and the downriver borderline fence separating BLM lands and private lands would not be disturbed. The end of the fence near the parking area will need modification to prevent vehicle traffic from going around it. If livestock drift into the area then barbed wire fence could be reinstalled.
- Once tanks are installed, and depending on the need, plant drought tolerant or site adapted shrubs, trees, grasses, and forbs between tanks and edge of high bank and upper bank for visual resource screening. Preference for native species and other desirable species which may be suitable for the site. As needed, watering would be conducted during the first several years after planting. This vegetation would provide partial visual cover in the long term for Highway 95 travelers, river boaters, and other publics utilizing the general area.
- Acclimation tanks and associated water supply: The facility would have a 40 - horsepower pump with a 10-inch supply pipe. This provides approximately 2,500 gallons per minute (gpm) so that each tank receives about 150 gpm of water. This equates to about 5.5 cubic feet per second (cfs) of water. Operation of the acclimation facility occurs from mid-April to early June (fish in tanks), essentially during the spring run-off period. Fish would first be delivered to the facility approximately mid-April. Fish delivery may occur in one truck or two trucks. The subyearling fall Chinook salmon would be acclimatized in the fish tanks with Salmon River water for approximately three weeks prior to release. Pumping would occur 24-hours a day and seven days a week during acclimation when fish are in the tanks.

Water would be pumped from the Salmon River at the location immediately downriver from the Highway 95 bridge which is located upriver of the fish tanks. Water would be pumped from a river alcove area and up to 4 screened pipes would be used for water withdrawal from the river. Water would be pumped from the river down to the tanks and then returned through pipes back to the river. One water outflow discharge pipe serving 16 fish tanks would return water to the river, or two outflow discharge pipes serving 8 fish tanks each would return water to the river. It is a non-consumptive use of water. These same water outflow discharge pipes would also be utilized for fish return to the river with draining of fish tank after acclimation period reached. The water intake pipes and water/fish outflow pipe(s) distance from pump extending into the river would be dependent on river flows and velocity.

- Water intake screens (ESA compliant) would be placed in the river and two 10-

inch pumps located near the three-phase power pole (existing power pole), in the same location as a previous pumping station operated by the BLM.

- The screened water intake pipes would be power backwashed, as needed, to prevent debris and sediment from plugging the screen and prevent excessive sediment delivery to the fish tanks.
- Sixteen 20-foot diameter acclimation tanks would be located on Russell Bar terrace located above Salmon River mean high water level located near the southwest corner of BLM lands. The tanks would sit in a straight line on a gravel bed supported by 6-inch x 6-inch timbers 20-feet in length. The tanks would be located above mean high water level and any treated tank base timbers would not be in contact with any flowing water.
- Two eight-feet x eight-feet x twelve-feet water distribution boxes would be located directly upstream of the acclimation tanks for gravity flow water delivery to circular tanks.
- Pumped water would be delivered to the acclimation tanks via distribution boxes via eight-inch pipeline running above ground occurring on the high bank edge of the landform.
- Discharge piping (from tanks to river) would lay above ground, parallel to tanks and a 45-degree angle would outfall water (and fish after acclimation period) into the river through one or two outflow discharge pipes.
- The acclimation tanks outflow would have a manifold design (like Big Canyon acclimation facility) to reduce outflow velocity and reduce potential for adverse riverbank erosion. The manifold design incorporates outflow piping paralleling the tanks and then discharges through one or two outflow pipes extending to the river. No discharge of water over the riverbanks would occur with the outflow pipe(s) extending to the river.
- An elevated gravel ramp would be constructed parallel to tanks for offloading fish from transport vehicles. The ramp would be approximately 3-feet high and 80-feet in length.
- Staff quarters for operating the facility: Living quarters (camp trailer) would be parked near the two water distribution boxes will be parked. Being near the rearing fish tanks is a necessity to respond to low water alarms and daily activities associated with fish culture. Water storage tanks (100-250 gallons) would be located on site to provide domestic water for staff. Porta-toilets would be located on site and would not be available for public use and would only be used by NPT staff. The single-phase overhead power is needed at the living quarters for the water alarm system and communication system.

- Facility Set Up/Construction Timing: Pending approval of funding agency (USFWS, LSRCP), permitting, and environmental review process, as well as co-manager support, the initial construction process could start in the summer of 2026. After construction is completed, the first group of 650,000 subyearling fall Chinook could be acclimated starting in the spring of 2027.
- Between the bridge and the buck and pole fence some recreation users transport their boats to the river. Ensure that area remains open for river access.

