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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Bonneville Power Administration

Finding of No Significant Impact and Floodplain Statement of Findings for  
Lower Yakima Valley Wetlands and Riparian  
Restoration Project

AGENCY: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), DOE.

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Floodplain Statement of Findings

SUMMARY: BPA proposes to fund the Lower Yakima Valley Wetlands and Riparian Mitigation Project (Project) in a cooperative effort with the Yakama Indian Nation and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Project is intended to mitigate for wildlife and wildlife habitat adversely affected by the construction of Bonneville, The Dalles, John Day, and McNary Dams and their reservoirs. The Project would allow the sponsors to acquire property and conduct wildlife management activities within the boundaries of the Yakama Indian Reservation. BPA has prepared an environmental assessment (DOE/EA-0941) evaluating the potential environmental effects of the proposed project (Alternative B) and No Action (Alternative A). Restoring wetland and riparian habitat on the Yakama Indian Reservation, under Alternative B, would not cause significant environmental impact because: (1) there would be only limited, mostly short term adverse impacts on soils, air quality, water quality, wildlife (including no effect on endangered species), vegetation, fish, and land use; and (2) there would be no effect on cultural resources. 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 (NEPA) of 1969. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required and BPA is issuing this FONSI.

A finding is included that there is no practicable alternative to locating the project within a 100-year floodplain.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND COPIES OF THE EA, CONTACT: Roy B. Fox, Bonneville Power Administration, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3261, phone number 503-230-4261, fax number 503-230-3752. Or Joe DeHerrera, Bonneville Power Administration - PJSP, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon 97208-3621, Telephone (503) 230-6971; 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 (Northwest Power Act), 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 Bonneville, The Dalles, John Day, and McNary Dams. 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 mitigation goals. In 1990, the Council reviewed and approved the proposed Yakama Indian Nation's, "Lower Yakima Valley Wetlands and Riparian Project." BPA funding would allow the Yakama Indian Nation to immediately acquire lands within the Reservation for wildlife habitat and to enhance, maintain, and monitor site-specific conditions to increase wildlife values.

Under Alternative B, the proposed action, effects on the physical environment including soils, air, and water, would be mostly short term. Restoration of former wetlands and riparian areas near existing water bodies may cause some short-term soil rutting and compaction, and temporarily increase soil transport and stream sedimentation, but these impacts would be minimal and would be limited to construction sites. In addition, effects would remain within Federal and Tribal permit requirements. Prime and unique farmland designations in wetland, riparian, and upland areas would not change or be affected by wildlife enhancement and management activities because the land could be converted back to farm use if required by the declaration of a national emergency. The Project is, therefore, consistent with Federal policy for farmland protection.

Although burning of outdoor vegetation could occur on small dispersed plots to remove undesirable weeds, the amount of required burning in the project area and, therefore, the amount of air quality impact, would be slight as compared to current burning levels required to maintain agricultural production in the surrounding area. Effects on air quality would be short term because the amount and frequency of required burning would decrease as native vegetation is re-established over time.

Because irrigation withdrawal and return flows would remain the same above and below the project area, an observable change in Yakima River surface water quantity is unexpected. Ground water tables could become slightly higher in localized areas as wetland acreage increases. Some differences may be observed in the timing and return of Toppenish and Satus Creek streamflows as wetlands are re-established and a more natural hydrograph pattern occurs. Protection of existing riparian systems and restoration of damaged riparian areas would increase bank stabilization, increase shading, reduce stream temperatures, and reduce sediment and pollutant load into project area streams. These effects would

contribute locally to the increase in ground and surface water quality, raise groundwater levels and buffer the effects of floods. Due to the physical effects of sediment settling, uptake of nutrients in vegetation, stream shading, and other natural processes, the quality of wetland return flows into project area streams is expected to equal or exceed the water quality of the receiving stream itself.

Securing and enhancing land for wildlife purposes would provide immediate and long term benefits to wildlife populations. Potential adverse effects on biological resources including wildlife, vegetation, and fisheries would be short term. Wildlife disturbances due to construction and other 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 riparian and wetland prey species (waterfowl and fish) 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 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.

Effects on native vegetation are not expected because restoration or maintenance actions would take place only in areas that have been disturbed in the past from farming or grazing practices and now contain large non-native (weedy) plant communities. Remnant wetland, riparian, and upland native plant communities would be identified and protected prior to restoration work to avoid impacts.

Effects on fish resources resulting from increased stream turbidity would be short term and localized at construction sites near streams or water bodies.

Turbidity levels would be controlled, as necessary, to remain within Federal and Tribal permit requirements.

Long term land use changes would occur in the project area as management is changed from support of agricultural practices to wildlife habitat. However, because land condemnations would not occur, site specific land use changes would take place only at the consent of the land owner. If an existing property is acquired for the Project that could result in relocation of lease holders to other idle Reservation properties, such activities would take place only at the time of lease expiration or with the prior agreement of the lessee. Because site specific leases would also be established for individual parcels selected for the Project, Tribal income from the leasing program could increase.

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 Yakama 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.

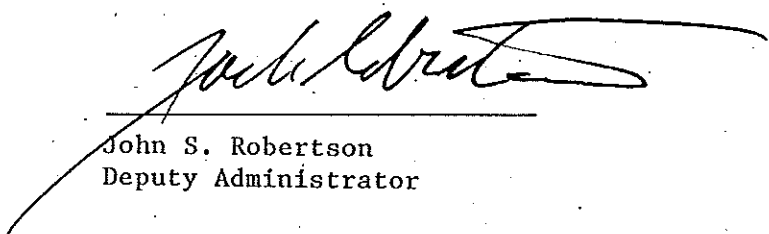
Floodplain Statement of Findings: This is a Floodplain Statement of Findings prepared in accordance with 10 CFR Part 1022. A Notice of Floodplain and Wetlands Involvement was published in the FEDERAL REGISTER on May 10, 1994 and a floodplain and wetlands assessment was incorporated into the EA. BPA funding of the Lower Yakima Valley Wetlands and Riparian Restoration Project would result in the restoration of as much as 810 hectares (2000 acres) of former wetlands in project area floodplains over the next 5-10 years. The proposed action (with a location map), the impact on the floodplains, an explanation of why the action is being proposed in the floodplains, and steps taken to minimize

environmental impacts to the affected floodplains are discussed in the EA. In the long term, re-establishment of wetland structures, processes and functions and the halt of livestock grazing would have positive benefits on the natural vegetation that help to buffer the effects of high streamflows. Because development of permanent buildings, roads, or facilities, are not part of this proposal, adverse flooding effects would not be expected.

For further discussion of the need for the proposed action, the proposal, a description of potential environmental effects, and the alternatives, see the EA.

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 Aug. 24, 1994



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John S. Robertson  
Deputy Administrator