

East Fork Irrigation District Modernization Project

Finding of No Significant Impact
Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA – 2118
November 2020

INTRODUCTION

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings for its proposal to fund a portion of the Eastside Lateral Piping Project, a discrete component of the East Fork Irrigation District Modernization Project. The Eastside Lateral Piping Project would modernize approximately six miles of irrigation infrastructure and is expected to cost up to \$10 million to implement. BPA would provide the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon with up to \$1 million to fund certain design work and materials for the Eastside Lateral Piping Project.

The Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) developed a Watershed Plan-Environmental Assessment (Plan-EA) evaluating the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. The draft Plan-EA was released for public review and comment in January 2020. During the review period, 27 comments on the Draft Plan-EA were received from 26 individuals and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). NRCS reviewed all public comments and made changes, as appropriate, to the final Plan-EA based on those comments and internal review. The final Plan-EA and NRCS' Finding of No significant Impact (FONSI) were released in July 2020. During the final review period, no comments were received.

BPA hereby adopts the Plan-EA, and based on its analysis and public comments received, 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 (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action is not the type of action that normally requires preparation of an EIS and is not without precedent.

Attached is a Mitigation Action Plan that lists all the mitigation measures that BPA and its contractors are committed to implementing.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

This FONSI will be posted on BPA's project website:

<https://www.bpa.gov/efw/Analysis/NEPADocuments/Pages/East-Fork-Irrigation-District-Modernization-Project.aspx>.

PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, BPA would fund a portion of the Eastside Lateral Piping Project, a discrete component of the East Fork Irrigation District Modernization Project. The Eastside Lateral Piping Project would modernize approximately six miles of irrigation infrastructure and is expected to cost up to \$10 million to implement. BPA would provide the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon with up to \$1 million to fund certain design work and materials for the Eastside Lateral Piping Project.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, BPA would not fund any of the proposed Eastside Lateral Piping upgrades.

SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

To determine whether the Proposed Action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, NRCS and BPA analyzed the potential impacts of the proposal on human and natural resources and presented them in Chapter 6 of the Plan-EA. The potential impacts associated with the Proposed Action are summarized below. The Proposed Action, with implementation of selected mitigation measures, would have no significant impacts. The following discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

Cultural Resources

The Proposed Action would have moderate effects on cultural resources, which would be mitigated. BPA has executed a Memorandum of Agreement with Oregon SHPO to mitigate adverse effects on the East Fork Irrigation District (EFID). The EFID is eligible for inclusion in the NRHP as an Historic District under Criterion A (36 CFR 60.4(a)) for its association with the development of irrigated agriculture in the Hood River region. It is also eligible for inclusion in the NRHP under Criterion C (36 CFR 60.4(c)) as a "significant and distinguishable entity whose individual components may lack individual distinction" (NPS 1995). Effects on historic canal structures would be completed in compliance with the Memorandum of Agreement.

Land Use

The project area has been substantially altered over the past century by a variety of human activities, including agricultural development, livestock grazing, timber harvest activities, residential development, and road construction. EFID would coordinate with Crystal Springs Water District to explore whether an opportunity may exist to coordinate activity for planned domestic pipeline construction prior to construction of each project group in the proposed action. It has already initiated such coordination as requested by the Water District for a portion of Project Group 1. The proposed action and future irrigation modernization actions would support existing land uses. Since these actions would collectively support existing land use (predominantly agriculture), the proposed action would have negligible effects on land use.

Public Safety

Additional irrigation piping would improve public safety by eliminating the risk of drowning in open canals. This alternative would also nearly eliminate any potential flooding risk from canal breaches and overflow, and the durability of the pipeline would increase seismic resiliency.

Socioeconomic Resources

Past actions including agricultural development, other land development, and recently completed projects have had effects on socioeconomics. The effects on socioeconomics from the proposed action are considered minor because "the modernization is expected to result in additional agricultural production due to increased water supply reliability and in reduced O&M expenses for EFID and pumping costs for its patrons."

Vegetation

Agriculture, forest management, transportation, and rural residential development have affected vegetation in the project area since the late 1800s. The amount of vegetation that would be affected by the Proposed Action is minor because selection of construction areas and travel routes adjacent to canals and laterals would consider existing vegetation and avoid mature trees to the extent practicable.

Herbaceous, shrub, and woody vegetation along the canals, laterals, and delivery turnouts within the project area would be temporarily disturbed through activities such as clearing and digging. Vegetation within the affected areas would return to historical upland habitat. Some trees that are dependent upon the canal for water may not survive due to a lack of water following construction. In the long term, a net gain in native vegetation in the project area would occur because the overall project footprint after piping would generally be narrower than the footprint of the existing open canals with the adjacent maintenance tracks or roads. This change in corridor width would allow for additional native vegetation or forest cover growth. Erosion control measures and materials would be free of weeds and weed seeds. Disturbed areas would be revegetated with native grasses and forbs.

