



## Department of Energy

Bonneville Power Administration  
P.O. Box 3621  
Portland, OR 97208-3621

ENVIRONMENT, FISH & WILDLIFE

July 22, 2019

In reply refer to: EC-4

### **To: People Interested in the Big Bear Falls Fish Passage Project in Idaho**

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to fund Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to improve passage for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed steelhead within Big Bear Creek in Latah County, Idaho. This letter explains what is being proposed, outlines our environmental review process and schedule, and requests your comments regarding the project.

**Proposal:** BPA is proposing to fund IDFG to enhance steelhead passage past Big Bear Falls, a bedrock waterfall located on private land within the Potlatch Watershed in Idaho. Studies conducted by IDFG provide evidence that steelhead historically accessed the entire Big Bear Creek drainage. Over the last century, human-induced changes within the watershed have reduced the watershed's ability to store water, making spring runoff more intense over shorter windows and limiting adult steelhead migration and passage around the falls. IDFG is proposing to modify the vertical profile of Big Bear Falls to create a series of jump pools that would allow for steelhead passage at a wider range of flow conditions than is currently possible. The project would provide access to an additional 20 kilometers of canyon habitat directly above the falls that has very similar environmental conditions such as instream water temperature, dissolved oxygen, riparian habitat, and substrate as the reach directly below Big Bear Falls which is currently occupied by steelhead. Completion of the project is projected to double the amount of high quality rearing habitat for juvenile steelhead in Big Bear Creek and significantly increase juvenile steelhead production in the watershed annually.

IDFG has contracted with a design/build team that has proposed a preliminary project concept that accounts for the limited access, steep topography, and environmental conditions of the site. Proposed project components include the use of spider excavators and helicopters to navigate the steep terrain of the canyon due to lack of road access, precision blasting during low/no flow periods to form natural-looking jump pools that meet fish passage criteria, and temporary platforms for staging and materials storage. Further design and engineering are still needed.

**Environmental Review:** To understand the potential environmental impacts of this proposal, BPA will prepare an environmental assessment (EA). The EA will describe anticipated impacts to natural and human resources and include mitigation measures that would help avoid or minimize impacts. We are asking for your comments to help determine the issues that should be addressed in the EA. During this process, BPA will work with Federal, state, and local agencies; Tribes; potentially affected landowners; and other interest groups. The proposed schedule for the EA process is as follows:

Scoping comment period	July 22 – August 22, 2019
Draft EA available for public comment	Winter 2019
Final EA	Spring/Early Summer 2020
Finding of No Significant Impact (if warranted)	Spring/Early Summer 2020
If decision to build, construction start	Late Summer 2020

Please indicate on the enclosed postcard whether or how you would like to receive the EA when it is available.

**How to Comment:** Please send your scoping comments by **August 22** and reference the Big Bear Falls Fish Passage Project. All comments will be available on the project website at [www.bpa.gov/goto/BigBearFalls](http://www.bpa.gov/goto/BigBearFalls). There are several ways to comment:

**Mail:** Bonneville Power Administration  
Public Affairs – DKE-7  
P.O. Box 14428  
Portland, OR 97291-4428

**Toll-free:** 800-622-4519  
**FAX:** 503-230-4019  
**Online:** [www.bpa.gov/comment](http://www.bpa.gov/comment)

**For More Information:** If you have questions regarding the environmental process, please contact me at 503-230-5206 or by e-mail at [casharp@bpa.gov](mailto:casharp@bpa.gov). You can also reach us toll free at 1-800-622-4519.

Thank you for your interest in our work.

Sincerely,

/s/ Carolyn Sharp  
Carolyn Sharp  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Enclosures:  
Project Map  
Comment Form  
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