

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Bonneville Power Administration

Finding of No Significant Impact for
Washington Wildlife Mitigation Projects

SUMMARY: BPA proposes to fund the portion of the Washington Wildlife Mitigation Agreement (Agreement) pertaining to wildlife habitat mitigation projects to be undertaken in a cooperative effort with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). This Agreement serves to establish a monetary budget funded by BPA for projects proposed by Washington Wildlife Coalition members and approved by BPA to protect, mitigate, and improve wildlife and/or wildlife habitat within the State of Washington that has been affected by the construction of Federal dams along the Columbia River. The proposed action would allow the sponsors to secure property and conduct habitat improvement activities for multiple projects located in central Washington. BPA has prepared an Environmental Assessment (DOE/EA-1096) evaluating the potential environmental effects of the proposed project, including three action alternatives (Alternatives 1 through 3) and a No Action alternative (Alternative 4). Improving wildlife habitat on existing WDFW lands and/or managing and improving newly acquired lands for habitat under any of the action alternatives would not have a significant adverse environmental impact because: (1) there would be only limited, mostly short-term adverse impacts on soils, water quality and hydrology, air quality, vegetation, and wildlife (including no adverse effect on endangered species); (2) there would be no adverse effect on cultural resources, land management programs, or socioeconomics; and (3) there would be improved long-term conditions for soils, water quality, vegetation, and wildlife. 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 Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

FUR FURTHER INFORMATION AND COPIES OF THE EA, CONTACT: Patricia Smith, Bonneville Power Administration - ECN, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3621; phone number (503) 230-7349; fax number (503) 230-5699; or Joe DeHerrera, Bonneville Power Administration - EWP, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon 97208-3621; telephone (503) 231-6971. You may also contact BPA's 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 the terms of the Agreement, BPA has the authority and obligation to fund wildlife mitigation activities undertaken by WDFW to mitigate for wildlife habitat losses within the State of Washington resulting from construction of Bonneville, The Dalles, John Day, McNary, Chief Joseph, and Grand Coulee Dams.

BPA proposes to fund five separate wildlife mitigation projects planned by WDFW involving potential areas throughout Grant County and in parts of Okanogan, Douglas, Adams, Franklin, Kittitas, Yakima, and Benton Counties. BPA funding would allow WDFW to improve, maintain, and monitor site-specific conditions to increase wildlife habitat values on existing WDFW lands and/or newly acquired lands within these project areas.

The EA addresses four alternatives: Alternative 1, Improve Existing Lands; Alternative 2, Acquire, Manage, and Improve Lands; Alternative 3, Improve Existing Lands and Manage and Improve Newly Acquired Lands; and Alternative 4, No Action. Alternative 1 involves habitat improvement activities on lands already owned by WDFW within up to four existing wildlife areas. Habitat improvements implemented under these projects would include activities such as weed control, fence construction, rangeland rehabilitation, wetland and riparian restoration, water control, road management, and fire control. Alternative 2 involves similar activities on lands that would be acquired by BPA and most likely transferred to WDFW. WDFW has identified four habitat types for acquisition that could be implemented under Alternative 2. Alternative 3 essentially combines the elements of Alternatives 1 and 2. Under Alternative 4, No Action, BPA would not fund one or more of the specific projects included within Alternatives 1 through 3.

WDFW has prepared management plans for individual wildlife areas that address existing habitat types and wildlife species, life history data, and species- and habitat-specific management objectives. These management plans would guide habitat improvement activities that WDFW would conduct on its existing lands, and as applicable on newly acquired lands, under the proposed action. Similarly, WDFW has prepared statewide management plans for individual species that would guide other habitat acquisition activities, and potential improvement of those newly acquired lands. Acquisition actions could include purchase of fee title and/or conservation agreements on private lands, from willing sellers, or development of cooperative management agreements on public lands.

Alternative 3 is the preferred action because it would best satisfy the project purposes and would provide WDFW with the maximum flexibility in implementing a habitat improvement program through BPA funding. Because Alternative 3 essentially incorporates the elements of both Alternatives 1 and 2, the adverse effects of Alternative 1 or Alternative 2 would likewise not be significant.

Under Alternative 3 the effects on the physical environment, including terrain and soils, water, and air, would be mostly beneficial. There would be no adverse effect on terrain or geology, and only minimal, short-term, localized effects on soils, water quality, and hydrology from ground-disturbing activities. Conversely, there would be improved long-term soil and water quality conditions from the promotion of native vegetation and the restoration of wetland and riparian habitat. However, beneficial impacts resulting from improvements would not be significant because effects would occur gradually from natural succession of vegetation patterns and wetland restoration. Ground disturbance, prescribed burning, and equipment operation would cause minimal air emissions, which would likely be similar to or less than emissions from existing uses of the affected lands.

The preferred action would have minimal short-term effects on vegetation from removal of generally non-native vegetation. These adverse effects would be more than offset by the short- and long-term gradual benefits from improvement or restoration of native vegetation. Similarly, wildlife would experience some minimal, short-term, localized disturbance from habitat improvement activities. These activities, however, would provide both short- and long-term benefits to fish and wildlife from improvement and/or restoration of wetland, riparian, shrub-steppe, grassland, and forested habitats. Alternative 3 is not likely to adversely affect any of the five Federally listed or two State-listed species of wildlife that may occur in the project areas, and potential acquisitions would not likely include or affect any lands along streams that provide critical habitat for Federally listed Snake River salmon species. BPA has requested concurrence on its endangered species determinations from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service, and expects that these agencies will concur that the proposed projects would have no effect on Snake River Salmon and would not adversely affect other listed species. In the event the agencies do not concur, BPA will undertake consultation with them pursuant to the Endangered Species Act and proceed with further NEPA compliance as indicated.

BPA and WDFW will integrate cultural resource management planning with the wildlife management practices as a means of avoiding impacts to cultural resources. Cultural resource sensitivity studies would be conducted prior to any ground-disturbing activities, any sites found would be protected according to an approved cultural resources management plan, and BPA and WDFW would avoid sensitive sites in implementing habitat improvement actions. Therefore, no effects on cultural resources would be expected.

Long-term land use changes would occur on both existing WDFW lands and newly acquired lands as a result of converting land from existing use to wildlife habitat, but this would have no or negligible environmental adverse effects on adjacent landowners. WDFW habitat improvement activities would be consistent with local land use plans. There would be no adverse effects on prime farmlands, floodplains, scenic resources, or recreational opportunities. Actions on existing WDFW lands would have no effects on local property tax bases, and acquisition of new lands would cause a negligible reduction in local tax bases as a result of the short-term change of acquired lands to Federal ownership before transfer to WDFW; WDFW makes payments to local governments in lieu of taxes, so there would be no long-term tax or revenue consequences from acquisition of additional public lands. The preferred action would have no effect on local economic activity levels.

Determination: Based on the information presented in the EA, as summarized here, BPA determines that the proposed action (Alternative 3, the preferred action, as well as Alternative 1 or 2) 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 July 30, 1996.

/s/ Jack Robertson
Acting Administrator