I. DECISION TO BE IMPLEMENTED

A. Description of Decision

It is my decision to implement the Preachers Cove Stream Restoration project. This project is located on the Yankee Fork Salmon River (hereafter referred to as the Yankee Fork) approximately 27 air miles southwest of Challis, Idaho (Figure 1). The project involves restoring a section of the Yankee Fork between Preachers Cove and the Bonanza Guard Station to a more natural condition by placing trees, large rocks, and spawning gravel in the stream (Figure 2, Figure 3). The project is expected to improve fish habitat for Chinook salmon, steelhead, bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, and other fish species occurring in the Yankee Fork.

The entire project area covers approximately 2,500 feet of the Yankee Fork with approximately 1,250 feet located on private land owned by the J.R. Simplot Company and approximately 1,250 feet located on national forest lands. The Bonneville Power Administration and Bureau of Reclamation have completed the NEPA analysis and documentation for the entire project to include the portions of the project on national forest lands. While that NEPA analysis and documentation covered requirements that apply to all federal agencies, it did not cover NEPA requirements that are specific only to the Forest Service. The NEPA requirements specific to the Forest Service, such as a review of effects on Forest Service sensitive species, are being addressed by this decision memo and this decision memo applies only to national forest lands within the project area.

The project will involve the following activities on national forest lands:

- Accessing the project area with heavy equipment using Forest roads and access routes
- Collecting and storing trees adjacent to the stream
- Isolating work areas with block nets
- Salvaging fish from isolated areas using electrofishing techniques
- Dewatering work areas prior to work and re-watering work areas after work is complete
- Placing large wood (trees) in the stream at nine locations. The large wood placed at seven of these locations will be entirely on national forest lands whereas the large wood
placed at two of these locations will be partially on national forest lands and partially on private land.

- Placing large rock in the stream at four locations
- Placing approximately 100 cubic yards of spawning gravels in the stream channel near the wood and rock
- Obliterating an abandoned road
- Planting native vegetation
- Project monitoring

It is expected that most project work will occur between September 2, 2014, and November 30, 2014, although some minor work may occur in 2015 and 2016.

The trees used for this project will come from an existing timber sale on national forest lands west of the Bonanza Guard Station and an established source area on national forest lands in the Noho Creek drainage. Separate NEPA has authorized the removal of trees from these areas so the removal of trees from these areas will not be considered in this decision memo.

**B. Purpose of Decision**

The Yankee Fork is home to several fish species. These include Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout, all of which are listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and westslope cutthroat trout, which are listed as sensitive by the Forest Service. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Yankee Fork between Polecamp Creek and Jordan Creek was mined with a large dredge. This activity obliterated the stream channel, riparian vegetation, and floodplain which substantially reduced the ability of this reach to support fish.

Over the last several years a collaborative team, which includes representatives from the Bureau of Reclamation, Bonneville Power Administration, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, J.R. Simplot Company, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Trout Unlimited, Forest Service, and Idaho Governor's Office of Species Conservation, have been working to identify ways to restore fish habitat in the Yankee Fork. One of the actions recommended by this team is the Preachers Cove Stream Restoration project.

This decision also supports the following direction found in the Land Resource Management Plan for the Challis National Forest (Forest Plan):

- Provide habitat to ensure viability and recovery of threatened and endangered and Forest Service sensitive plants and animals (Forest Plan, page IV-3).
- Maintain or improve the current productivity level of wildlife and fish habitat (Forest Plan, page IV-3).
- Emphasize anadromous fish habitat management on the Challis National Forest (Forest Plan, page IV-4).
- Improve watershed condition on the Forest (Forest Plan, page IV-6).
- Emphasize habitat improvement for threatened and endangered species, Forest Service sensitive species, and economically and socially important species (Forest Plan, page IV-13).
- Improve aquatic habitat conditions for anadromous and resident fisheries (Forest Plan, page IV-76).
- Emphasize improving stream stability (Forest Plan, page IV-78).
This decision is also consistent with the following direction found in the *Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California (PACFISH)* which amended the Forest Plan:

- Design and implement watershed restoration projects in a manner that promotes the long-term ecological integrity of ecosystems, conserves the genetic integrity of native species, and contributes to attainment of Riparian Management Objectives.
- Cooperate with Federal, State, local, and Tribal agencies to develop cooperative agreements to meet Riparian Management Objectives.
- Design and implement fish and wildlife habitat restoration and enhancement actions in a manner that contributes to attainment of Riparian Management Objectives.