Facility Operations:

- Regular activities and operations would start at the facility site in March with the setting up and testing of pumps, alarms, and backup systems. The facility would be staffed 24/7 from March until the final release of fish in late May/early June. The disassembly, storage, and winterization of the facility would occur at about the end of June each year. Distribution boxes, pumps, etc. would be stored for the remainder of the year. It is proposed to leave the tanks and associated piping in place year-round. However, the pipe used to cycle the water back to the river and ultimately used to release the fish from the tanks to the river is temporary in nature and will be removed in the off season.
- Staff would consist of one person on site 24-hours a day for rotating eight-day shifts (Wednesday to Wednesday).
- Fish health of hatchery subyearling fall Chinook salmon is administered and monitored by a veterinarian fish pathologist. Fish health protocols are described in the Hatchery Genetic Management Plan (HGMP) and ESA consultation. Prior to transfer from the rearing hatchery (Lyons Ferry Hatchery) to the acclimation facility, fish receive what's termed a pre-release sample. A sample of juvenile fish is inspected by a fish health professional for the presence of any diseases or parasites. The risk of any fish health pathogens being detected is very low as the water used for rearing fall Chinook juveniles is disease free well/ground water. Water quality testing is also conducted at hatcheries rearing fall Chinook juveniles. This fish health information is provided as part of a fish transport permit that is done between Washington and Idaho state to establish the pathogen free status of fish prior to moving to the acclimation facility.
- During acclimation, staff perform daily scheduled fish culture duties that include checking and recording dissolved oxygen levels and water temperature in the rearing units three times each day, feeding the rearing units three times each day, and picking fish mortality twice each day. All trash and fish mortality will be disposed of. Staff also observe fish behavior for abnormalities and assist in fish health checks and the fish-marking program.

- Other staff that may be at the site (in addition to operators) associated with fish acclimation are fish health professionals checking on well-being of fish and taking pre-release samples; fish monitoring and evaluation biologists checking on size of fish and quality assurance on marks and tags.
- Equipment located at the site: sixteen twenty-foot diameter aluminum circular tanks; two twelve-foot high aluminum distribution boxes; four river intake screens; ring lock flexible hose: 4-inch = 1,260-feet, six-inch = 1,780 ft, eight-inch = 3,110-feet; camlock flexible hose: six-inch = 2,080-feet; portable generator with double walled belly tank for fuel (less than 250 gallons); containment berm sized to contain 125% of fuel stored (e.g., portable generator); one – 20-foot storage container; one 30-foot camp trailer/living quarters; two alarm systems; sixteen emergency oxygen systems - hoses, micro diffusers and regulators (one per tank); a trailer mounted 4,000 watt generator light plant; one utility storage trailer; sixteen camouflage nets; miscellaneous bolts, seals, camlock fittings, etc.

Design Features

1. All construction activity would be in accord with state and federal permits and authorizations (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Idaho Department of Water Resources, and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality). Additional state and federal permitting may be required for this project including the Idaho Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Program (IPDES), storm water Construction General Permit (CGP), and Concentrated Animal Production (CAAP).
2. All authorized actions would be in accord with Federal, State, and County laws, and authorized uses and restrictions.
3. Water withdrawals from Salmon River would be properly screened and screen openings would not exceed 3/32-inch and approach velocity would not exceed 0.33 feet per second. NOAA fish screen criteria (NMFS 2022) would be utilized for all water pumping activities from Salmon River.
4. Water rights would be obtained from Idaho Department of Water Resources for Salmon River water withdrawals.
5. All piping below the ordinary high-water mark will be temporary and removed during the off-season.
6. All fuel storage (i.e., portable generator) would have containment basin for a minimum of 125% of fuel volume being stored. Primary fuel storage on site is associated with the portable generator and has a double walled belly tank (less than 250 gallons capacity) and would be in a containment basin. All fuel storage sites would occur in areas that are level and would minimize or avoid potential for overland flow reaching water bodies. All fueling or maintenance sites would occur in areas that would minimize or avoid potential for any spill reaching water bodies. Fuel storage would occur in an area 75 – 100 feet from mean high water level. An emergency spill kit would be located on site during construction and project operation

periods, at fuel storage site, and at fueling sites. All hazardous materials spills (e.g., fuel, oils, hydraulic fluid, etc.) would be reported immediately to BLM.

