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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Bonneville Power Administration

Finding of No Significant Impact for  
Blue Creek Winter Range: Wildlife Mitigation Project

AGENCY: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), Department of Energy DOE.

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

SUMMARY: BPA proposes to fund the Blue Creek Winter Range Wildlife Mitigation Project (Project) in a cooperative effort with the Spokane Tribe of Indians and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Project is intended to mitigate for wildlife and wildlife habitat adversely affected by the construction of Grand Coulee Dam and its reservoir. The Project would allow the sponsors to secure land and conduct wildlife habitat enhancement and long term management activities within the boundaries of the Spokane Indian Reservation. BPA has prepared an Environmental Assessment (DOE/EA-0939) evaluating the potential environmental effects of the proposed project (Alternative B) and No Action (Alternative A). Protection and re-establishment of upland and riparian habitat on the Spokane Indian Reservation, under Alternative B, would not have a significant adverse environmental impact because: (1) there would be only limited, mostly short-term adverse impacts on air quality and wildlife (including no effect on endangered species); and (2) there would be no adverse effect on soils, water, vegetation, cultural resources, or land management programs. Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA), BPA has determined that the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required and BPA is issuing this FONSI.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND COPIES OF THE EA, CONTACT: Robert Shank, Bonneville Power Administration - ECN, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3621, phone number 503-230-5115, fax number 503-230-3752; Joe DeHerrera, Bonneville Power Administration - EWP, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon 97208-3621, telephone 503 231-6971; or the Public Involvement Office voice/TTY (503)230-3478 in Portland, or toll-free 1-800-622-4519. Fax number 503 230-3752.

Public Availability: This FONSI will be distributed to all persons and agencies known to be interested in or affected by the proposed action or alternatives.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Under provisions of the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980, BPA has the authority and obligation to fund wildlife mitigation activities that are consistent with the Northwest Power Planning Council's (Council) Fish and Wildlife Program (Program). In 1989, the Council amended its Program to include assessments of wildlife habitat losses resulting from construction of Grand Coulee Dam. Consistent with Section 1003(7) of the Program's Wildlife Mitigation Rule, BPA proposes to fund projects that are intended to help reach the Council's wildlife mitigation goals. In 1990, the Council reviewed and approved the Spokane Tribe's proposed, "Blue Creek Winter Range: Wildlife Mitigation Project." BPA funding would allow the Spokane Tribe to secure land within the Reservation for wildlife habitat and to enhance, maintain, and monitor site-specific conditions to increase wildlife habitat values.

Under Alternative B, the proposed action, effects on the physical environment including soils, air, and water, would be mostly beneficial. Suspending commercial timber harvest, road construction, and livestock grazing would reduce soil disturbance and decrease soil erosion in both the near and long-

term. Dust, smoke, and vehicle engine emissions would decrease from present levels and ambient air quality would improve. Although slash burning and prescribed burning of vegetation could temporarily reduce air quality in localized areas, burning levels and smoke quantity should be less because the amount of debris produced from thinning and creating small openings for wildlife would be less than that produced by commercial logging activities.

Observable changes in surface water quantity are not expected, although increased amounts of vegetation in project area watersheds could result in reduced peak streamflows and longer streamflow periods. Habitat protection and revegetation activities in upland and riparian zones would result in reduced levels of sediment loading in project area streams. This would contribute locally to an increase in surface water quality.

Securing and enhancing land for wildlife purposes would provide immediate and long-term benefits to wildlife populations. Wildlife disturbances due to habitat enhancement activities are expected to be of short duration, and localized in nature. Near-term disturbance of wildlife could be offset within one growing season by the greatly increased habitat values. Wintering bald eagles, a threatened species, are the only Federally listed species found in the project area. An increase in prey species would benefit bald eagles by increasing their food sources. The majority of habitat enhancement work would occur from late April through October, a time when bald eagles would not be present in the project vicinity. In a letter dated March 25, 1994, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with BPA's determination that the Project would not adversely affect the bald eagle.

Potential adverse effects on native vegetation are not expected because all age classes of trees and other native plant species would be protected and increased over time. In the long-term, controlled burning would be beneficial for regeneration of fire sprouting plant species. Fire suppression activities would provide protection

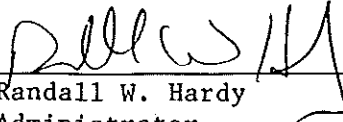
for some plant species that are fire sensitive, such as bitterbrush, that are used as primary food sources by wintering deer populations.

Long-term land use changes would occur in the project area as management is changed from support of timber harvesting, livestock grazing and development to support of wildlife habitat. Loss of Tribal timber program and grazing lease revenues would not occur, so no adverse social and economic effects are expected. Although there would be permanent and seasonal road closures, no adverse effects on recreation would be expected because all previous recreational activities would continue. Permanent closures of some primitive roads could decrease the level of motorized activities in localized areas. This would increase the quality of nonmotorized recreational experiences. Those seeking motorized activities in closed portions of the project area could move to adjacent areas of the Reservation. Seasonal road closures would occur during the peak of eagle, deer, and elk winter use. Due to little or no recreational use of the project area during the winter season, adverse effects of road closures on winter recreation should be minimal.

No listed cultural resource sites are known to exist in the project area although it is possible that as yet undiscovered sites exist. Surveys would be used to determine which areas must be totally avoided because of their historic or cultural importance to the Spokane people. If sites were discovered during pre-construction surveys or during construction activities, strict procedures would be followed to ensure that damage to important cultural resources would be avoided. Therefore, no effects on cultural resources would be expected.

Determination: Based on the information in the EA, as summarized here, BPA determines that the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq. Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared and BPA is issuing this FONSI.

Issued in Portland, Oregon, on December 12, 1994.

  
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Randall W. Hardy  
Administrator