This decision also supports the direction found in the *Yankee Fork Fluvial Habitat Rehabilitation Plan*. This plan, which was developed by technical experts from the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, and Idaho Department of Fish and Game, recommended re-establishing channel and floodplain interactions, increasing channel complexity, and improving channel geometry. This project helps accomplish these recommendations.

II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

A. Criteria

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when both of the following conditions are met:

- The decision is within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in 36 CFR 220.6,
- There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

B. Category of Exclusion

This project is within one of the categories of activity identified under 36 CFR 220.6(e) that can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment. The specific category is “Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction” [36 CFR 220.6(e)(6)]. This decision is consistent with the CEQ regulation established in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act for Categorical Exclusions [40 CFR 1500.4(p) and 1500.5(k)].

C. Extraordinary Circumstances

As required by 36 CFR 220.6(b), the following resource conditions were reviewed to determine whether extraordinary circumstances related to a proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement.
1. **Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat and Regional Forester’s Sensitive Species**

**Threatened and Endangered Species**: The ESA requires that federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species listed under the Act or result in the adverse modification of designated critical habitat for species listed under the Act. The following ESA listed species occur or may occur on the Salmon-Challis National Forest: sockeye salmon, Chinook salmon, steelhead, bull trout, and Ute ladies’ tresses. The following ESA listed species have designated critical habitat on the Salmon-Challis National Forest: sockeye salmon, Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout. There are no species proposed for listing under the ESA that occur on the Salmon-Challis National Forest. There is no proposed critical habitat for any listed species on the Salmon-Challis National Forest.

All obligations under the ESA have been addressed for this project by the Bonneville Power Administration and Bureau of Reclamation. In summary, the project is not expected to effect sockeye salmon, sockeye salmon critical habitat, or Ute ladies’ tresses. While project implementation may have minor, short-term negative impacts on Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout, the project is expected to create a long-term improvement for these species.

**Sensitive Species**: The Forest Service is required to review the potential impacts of projects on species designated as sensitive by the Regional Forester. The Regional Forester has designated the following species that occur or potentially occur on the Salmon-Challis National Forest as sensitive: wolverine, bighorn sheep, gray wolf, pygmy rabbit, spotted bat, fisher, Townsend’s Western Big-Eared Bat, bald eagle, boreal owl, sage grouse, peregrine falcon, common loon, harlequin duck, flammulated owl, three-toed woodpecker, great gray owl, northern goshawk, yellow-billed cuckoo, Columbia spotted frog, westslope cutthroat trout, Big Lost River whitefish, pink agoseris, Lost River milkvetch, Lemhi milkvetch, meadow milkvetch, White Cloud milkvetch, seaside sedge, flexible alpine collomia, Douglas’ biscuitroot, rockcress draba, Stanley’s whitlowgrass, welsh buckwheat, guardian buckwheat, Sacajawea’s bitterroot, Idaho pennycress, Challis crazyweed, Lemhi penstemon, salmon twin bladderpod, whitebark pine, Marsh’s bluegrass, wavy-leaf thelypody, and Idaho range lichen.

The project was reviewed by Forest Service Specialists to evaluate the effects of the project on sensitive species. Their findings were documented in three biological evaluations (see Project Record; Fish Species Biological evaluation, August 27, 2014; Plant Species Biological Evaluation, August 19, 2014; Terrestrial Animal Species Biological Evaluation, August 25, 2014). These reviews resulted in determinations of “no impact” for wolverine, bighorn sheep, gray wolf, pygmy rabbit, spotted bat, fisher, Townsend’s Western Big-Eared Bat, boreal owl, sage grouse, peregrine falcon, common loon, harlequin duck, flammulated owl, three-toed woodpecker, great gray owl, northern goshawk, yellow-billed cuckoo, Big Lost River whitefish, pink agoseris, Lost River milkvetch, Lemhi milkvetch, meadow milkvetch, White Cloud milkvetch, seaside sedge, flexible alpine collomia, Douglas’ biscuitroot, rockcress draba, Stanley’s whitlowgrass, welsh buckwheat, guardian buckwheat, Sacajawea’s bitterroot, Idaho pennycress, Challis crazyweed, Lemhi penstemon, salmon twin bladderpod, whitebark pine, Marsh’s bluegrass, wavy-leaf thelypody, and Idaho range lichen. These reviews concluded that while project implementation may have minor, short-term negative impacts on westslope cutthroat trout and Columbia spotted frog, the project is expected to create a long-term improvement in habitat, population abundance, and viability for these species. Therefore, the biological evaluations
resulted in a determination of “beneficial effects” for westslope cutthroat trout and Columbia spotted frog. These reviews concluded that the project is expected to benefit bald eagle. Therefore, the biological evaluations resulted in a determination of “beneficial effects” for bald eagle.

2. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 is to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined by this order as, “. . . the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including flood prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent [100-year recurrence] or greater chance of flooding in any one year.”

The project is located within the floodplain of the Yankee Fork Salmon River. This has been validated by site visits and reviews of maps and aerial photographs. This project, which will help restore the Yankee Fork floodplain, will have a beneficial effect on floodplains (see Project Record, Preachers Cove Stream Restoration Project Floodplains, Wetlands, and Municipal Watersheds Review, August 21, 2014).

Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 is to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands. Wetlands are defined by this order as, “. . . areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas such as sloughs, potholes, wet meadows, river overflows, mud flats, and natural ponds.”

The project is located within wetlands. This has been validated by site visits and reviews of maps and aerial photographs. This project, which will help restore wetlands along the Yankee Fork, will have a beneficial effect on wetlands (see Project Record, Preachers Cove Stream Restoration Project Floodplains, Wetlands, and Municipal Watersheds Review, August 21, 2014).

Municipal Watersheds: There are no municipal watersheds in the Project Area. Therefore, this project will not affect municipal watersheds (see Project Record, Preachers Cove Stream Restoration Project Floodplains, Wetlands, and Municipal Watersheds Review, August 21, 2014).

3.Congressionally Designated Areas

Wilderness: The project is not within Wilderness. Therefore, the project will not affect Wilderness.

Wilderness Study Areas: The project is not within a Wilderness Study Area. Therefore, the project will not affect Wilderness Study Areas.

National Recreation Areas: The project is not within a National Recreation Area. Therefore, the project will not affect National Recreation Areas.
4. **Inventoried Roadless Areas**

   The project is not within an Inventoried Roadless Area. Therefore, the project will not affect roadless areas.

5. **Research Natural Areas**

   The project is not within a Research Natural Area. Therefore, this project will not affect Research Natural Areas.

6. **American Indian and Alaska native religious or cultural sites**

   The Federal government has trust responsibilities to Tribes under a government-to-government relationship to insure the Tribes’ reserved rights are protected. Consultation with tribes helps insure that these trust responsibilities are met. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes are collaborating with the Forest Service on this project. They have been involved in the development of the project and are helping fund the implementation of the project. Additionally, the Salmon-Challis National Forest sent a letter to the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and the Nez Perce Tribe on February 6, 2014, informing the Tribes about this project and inviting them to provide input. No tribal concerns were identified for this project.

7. **Archaeological sites, historic properties, historic areas**

   Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of a project on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act also requires federal agencies to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment. The Archaeological Resources Protection Act covers the discovery and protection of historic properties (prehistoric and historic) that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It affords lawful protection of archaeological resources and sites that are on public and Indian lands. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act covers the discovery and protection of Native American human remains and objects that are excavated or discovered on federal lands. It encourages avoidance of archaeological sites that contain burials or portions of sites that contain graves through “in situ” preservation, but may encompass other actions to preserve these remains and items. All obligations under these Acts have been addressed for this project by the Bonneville Power Administration and Bureau of Reclamation. This project complies with the cited Acts.

No other extraordinary circumstances were identified that might be impacted by the project (see also Findings Required by and/or Related to Other Laws and Regulations below).

Based on this review, there are no extraordinary circumstances related to this project that may result in a significant individual or cumulative effect on the quality of the human environment.

**D. Determination**

Since this decision meets both of the criteria required for a categorical exclusion, it is my determination that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an
environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. This conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the project record.

III. EXTERNAL INVOLVEMENT

External involvement for the project included the following:

- Yankee Fork Interdisciplinary Team members Jerry Myers and Jim Gregory presented the project at Custer County Commissioners meeting on December 9, 2013
- Yankee Fork Interdisciplinary Team member Jim Gregory provided information about the project in an email to the Custer County Natural Resource Advisory Committee on June 16, 2014
- Listed the project in the Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions on January 2014, April 2014, and July 2014
- Sent scoping letters on February 6, 2014 to the following potentially interested parties:
  o Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Business Council
  o Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee
  o Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Salmon Region
  o Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
  o Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Project
  o Land of the Yankee Fork State Park
  o Land of the Yankee Fork Historic Association
  o Yankee Fork Dredge Association
- Published a legal notice of opportunity to comment in the Challis Messenger on February 13, 2014
- Yankee Fork Interdisciplinary Team member Jim Gregory presented the project to the Upper Salmon Basin Watershed Program Technical Team on March 5, 2014. This team includes stakeholders from the following groups and organizations:
  o Custer County
  o Lemhi County
  o Forest Service
  o Bureau of Land Management
  o Office of Species Conservation
  o Nez Perce Tribe
  o Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
  o Idaho Department of Fish and Game
  o Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
  o The Nature Conservancy
- Yankee Fork Interdisciplinary Team member Matt Green presented the project to Yankee Fork Landowners on March 20, 2014

One written comment was received from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and it was supportive of the project.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. I have summarized some pertinent ones below.
Archaeological Resources Protection Act – See Section II, Item C7 of this document.