7. All rock and gravel used for road surfacing must be free of noxious weed seeds. Borrow pits and stockpiles would not be used if it is determined they are infested with undesirable invasive plants. All equipment will be inspected for weeds prior to use on site.
8. Any trees greater than eight-inch diameter at breast height (DBH) and within the clearing limits for the road and acclimation facility would be felled, limbed, cut to appropriate lengths and decked to be hauled soon after felling. Any trees or vegetation less than eight-inch DBH and within the clearing limits for the road and acclimation facility would be cut and slashed.
9. All slashed vegetation material generated can be piled, chipped, or removed from site. Piles can be created by hand or machine and must not be placed on the road or the acclimation facility site and must be placed outside the dripline of remaining trees. Slash piles shall be compact and relatively free of dirt and decomposed duff. Piles should be 6 to 10 feet high and 6 to 10 feet in diameter and should not be made of just large diameter material. Layered stacking of material is preferred with fine fuels mixed with heavier fuels within the pile to aid in combustion. All material extending more than 6 feet beyond the outside perimeter of a pile shall be broken or trimmed off and returned to the pile. If slash is treated with a chipper, the chips can be dispersed on site.
10. If logistically feasible recommend that cutting of trees would be avoided from April 1 – July 15 to avoid impacts to nesting birds. May not be feasible if spring construction is initiated for access and construction.
11. Trees would be cut to ground surface level. A stump grinder could be used to grind the stump to surface level. This will avoid potential impacts from excavating stumps out of the ground. As needed, soil/gravel can be placed over cut stumps to provide good smooth base for acclimation facility or access road.
12. After initial construction activity, the project area would be evaluated to determine needed site-specific areas that may require re-vegetation/stabilization (e.g., seeding, straw wattles, straw bales, mulching). As needed, all disturbed soil and vegetation areas would be seeded and mulched as needed to minimize any potential for adverse erosion and sediment and to provide establishment of desired vegetation and ground cover. All straw mulch would be certified weed free. The following mix is recommended (Table 2):

Table 2. Rehabilitation Seed Mixture

Species	Percentage	Pounds per Acre
Streambank Wheatgrass	50%	8 lbs.
Sand dropseed	19%	3 lbs.
Sheep Fescue	19%	3 lbs.
Annual Ryegrass	12%	2 lbs.
TOTAL	100%	16 lbs.

Once tanks are installed, and depending on the need, plant drought tolerant or site adapted shrubs, trees, grasses, and forbs between tanks and edge of high bank and upper bank for visual resource screening.

13. Any project related noxious weed control would be in accord with the BLM multi-year noxious weed control program (USDI-BLM 2011) and corresponding Section 7 (ESA) consultation and Biological Opinions or adhere to any updates or new Environmental Analysis and Section 7 (ESA) consultations for weed control.
14. In areas of current and future surface disturbance, archeological site monitors will monitor such activities. Currently identified areas are power pole installation, vault toilet installation, and gate post placement, or other sites recommended by the archeologist.
15. To mitigate for the effects to cultural resources and to achieve a no adverse effect finding, an interpretive panel will be installed describing the cultural importance of this area.
16. The acclimation facility occurs in a 50- to 100-year floodplain. River peak flow/high flow elevation would be monitored and evaluated when river flows approach 90,000 cfs (White Bird Gage). Depending on risk from extreme high flow events, mobile facility items (e.g., camp trailer, generator, fuel tank, equipment, etc.) would be moved to higher elevation areas on adjacent BLM lands adjacent out of the floodplain for temporary storage. The temporary storage areas would be approved by BLM and would involve no construction activity or subsurface disturbance. USFWS and the NPT will develop an emergency evacuation plan to remove mobile equipment, fuel, trailer, pump, generator, etc. in case of potential flooding to reduce damage to the facilities.
17. A camp trailer will be placed on-site near the tanks so pumps and water flow can be monitored. A portable restroom (porta-pottie) will be situated near the camp trailer. Greywater from the camp trailer will be captured and properly disposed of. It cannot drain on the ground. Gravel, 3-inch minus topped with ¾-inch minus gravel will be placed on the ground before the camp trailer and porta-pottie are installed.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on our review of the attached EA and supporting documents, we have determined that the selected Alternative B – Proposed Action would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required. This finding is based on the degree of the effects described in the following EA sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8.

Potentially Affected Environment

Through internal and external scoping, the BLM and USFWS-LSRCP identified potentially affected environment and issues to be analyzed in the EA. Affected environment and issues considered for detailed analysis in the EA are addressed in sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8, and summarized below. Refer to EA for more specific details and analysis.