Visual Resources

Past land use actions have changed the visual character of the project area. There would be minor effects on the developed and rural visual character of the landscape from the Proposed Action in the project area.

Water Resources

The Proposed Action would affect streamflow and irrigation water supply in the East Fork Hood River and the Hood River. The Proposed Action is anticipated to benefit water resources and would help to mitigate the effects of climate trends on summer streamflow and irrigation water supply.

The Proposed Action would be constructed when there is no water in the canal system and construction Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be used to avoid or minimize water quality effects; construction practices for other potential construction and development projects are anticipated to be similar. The Proposed Action is anticipated to contribute to water quality improvements from the elimination of end spills and increased streamflow in the East Fork Hood River.

The Proposed Action is anticipated to have a moderate effect on water resources as it would eliminate water loss, increase the amount of water that is conserved in the Hood River basin, and improve water quality.

Fish and Aquatic Species

Because EFID's irrigation diversion is screened and the conveyance system does not provide functioning habitat for fish and aquatic species, the Proposed Action would not have an effect on fish and aquatic species in the irrigation infrastructure itself. Irrigation diversion and end spill discharges are responsible for most of the past and ongoing effects on water quantity and quality for aquatic life and riverine habitat in the area affected by District operations.

The Proposed Action, when combined with other future actions, is anticipated to have a beneficial effect on fish, aquatic species, and available habitat for steelhead, Chinook, coho, and other species. Implementation of other irrigation efficiency, piping, and water conservation-related projects in the basin could have an additive effect on the amount of water conserved, and therefore would provide additional flexibility in managing water rights in the Hood River basin and may help to mitigate the effects of climate trends on streamflow and aquatic life.

Wetlands and Riparian Areas

Past actions that may have affected wetlands, riparian areas, and floodplains consist of the original construction of the irrigation canals as well as agricultural activities, livestock grazing, vegetation control, and development. Irrigation water flows in and along the banks of the canals and laterals has contributed to localized areas of hydrophytic and/or wetland vegetation within or adjacent to the project area. The Proposed Action would reduce the amount of water available to vegetation and these

potential wetland features during the irrigation season. These sites, however, are expected to be non-jurisdictional under the Clean Water Act (Section 6.9.2 of the Plan-EA). An estimated 6 acres of natural wetlands, most of which transect the canals, are known to occur within 100 feet of the project and may be affected by the project. While effects on these wetlands would be avoided, minimized, or mitigated, the project may have the potential to restore a more natural hydrologic pattern in those wetlands. The effect of the Proposed Action on wetlands and opportunistic hydrophytic vegetation is expected to be minor.

Wildlife

Some wildlife currently use open canals as a drinking water source. While the Proposed Action would require wildlife to find other water sources, as they did prior to installation of the canals, it would also create connected habitat corridors through which wildlife could travel. Water is not considered a limiting factor for wildlife populations in the project area or the surrounding area. Since effects of the Proposed Action on wildlife would happen incrementally over the time required to complete the project, animals would be able to adapt. The effect on wildlife from the Proposed Action would be minor.

The amount of wildlife and habitat that would be affected by the Proposed Action is minor because of the timing and duration of construction, and mobile wildlife species would be expected to avoid work areas during construction. In appropriate cases and under consultation with ODFW, ramps would be placed in open pipeline trenches during construction to avoid the potential for wildlife to become trapped overnight. Bird and other wildlife habitat may be affected through the removal of trees. Bald and golden eagles typically use the same nest sites year after year; however, no nest sites for either species are reported in or near the project area. In the unlikely event that an eagle nest is observed in or near the project area, the District would work with a USFWS biologist to determine how best to operate within the project area to minimize any potential effects. Construction would occur outside USFWS-approved buffer distances where possible. If operating within the recommended buffer distance, the District would operate outside the nesting season. Construction would occur outside the primary nesting period for migratory birds of concern (April 15 through July 15), although it could overlap with the early portion of the nesting period of raptors (February through July). Should an active raptor nest be found, construction would pause and a consultation with a local USFWS biologist would occur to determine the following steps. The project area would be planted with a seed mix of native grasses and forbs.

Ecosystem Services

All reasonably foreseeable future actions regarding modernization of irrigation infrastructure in the Hood River basin would work in concert to improve water conservation and water availability to irrigators. Past and ongoing actions described in the sections above have contributed to water availability for irrigators and instream flow. Past, ongoing, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the Hood River basin could all impact ecosystem services in the watershed. When combined with other future actions, the proposed action is anticipated to have a beneficial effect on all ecosystem services assessed when compared to background levels and the application of BMPs.

DETERMINATION

Based on the information in the Plan-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 USC 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

SCOTT G. ARMENTROUT
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