

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

6450-01-P

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Bonneville Power Administration

Finding of No Significant Impact for Willow Creek Wildlife Mitigation Project

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

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for land acquisition or conservation easement over land and wildlife management plan.

SUMMARY: Today's notice announces BPA's proposal to fund land acquisition or acquisition of a conservation easement and a wildlife management plan to protect and enhance wildlife habitat at the Willow Creek Natural Area in Eugene, Oregon. This action would provide partial mitigation for wildlife and wildlife habitat lost by the development of Federal hydroelectric projects in the Willamette River Basin. The project is consistent with BPA's obligations under provisions of the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 as outlined by the Northwest Power Planning Council's 1994 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. BPA has prepared an environmental assessment (DOE/EA-1023) evaluating the proposed project. Based on the analysis in the 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.

ADDRESS: For copies of this FONSI, please call BPA's toll-free document request line: 800-622-4520.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT: Nancy Weintraub, ECN-1500 Bldg., Bonneville Power Administration, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3621, phone number 503-230-5373, fax number 503-230-5699.

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: BPA is obligated by the Northwest Power Act to take actions consistent with the Northwest Power Planning Council's 1994 Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program to mitigate for native wildlife habitat types that were lost as a result of development of Federal hydroelectric projects within the Willamette River drainage basin. This opportunity to fund wildlife habitat improvement and restoration at the Willow Creek Natural Area will partially fulfill that obligation. The Willow Creek Natural Area is west of Eugene, in Lane County, Oregon, at the southern end of the Willamette Valley. Grasslands, wetlands, woodlands and forests at the site compose a diversity of habitats that support a variety of animal and plant species typical of the Willamette Valley.

The EA considers five alternatives. All alternatives except Alternative 5, the No Action alternative, include BPA acquisition of fee title to land or conservation easements over land. All alternatives, except Alternative 5, provide for protection and maintenance of existing wildlife habitat at the Willow Creek Natural Area. Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 include management activities that enhance existing, degraded wildlife habitat. The alternatives are designed to provide different levels of habitat management which would ultimately result in different mixes of habitat due to plant succession. The habitat types include prairies, forests, savannas and wetlands.

Alternative 1 proposes to maximize wildlife and biodiversity values by restoring and increasing the extent of existing habitats. Oak and ash forest would be thinned to provide savanna habitats. Grasslands would be plowed and reseeded with native species to establish prairie habitats. Priority would be given to control of habitat-modifying non-native and animal species. Habitat Units for targeted species would increase from 575.39 to 814.71.

Alternative 2 proposes to restore the site to its presettlement condition which occurred prior to the arrival of early settlers during the 1800's. This alternative would require a major program to remove invasive non-native species and woody plants and convert some areas of mature oak and ash forests back to prairie or savanna. It would also require restructuring of existing streams to recreate pre-existing headwater wetlands and prairies. Habitat Units for targeted species would increase from 575.39 to a total of 801.06

Alternative 3 proposes to maintain the existing conditions; this would require a lower level of active management than either Alternatives 1 or 2. Habitats would be managed for the existing conditions on the site. No habitats would be restored. Expansion of non-native species beyond the present level would be controlled, however, no effort to restore prairie or wetland habitat, or control non-native species would be undertaken. Habitat for targeted species would remain at a total 575.39 Habitat Units.

Alternative 4 proposes no active management and would allow existing habitat trends to continue. Prairie habitat would eventually become revegetated with non-native species of plants and animals. Habitat Units for targeted species would decrease from 575.39 to 414.27.

Alternative 5 proposes No Action. BPA would not acquire land or conservation easements or fund wildlife management and habitat restoration and improvement activities. Private land would be unprotected from potential development that would fragment existing natural habitat. Non-native grasses, shrubs, and trees would

probably increase in abundance, and most native prairie species would eventually be extirpated. Habitat Units for targeted species could not be determined but it is expected that they would decrease.

Identified Impacts: Activities that restore or enhance wildlife habitat could cause impacts to the existing environment. Long term wildlife benefits are expected to occur from restoring habitats at Willow Creek Natural Area to those most likely to be used by the targeted species.

Short term, impacts could occur under Alternatives 1 and 2 as a result of implementation of wildlife habitat management actions. These would include local trampling of vegetation by workers, noise produced by operation of woody plant cutting and chipping equipment or smoke produced by prescribed burns. Equipment used would be small or hand-held machines; vehicles such as pick-up trucks would be limited and restricted to a marked route and conventional farm equipment would be used for plowing. Prescribed burns would be limited and closely restricted by Lane County burning permits. Under these alternatives, impacts would be minimized by timing the activities to occur during non-breeding or nesting seasons or during dry seasons when the ground is dry and hard and little or no erosion would occur. The short term impacts from these activities would be minor. Long term impacts could occur with Alternative 2 which would require substantial alteration of existing drainage patterns using large earth-moving vehicles.

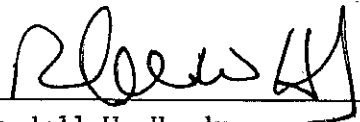
Alternatives 3, 4 and 5 would not increase wildlife benefits. These alternatives would either reduce wildlife habitat benefits or result in existing maintenance of habitat benefits. Alternative 2 would increase wildlife habitat benefits but would cause substantial long-term disturbance from earth moving equipment and alteration of hydrology. Restoring habitats under Alternative 1 would increase wildlife habitat benefits and would not cause significant environmental impacts.

The project would be consistent with land use plans and is part of an inter-agency West Eugene Wetlands Plan. Wetland restoration on the Willow Creek site has been approved by the Order of the Director of the Division of State Lands approving the West Eugene Wetlands Plan in September, 1994. The Portland District of the US Army Corps of Engineers also approved the plan and will provide a Letter of Permission to expedite the wetland restoration permitting process under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

The proposed action, Alternative 1, would not have a significant adverse effect on floodplains, species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, historic or cultural resources, air or water quality. No alteration or disturbance to floodplains will occur from restoration activities. Because the Willow Creek Natural Area is an element of the West Eugene Wetlands Plan no significant disturbance to endangered species will occur. All activities will be consistent with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's adopted Recovery Plan for Bradshaw's lomatium (*Lomatium bradshawii*) a Federally listed endangered plant and with the West Eugene Wetlands Plan that provides protection to rare plant and animal species. Activities that cause disturbance to the ground will be monitored by an archeologist as recommended by the Cultural Resources survey. Air quality control will be monitored by Lane County during prescribed burns. Water quality will be closely monitored by the Eugene Comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan.

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 April 6, 1995.


Randall W. Hardy
Administrator and Chief Executive Officer