1. Soils and Water Quality (EA section 3.2) – The primary project related activities affecting soil resources and water quality would include soil and vegetation disturbance activities from the construction and operation of the fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility, activities occurring below mean high water level, and water withdrawal. New soil and vegetation disturbance activities would occur on the level river terrace area and occur within 300-feet of the Salmon River. Such activities include new road construction, staging area pads for tanks, staff trailer, and equipment. Total area disturbed would be 1.2 acres for new access roads and staging area for facility.
2. Riparian and Upland Vegetation (EA section 3.3) – No ESA-listed or other BLM special status plants occur within the project area, and no impacts would occur to these species. Construction of the acclimation facility and access roads would result in new soil and vegetation disturbance of 1.2 acres of upland vegetation within the Russell Bar ponderosa pine seed orchard that occur within 300-feet of the Salmon River and minimal potential disturbance to riparian habitats (0.05 acre).
3. Fisheries, Special Status Species, and Aquatic Habitats (EA section 3.4)

The Salmon River provides designated critical habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed sockeye salmon, spring/summer Chinook salmon, fall Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, and bull trout. The river also provides aquatic habitat for Idaho BLM designated sensitive fish species and includes westslope cutthroat trout, redband trout, and Pacific lamprey. All new soil and vegetation disturbance would occur within 300-feet of the Salmon River and occur on a level river terrace area and small disturbance would occur to riparian areas and areas below mean high river level.
4. Wildlife, Special Status Species, and Habitats (EA Section 3.5) – The project area and adjacent lands provide seasonal and yearlong habitat for a variety of wildlife species and BLM designated sensitive species. Idaho BLM designated sensitive wildlife species which may potentially be impacted by construction and operation of the acclimation facility include the bald eagle, willow flycatcher, western toad, and Columbia River tiger beetle. All new soil and vegetation disturbance occur within 300-feet of the Salmon River. Construction and operation of the acclimation facility would alter approximately 1.2 acres of upland habitats and a small area of riparian habitats (less than 0.05 acre).

Alteration of wildlife habitat and disturbance or displacement may occur from wildlife utilizing project area and adjacent habitats.

5. Recreation and Visual Resource Management (VRM) (EA Section 3.6) – The Lower Salmon River adjacent to the Salmon River is very popular for river-based recreation and includes commercial and non-commercial floating and power boating, fishing, swimming, camping, and sightseeing. Highway 95 crosses the Salmon River upstream from the proposed acclimation facility. The Salmon River and canyon have high scenic qualities that are managed in accord with VRM guidance.
6. Cultural and Historical Resources (EA Section 3.7) – The project is located within the previously recorded precontact archaeological site 10IH58. There is a no adverse effect determination for this site achieved through consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office and the NPT. The Congressionally designated Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail route occurs in this area and will not be affected.
7. Special Designation Areas (EA Section 3.8) – The general analysis area for the proposed project includes BLM lands within the Upper Salmon River Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and includes the Salmon River corridor from White Bird Creek to French Creek (BLM 2009). The ACEC area includes all BLM lands that are adjacent to the Salmon River. The objectives for the ACEC are to protect and conserve scenic values, cultural resources, federally listed and BLM sensitive fish, wildlife, and plants (BLM 2009). The 112-mile segment of the Lower Salmon River, Long Tom Bar to the confluence of the Snake River was recommended to Congress for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System (NWSRS). The project area occurs within the 0.25-mile river corridor that was recommended for Recreational designation and includes the 59-mile Salmon River segment from Long Tom Bar to Hammer Creek.

Degree of Effects

The following have been considered in my evaluation of the selected alternative:

i. Short- and long-term effects

Short term and long-term effects are not considered significant, and the resource effects of Alternative B (Proposed Action) are presented and assessed in Chapter 3 of the EA (Sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8). Short-term effects primarily associated with initial new soil and vegetation disturbance of approximately 1.2 acres associated with the following which occur within 300-feet of the Salmon River on a level terrace area: new access roads and widening of a short segment of existing road; construction and graveling pads for the fish tanks, trailer, and equipment; pumping station and water withdrawal for facility; providing power for the facility; and installation of vault toilet at day use parking area. Following road improvements and installation of facility pads the transport of equipment from Pittsburg Landing would occur along with the construction of the acclimation facility. The initial construction duration may occur over 1-2 years (starting in 2026). Short term effects from initial construction activity would have small, localized impacts from soil and vegetation disturbance and project design measures would minimize or avoid adverse impacts in the short term and long term.

