



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**  
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE  
Northwest Region  
7600 Sand Point Way N.E., Bldg. 1  
Seattle, WA 98115

May 13, 2004

David Campbell, District Ranger  
Bitterroot National Forest  
West Fork Ranger District  
6735 West Fork Road  
Darby, Montana 59829

RE: Gabe Creek Bridge (One Project) (Hydrologic Unit Code: 1706030101)

Dear Mr. Campbell:

This letter responds to your April 16, 2004, letter requesting reinitiation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) consultation for the Bitterroot National Forest's (BNF) Gabe Creek and Pete Creek Culverts Replacements Biological Opinion (Opinion). NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) issued an Opinion for these actions on August 14, 2002. The biological assessment (BA) accompanying the original consultation was updated with a supplemental BA dated April 16, 2004, and fully explained the potential impacts on Snake River salmon and steelhead, designated critical habitat and Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) under NOAA Fisheries review. The revised 2004 project has been reviewed by NOAA Fisheries, as provided under section 7(a)(2) of the ESA and its implementing regulations, 50 CFR Part 402, and section 305(b)(2) of the MSA and its implementing regulations, 50 CFR Part 600.

Snake River spring/summer chinook salmon and steelhead are likely to occur within the action area; however, spring/summer chinook salmon are not listed under the ESA for the Clearwater River subbasin. The action is within designated EFH for chinook salmon. Pursuant to NOAA Fisheries ESA and MSA responsibilities and authorities, NOAA Fisheries evaluated the effect of the revised project on ESA listed steelhead and EFH.

The proposed action in the original BA analyzed the effects of replacing the Gabe Creek culvert with a larger culvert to eliminate a fish passage problem. The BNF now plans to replace the current culvert with a 24-foot long bridge over Gabe Creek. The 2002 Opinion analyzed the effects of replacing the culvert, along with the need to dewater the work area and place riprap to protect the structure. The revised project proposal is designed to locate the bridge abutments outside the bankfull width, with the new bridge entirely spanning Gabe Creek. The extent of disturbance to riparian vegetation and the amount of riprap would be similar with either the culvert or the bridge.

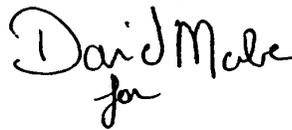


Based on the best available information and successful implementation of mitigation measures described in the 2002 BA and the 2004 supplemental BA, as well as implementation of all reasonable and prudent measures and terms and conditions described in the 2002 Opinion, NOAA Fisheries has determined that the subject action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Snake River steelhead. NOAA Fisheries concludes the subject action may adversely affect designated EFH for chinook salmon. As required by section 305(b)(4)(A) of the MSA, conservation recommendations and provisions are included in the BA and the 2002 Opinion that NOAA Fisheries believes will avoid, minimize, mitigate, or otherwise offset adverse effects on EFH.

This letter amends the 2002 Opinion to include the bridge installation at Gabe Creek. All terms and conditions, reasonable and prudent measures, conservation measures and recommendations, and monitoring and reporting requirements of the 2002 Opinion remain in effect. This concludes ESA consultation and MSA consultation on this action. The BNF must reinitiate consultation on this action if new information becomes available, or if circumstances occur that may affect listed species, designated critical habitat, or may adversely affect EFH in a manner or to an extent not previously considered.

Mr. Bob Ries at (208) 882-6148 and Mr. Dale Brege at (208) 983-3859 are the NOAA Fisheries contacts for this consultation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Mabe" in a cursive style, with "for" written below it in a smaller, simpler script.

D. Robert Lohn  
Regional Administrator

cc: J. Foss - FWS  
M. Benker - IDFG  
M. Jakober - USFS  
I. Jones - Nez Perce Tribe