Clean Water Act – The purpose of this Act is to restore and maintain the integrity of the nation’s waters. The Yankee Fork within the project area is currently in full support of beneficial uses designated by the State of Idaho under this Act. The project meets Forest Service obligations under the Forest Plan to meet State water quality standards. This project incorporates Best Management Practices to ensure the protection of resources including water resources. The project will also comply with direction in the 404 and Idaho Stream Channel Alteration permits issued for this project.

Endangered Species Act – See Section II, Item C1 of this document.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898) – This Order requires consideration of whether projects would disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. A review of the project and public involvement associated with the project did not identify any local minority or low-income populations that would be adversely affected by the project. This project complies with this Act.

Idaho Roadless Rule – See Section II, Item C4 of this document.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act – This Act prohibits the unauthorized take of most bird species found in the United States. This project is consistent with this Act.

National Environmental Policy Act – This Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental effects. The entirety of documentation for this project supports compliance with this Act.

National Forest Management Act (Forest Plan Consistency) – The National Forest Management Act requires the development of long-range land and resource management plans and requires that all projects and activities be consistent with these plans. The Land Resource Management Plan for the Challis National Forest (Forest Plan) was completed in 1987. This project has been reviewed for consistency with the Forest Plan. This project is responsive to the guiding direction and the standards and guidelines contained in the Forest Plan (see also Section I, Item B of this document).

The Forest Service adopted the Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and Portions of California (PACFISH) in 1995 as an interim strategy for managing anadromous fish-producing watersheds. The Forest Plan for the Challis National Forest was amended by PACFISH and established specific riparian management objectives, standards and guidelines, and monitoring direction that the forest is required to follow. This project is consistent with the guiding direction and the standards and guidelines contained in PACFISH.

Management Indicator Species (MIS) are defined as “plant and animal species, communities, or special habitats selected for emphasis in planning, and which are monitored during forest plan implementation in order to assess the effects of management activities on their populations and the populations of other species with similar habitat needs which they may represent” (FSM 2620.5). The MIS for the Salmon-Challis National Forest are bull trout, Columbia spotted frog, sage grouse,
and pileated woodpecker. The project was reviewed by a Forest Service biologist to evaluate the effects of the project on MIS species for the Salmon-Challis National Forest (see Project Record, Preachers Cove Stream Restoration Project MIS Review, August 21, 2014). This project is expected to result in a long-term upward trend for bull trout and spotted frog and is not expected to affect sage grouse or pileated woodpecker.

National Historic Preservation Act – See Section II, Item C7 of this document.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act – See Section II, Item C7 of this document.

Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA) – The section of the Yankee Fork within the project area has been determined eligible for designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The project was reviewed by a Forest Service specialist to determine how the project might affect the Outstanding Remarkable Values (ORVs) for this section of stream (see Project Record, email from Trish Callaghan to Bart Gamett dated 08-15-2014). This evaluation reached a determination of “Beneficial Effects” for the fisheries ORV, “No Effect” for the Recreation ORV, and “No Effect” for the Geology ORV.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

Since this decision involves an activity that is categorically excluded under the National Environmental Policy Act, it is not subject to administrative review or appeal.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented immediately. Implementation is scheduled to begin on or after September 1, 2014.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained by contacting:

Katherine L. Wood
Challis-Yankee Fork District Ranger
Salmon-Challis National Forest
HC 63 Box 1699, Hwy 93 N
Challis, Idaho 83226
Phone: 208-879-4125
Email: katherinelwood@fs.fed.us
Office Hours: weekdays 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. (excluding holidays)

VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE

Katherine L. Wood
District Ranger
Responsible Official

August 28, 2014
Date
Figure 1. General location of the project relative to the Salmon-Challis National Forest (green shaded area of detail).
Figure 2. A general overview of the project area relative to the Yankee Fork watershed (shaded blue).
Figure 3. The project area.