Long-term effects would occur with periodic maintenance and operation of the acclimation facility by the NPT and the annual acclimation of approximately 650,000 subyearling fall Chinook salmon and release of these fish into the Salmon River.

ii. Beneficial and adverse effects

Effects of Alternative B (Proposed Action) are presented and assessed in Chapter 3 of the EA (Sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8). None of the environmental effects discussed in the EA, either beneficial or adverse, are considered significant.

1. Soils and Water Quality (EA section 3.2) Total area disturbed would be 1.2 acres for new access roads and staging area for facility and occur within 300-feet of the Samon River (Riparian Conservation Area) and occur on a level river terrace area. Project design measures include graveling roads and staging areas and erosion control measures would avoid or minimize any adverse erosion or sediment delivery to Salmon River.

Widening of the road under the bridge may be expected to require placement of riprap material below mean high water level (e.g., 125 cubic yards). This area already has existing riprap material along this segment and placement of additional riprap material would not result in adverse scouring or velocity. Majority of riprap would be placed on top of existing riprap material and as needed removal of few small trees or shrubs and some movement of existing rock or excavation to key riprap into bank would occur. Road widening and riprap placement would have discountable impacts to river channel encroachment, river channel morphology, and discountable impacts to riparian vegetation because of existing impacts from existing riprap placement and small amount of area impacted and disturbed.

Salmon River water withdrawal for the acclimation facility would be 5.5 cfs and would comprise approximately of .05 percent (April) to 0.01 percent (June) of the mean average monthly flows (April through June). This is a non-consumptive use of the flows and would be returned to the river approximately 1,000 feet downriver from the water pumping site after flowing through the acclimation tanks. The water withdrawal would not result in any expected adverse Salmon River water quality, hydrologic, or river channel impacts.

Fuel storage would occur in a containment basin that would have a minimum capacity of 125% percent of fuel volume being stored. The portable generator on wheels would have a double walled belly fuel tank and capacity would be less than 250 gallons and would be parked in the containment basin. An emergency spill kit would be located on site during construction and project operation periods, at fuel storage site, and at fueling sites. All hazardous materials spills (e.g., fuel, oils, hydraulic fluid, etc.) would be reported immediately to BLM. Project design measures that would be implemented would minimize or avoid potential for adverse hazardous spill and impacts to Salmon River water quality.

Mercury was listed in DEQ's 2002 Integrated Report and resampled in 2016 by Idaho Department of Environmental quality. The report stated Smallmouth Bass tissue exceeded the EPA methylmercury criterion of 0.3 mg/kg on average. The goal of the sampling effort was to evaluate mercury concentrations regarding human health risks. This issue was assessed in Section 3.3 (see following referenced section for details) and it

was concluded that no adverse impacts to human health or fall Chinook salmon fish health and associated methylmercury risks would occur from construction and operation of the acclimation facility.

The project area occurs within the Salmon River 50- to 100-year flood zone. Overall, the proposed facility is “temporary” in nature. A project design measure identifies the preparation of a flood stage response plan and monitoring of predicted flood stage river flows. When predicted high flood stage may put the facility at risk, such would require the movement of mobile facility items and equipment (e.g., generator, trailer, pump, etc.) to designated higher elevation areas. Items less mobile such as fish tanks and water pipelines and tank plumbing would not be moved which occur on high terrace adjacent to the river. Overbank flows would spread out over the floodplain with reduced velocity.

No permanent constructed housing or other permanent constructed items would occur in the floodplain. Construction and operation of the facility would not significantly alter the function and beneficial values of the floodplain. Overall, project design measures would reduce the risk of flood loss, and minimize the impacts of floods on human safety, health, and welfare. The natural and beneficial values and function of a floodplain would still be provided for with flood stage high flows “spreading out” with lower velocities than main river channel over the Russell Bar terrace area.

2. Riparian and Upland Vegetation (EA section 3.3) Construction of the acclimation facility and access roads would result in new soil and vegetation disturbance of 1.2 acres of upland vegetation within the Russell Bar ponderosa pine seed orchard. It is estimated that 35 ponderosa pine trees would be cut for the project. As needed, areas resulting in soil disturbance would be seeded to prevent adverse erosion and encroachment of undesirable invasive species.

Discountable disturbances of riparian habitats would occur from project construction and operation and would be associated with the road widening area under the bridge, water withdrawal sites, and acclimation tanks water/fish discharge pipes. Minor localized negligible disturbance (less than 0.05 acre) of Salmon River riparian habitats would occur at the site of water withdrawal and where water is returned to Salmon River from the fish tanks.

3. Fisheries, Special Status Species, and Aquatic Habitats (EA section 3.4) The Salmon River provides designated critical habitat for Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed sockeye salmon, spring/summer Chinook salmon, fall Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, and bull trout. The river also provides aquatic habitat for BLM Idaho designated sensitive fish species and includes westslope cutthroat trout, redband trout, and Pacific lamprey. Primary effects to special status fish and aquatic habitats would occur from new soil and vegetation disturbance and all new construction activity would occur within 300-feet of the Salmon River. Project design measures would minimize or avoid potential adverse impacts to these species and aquatic habitats and a summary of these effects occur below.

Erosion – Sediment: New soil and vegetation disturbance activities would occur on the level river terrace area and occur within 300-feet of the Salmon River. Such activities include new road construction, staging area pads for tanks, staff trailer, and equipment.

Total area disturbed would be 1.2 acres for new access roads and staging area for facility. Project design measures include graveling roads and staging area and erosion control measures would avoid or minimize any adverse erosion or sediment delivery to Salmon River. Potential road widening and localized riprap placement along 150-feet of road would have negligible impacts on river channel encroachment and discountable impacts to riparian vegetation because of existing impacts from existing riprap placement and small amount of area impacted and disturbed.

It is concluded that using state of the art monitoring that no adverse impacts attributed to deposited sediment (i.e., cobble embeddedness, surface fines, and spawning gravels) would occur to Salmon River ESA-listed fish species designated critical habitat. Discountable or negligible potential for adverse impacts attributed to project related turbidity, deposited sediment, channel encroachment, riparian areas, and impacts to ESA-listed fish and designated critical habitats are expected to occur with implementation of proposed project and design measures.

Hazardous Materials: As discussed above for No. 1 Soils and Water Quality (EA Section 3.2), potential impacts to water quality (e.g., fuel storage, etc.) would be avoided or minimized. These same design measures would avoid or minimize potential adverse impact to ESA-listed fish and BLM designated sensitive fish species and aquatic habitats.

Mercury was listed in IDEQ's 2002 Integrated Report and resampled in 2016 (IDEQ 2017). The goal of the sampling effort was to evaluate mercury concentrations regarding human health risks. The report stated Smallmouth Bass tissue exceeded the EPA methylmercury criterion of 0.3 mg/kg on average. The short duration adult fall Chinook salmon would occur in the Salmon River project area (e.g., spawning, migration, and incubation) and rearing of subyearlings in acclimation tanks would not be expected to result in any exceedance of EPA methylmercury criterion of 0.3 mg/kg for fall Chinook salmon.

From a technical standpoint, and based on the available information, the initial assessment is that the documented mercury impairment, based on fish tissue concentrations in resident species Smallmouth Bass, is unlikely to result in impacts to acclimation of subyearling fall Chinook production for a small period during the spring high flow periods, given the species' life history, short duration of exposure during acclimation, and rapid outmigration. No adverse impacts to human health or fall Chinook salmon fish health and associated methylmercury risks would occur from construction and operation of the acclimation facility.

Water Withdrawal: Water for the fish tanks would be pumped (5 cfs) from the Salmon River at the location immediately downriver from the bridge which is located upriver of the fish tanks. Water would be pumped from the river down to the tanks and then returned through pipes back to the river. It is a non-consumptive use of water.

Water intake pipe screening would be in accord with NMFS criteria (NMFS 2022). Proposed water withdrawals and design measures would avoid or have discountable potential for adverse impacts to ESA-listed fish and designated critical habitat and BLM sensitive fish species.

ESA-Listed Fish Species and BLM Sensitive Fish Species: The proposed action includes the construction and operation of an acclimation facility and the annual acclimation and release of approximately 650,000 subyearling fall Chinook salmon to the Salmon River. Authorizing the NPT request to construct and operate the proposed Russell Bar acclimation facility would be beneficial to the Nez Perce Tribe, support recovery of an ESA-listed species, and provide improved recreational fishing opportunities. The BLM recognizes tribal treaty rights and trust responsibilities regarding management actions that affect aquatic species and their habitats and authorizing the acclimation facility would support these responsibilities.

A critical component of an effective fish culture program is to provide time for the fish to recover after transport and acclimate to a new environment. Acclimation is a strategy commonly used to allow hatchery juvenile anadromous salmonids *Oncorhynchus* spp. to recover from transport and imprint to release water, thus facilitating their return to that location as adults. In comparison to hatchery subyearlings that were directly released into the river, studies have shown that acclimated hatchery subyearlings passed downriver faster, survived at higher rates, and had a survival advantage. As discussed above, overall, project related potential impacts for erosion/sediment, localized riprap placement for road widening, and risks for hazardous material effects would be avoided or minimized.

The BLM consulted with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and USFWS in accord with Section 7 of the ESA. A final Biological Assessment (BA) on the proposed project was completed and submitted to NMFS and USFWS requesting a letter of concurrence on the proposed project, analysis of effects, and affect determinations for ESA-listed fish and designated critical habitats. Consultation with NMFS and USFWS and the BA concluded that the determination would be “*may affect, not likely to adversely affect*” for Salmon River ESA-listed fish and designated critical habitat. A letter of concurrence on the BA and proposed action, analysis of effects, and affect determinations were received February 18, 2026 from NMFS and March 3, 2026 from and USFWS.

Potential impacts to BLM Idaho designated fish species would be similar to ESA-listed fish and project design measures would avoid or minimize potential for adverse impacts. It has been concluded from the above analysis that implementation of the proposed action and effects to BLM sensitive fish species “*may impact individuals or habitat but will not likely contribute to a trend toward federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population*”.

4. Wildlife, Special Status Species, and Habitats (EA Section 3.5) – Construction and operation of the acclimation facility would alter approximately 1.2 acres of upland habitats and a small area of riparian habitats (less than 0.05 acre) for a variety of wildlife species that occur in the area. The loss of a small amount of habitat (1.2 acres) would occur adjacent to the Salmon River and increased human use and operation of the facility would have the potential to disturb and displace wildlife species utilizing the project area and adjacent areas. Overall, impacts to suitable habitats and wildlife species would be localized and minor.

BLM designated sensitive species that may potentially impacted by the construction and operation of the acclimation facility include the bald eagle, willow flycatcher, western toad, and Columbia River tiger beetle. Because of the small amount of habitat impacted and localized area for disturbance and displacement potential impacts are negligible and a *“may impact individuals or habitat but will not likely lead to a trend toward federal listing or cause a loss of viability of the population or species”* was concluded for BLM Idaho designated wildlife species that may potentially occur in the area.

5. Recreation and Visual Resource Management (VR) (EA Section 3.6) – While the construction and operation of the fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility at Russell Bar may affect recreational activities in the immediate area, the long-term benefits of enhanced salmon populations are expected to significantly outweigh these impacts. The facility supports the local economy through recreational fishing, benefiting both current and future generations of outdoor enthusiasts.

The construction and operation of the fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility would have impacts on visual resources and visual resource management (VRM) associated with the Salmon River and Russell Bar. Construction and operation of the acclimation facility would detract from scenic quality. After construction is completed, planting of desirable vegetation species between the fish tanks and river on the upper bank would provide for some improved visual screening of the facility in the long term. With careful planning, design, and management, the construction and operation of the fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility can meet the Visual Resource Management Class II objectives identified for the project and analysis area. Key factors such as appropriate design strategies and integration with the natural landscape would play crucial roles in ensuring the facility's compatibility with VRM Class II goals.

Construction of a vault toilet at the day use parking area would provide long-term benefits for the public using the area for recreational purposes.

6. Cultural and Historical Resources (EA Section 3.7) – The laying of gravel, placement of the holding tanks, and moving an employee trailer on site would have minimal disturbance on cultural and historical resources. Digging holes for gate posts, vault toilet, and power poles can potentially affect historic property 10IH58. Nez Perce Tribal archeologists will watch the project's planned ground disturbance now and into the future. An interpretive sign will be installed to describe the historic use and significance of the area. This sign will assist in achieving a determination of no adverse effect by sharing the information from the historic property with the public. The Nez Perce (Nee-Me-Poo) National Historic Trail route and the Poyner historic property would not be impacted.
7. Special Designation Areas (EA Section 3.8) –None or small localized, and negligible impacts to Upper Salmon River ACEC high resource values and NWSRS outstanding remarkable values (ORVs) are expected from construction and operation of the fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility. The ACEC high resource values and the NWSRS ORVs would continue to be conserved.

iii. Effects on public health and safety

The environmental assessment process did not reveal any major effects on public health and safety. A total of five comments were received from public scoping. Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) submitted a comment that mercury was listed in IDEQ's 2008 Integrated Report and resampled in 2016. Sampling occurred on the lower Salmon River, between Slate Creek and Rice Creek, to evaluate mercury concentrations in Smallmouth Bass. The goal was to evaluate mercury concentrations regarding human health risks. The report stated Smallmouth Bass tissue exceeded the EPA methylmercury criterion of 0.3 mg/kg on average (2017 Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Lower Salmon River Mercury Fish Tissue Sampling Project Report).

Based on the available information, the initial assessment is that the documented mercury impairment, based on fish tissue concentrations in resident species (smallmouth bass), is unlikely to result in meaningful impacts to acclimation of subyearling fall Chinook production for a small period during the spring high flow periods, given the species' life history, short duration of exposure during acclimation, and rapid outmigration. No adverse impacts to human health or fall Chinook salmon fish health and associated methylmercury risks would be expected to occur from construction and operation of the acclimation facility.

The BLM, USFWS, and NPT interdisciplinary (ID) team did not identify any potentially significant impacts to public safety and health.

iv. Economic effects and Effects on the quality of life of the American people.

Fall Chinook salmon play an important role in Nez Perce tribal traditions, land use, and history. The importance of fall Chinook salmon includes subsistence as well as the act of cooperative fishing and processing fish sustains cultural traditions. The reduced numbers of fish or a loss of this resource could affect internal cultural relationships including family as well as external relations with other groups. Fall Chinook salmon also has spiritual importance to the Nez Perce people. These cultural and social connections are found at the family level as well as across the Tribe. Increasing the fish population is a benefit to tribal culture and subsistence.

Increasing the fish population supports jobs, boost tourism, and provides food sources. Recreational fishing contributes to the local economy. Commercial outfitting provides an economic boost by purchasing equipment, food, gas, and overnight stays from clients. Private recreational fishing contributes to family cohesiveness and provides an economic boost to the local and regional economy.

Rationale for Decision

The USFWS-LSRCP decision is to provide funding for the construction and operation of a fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility on BLM lands at Russell Bar (see attached maps 1, 2, 3, and 4). The BLM is evaluating whether to grant a ROW to the NPT for the construction and operation of a fall Chinook salmon acclimation facility on BLM lands at Russell Bar. The BLM, the lead agency, worked with the USFWS-LSRCP, the cooperating agency, for the preparation of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project.

Effects of this decision (EA, Alternative B - Proposed Action) are presented and assessed in Chapter 3 of the EA (Sections 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8). Project design measures would minimize or avoid adverse effects to affected environmental resources occurring in the project area.

Authorizing this proposed request to fund and operate a Russell Bar acclimation facility would be beneficial to the Nez Perce Tribe, support recovery of an ESA-listed species, and provide improved recreational fishing opportunities. The USFWS-LSRCP recognizes tribal treaty rights and trust responsibilities regarding management actions that affect aquatic species and their habitats and authorizing the acclimation facility would support these responsibilities.

Fish acclimation is the gradual process of helping adapt to their new aquatic environment. The process is vital because sudden changes in water conditions can shock and stress the fish causing health issues and sometimes death. Proper acclimation mitigates these risks by allowing fish to adjust to changes in temperature, water chemistry, and other factors at a controlled pace. The operation of the acclimation facility and release of subyearling fall Chinook salmon would result in improved health of fish when released and survival.

Studies and research concluded that in comparison with hatchery fall Chinook salmon subyearlings that were released directly into the lower Snake River just downstream of the acclimation facility, acclimated hatchery subyearlings (1) passed downstream to Lower Monumental Dam (the third dam encountered during seaward migration) faster, (2) passed the dam earlier, and (3) survived from release to the dam tailrace at higher rates. The differences in downstream passage rate and dam passage timing were also much greater between acclimated hatchery subyearlings and natural subyearlings than between directly released hatchery subyearlings and natural subyearlings.

Potential adverse effects to affected resources of concern identified in the project EA are primarily associated with the construction and operation of the acclimation facility and new soil and vegetation disturbance, which would be less than 2-acres.

Determination:

Based upon information contained in the EA, the USFWS ESA Section 7 consultation, and supporting data in USFWS-LSRCP files, we have determined that the Proposed Action alternative is not a major Federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of section 102(2)(c) of the NEPA. The action considered is not of a nature that would normally require preparation of an EIS, and accordingly, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed action is not warranted. Therefore, the USFWS has made a finding of no significant impact consistent with NEPA and Department of Interior guidance.

This FONSI and supporting documents are on file and available for public inspection, by appointment, at the following U.S. Fish and Wildlife Office:

Lower Snake River Compensation Plan Office
1387 South Vinnell Way

Suite 343
Boise, ID 83709-1657
<https://www.fws.gov/office/lower-snake-river-compensation-plan>

APPROVAL:

Eric McMillan
Assistant Regional Director
USFWS, Pacific Region

5/11/2026

Date