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**BONNEVILLE
POWER
ADMINISTRATION**

Public Notice

Draft Environmental Assessment

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 3755
Seattle, WA 98124-3755
ATTN: Leah Wickstrom

Public Notice Date: July 28, 2011
Expiration Date: August 29, 2011
Reference: PM-ER-11-4
Project Name: Albeni Falls Dam,
Flexible Winter Power Operations

Interested parties are hereby notified that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) have prepared, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for a proposed project at Albeni Falls Dam (AFD), Bonner County, Idaho. AFD is located on the Pend Oreille River at river mile 90.1 just downstream of Lake Pend Oreille.

BACKGROUND

AFD is a multipurpose hydroelectric project operated by the Corps. The BPA is a power marketing agency of the U.S. Department of Energy that markets the power from federal hydroelectric projects in the Columbia River Basin (known collectively as the Federal Columbia River Power System, or FCRPS). The FCRPS is jointly managed by the Corps, BPA, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to address an array of treaty, statutory, and regulatory responsibilities. AFD is one of the FCRPS hydroelectric projects.

BPA has proposed the Corps operate AFD during the winter months to utilize a larger portion of the authorized operating range from what has occurred in recent years. This would allow water to be stored and released to meet power needs more effectively. The proposal is referred to as Flexible Winter Power Operations (FWPO). The Corps and BPA are acting as co-lead agencies for the purpose of the draft EA.

AUTHORITY

Construction of AFD was authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1950 (Public Law 81-516, 81st Congress, 2nd Session). AFD is operated for the multiple purposes of power generation, navigation, recreation, flood control, and fish and wildlife conservation. Its operation benefits flood management of Lake Pend Oreille, power generation, and regulation of stream flow for 15 downstream federal and non-federal hydroelectric projects.

BPA is authorized to market the power from AFD pursuant to the Bonneville Project Act of 1937, Public Law No. 75-329, as amended, as well other laws, including the Northwest Power Act. In the Northwest Power Act, Congress declared that one of the purposes of the FCRPS is to assure the Pacific Northwest of an adequate, efficient, economical, and reliable power supply.

PURPOSE AND NEED

BPA is required to market the power from the FCRPS for Congressionally-designated purposes, including assuring the Pacific Northwest of an adequate, efficient, economical, and reliable power supply, while adhering to all applicable legal requirements. Consistent with this, BPA has proposed the Corps operate AFD during the winter months to utilize a larger portion of the authorized operating range from what has occurred in recent years. During the winter, AFD is one of only two major federal storage projects in the FCRPS where storage and release of water can be managed for power purposes. Effective and careful use of power generation from the dam helps minimize power rates. Thus, the proposal would more effectively provide adequate, efficient, economical, and reliable power supply. The proposal is consistent with the existing authorized purposes and operating restrictions of AFD.

In 1995, BPA, the Corps, and Reclamation co-led the development of the *Columbia River Power System Operation Review Environmental Impact Statement (SOR EIS)*. The primary purpose of the SOR EIS was to evaluate different management strategies for the 14 federal dams and reservoirs in the Columbia River Basin that have a major influence on multiple-purpose system operation, and for which power production is coordinated under the Pacific Northwest Coordination Agreement. Five of these 14 projects, including AFD, provide necessary water storage; whereas the remaining projects operate as run-of-the-river (water is passed through them as it is received).

The purpose of the draft EA is therefore to evaluate effects of the FWPO and determine whether a supplemental or new EIS is required, or whether the SOR EIS, as confirmed through analyses in this draft EA is sufficient. Specifically, this draft EA is intended to evaluate whether: (1) FWPO is a substantial change from the proposed action evaluated in the SOR EIS relevant to environmental concerns; or whether, (2) there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the proposed action of the SOR EIS or its impacts.

PROPOSED ACTION

The preferred alternative for this draft EA, hereafter referred to as FWPO, would fluctuate the lake elevation when conditions warrant by as much as 5 feet between the established MCE and elevation 2056 ft during the winter operational period (approximately December 15th to March 31st).

The purpose of FWPO is to more efficiently use the available water storage capabilities at AFD to generate power during the winter while at the same time meeting all existing authorities, purposes, and legal requirements. This is achieved by more actively managing the storage capability so that it can be used to generate power most efficiently both at AFD and at FCRPS hydroelectric facilities downstream (Grand Coulee Dam is the downstream project that most efficiently generates power).

Under FWPO, the operation would be opportunistically utilized, taking advantage of weather and stream flow forecasts as well as energy needs throughout the system to store and use water to maximize benefits of the available storage within project operating limits. Utilizing the available storage during this period would only occur when a power marketing value to the region can be forecasted.

POSSIBLE IMPACTS

The preliminary effects identified include a combination of new information and effects that had not previously been disclosed in the SOR EIS, and more detailed information on effects that were previously disclosed in the SOR EIS. These effects include:

- Alteration in the hydrology of Lake Pend Oreille and the Pend Oreille River both upstream and downstream of AFD,
- Alteration in potential for ice to interact with the shoreline and structures around AFD,
- Incremental increases in erosion upstream and downstream of AFD. This incremental erosion results in incremental effects on vegetation, wetlands, wildlife habitat, and cultural resources in the affected area.
- Effects on resident fish species including bull trout due to gas supersaturation, altered aquatic habitat, some loss of fish species, and potential stranding due to fluctuating flows,
- Potential effects on vegetation due to a potentially accelerated spread of the invasive flowering rush. The spread of rush could affect native fish and wildlife species.
- Potential socioeconomic effects include some effects on hydropower distribution, winter recreation, and dock structures. Some less structurally sound docks could be damaged.

The potential effect on flowering rush is considered the only new effect relevant to environmental concerns that was not previously disclosed in the SOR EIS.

EVALUATION

The various possible effects are evaluated in the draft EA in the context of the SOR EIS, with the following preliminary assessments of the effects:

The effects on docks and recreation are considered socioeconomic effects of FWPO with limited environmental concern. The effect on flowering rush is not considered a significant environmental concern in the context of 40 C.F.R. §1508.27. This is due primarily to the very limited role FWPO could play in the seemingly inevitable spread of this invasive species. The remaining effects identified in the draft EA are considered additional detail to effects, including those that were previously identified as significant, that were previously disclosed in the SOR EIS. These effects include:

- An increase in shoreline erosion around the lake and related erosion of cultural resources and wildlife habitat. This is due to the increased lake fluctuation compared to the relatively constant winter lake elevation considered in the No-Action Alternative.

- Alteration of natural winter flows between AFD downstream to Box Canyon Dam. This is about 45 miles of the Pend Oreille River. This would result in greater fluctuations in river stage and velocity than would otherwise occur leading to the dewatering of aquatic habitat along the margins of the river, loss of invertebrate populations in the dewatered areas, and potential stranding of fish including bull trout.
- Indirect water quality impacts associated with gas supersaturation and related potential for fish gas bubble trauma in the Pend Oreille River downstream of Box Canyon Dam and downstream of Waneta Dam. In each case, this effect would potentially occur prior to 2016. At this time, both Box Canyon and Waneta dams are scheduled to have completed upgrades to their facilities that would allow passage of the maximum flow contemplated for FWPO without creating supersaturated gas levels.

Based on the analysis presented in Chapter 5 in the draft EA, FWPO results in a different winter management strategy (including some differences in operating parameters for power operations) compared to the SOR EIS proposed action. The environmental concerns of the management strategy for FWPO have been assessed and are summarized above.

Our preliminary conclusion is that 1) the FWPO is not a substantial change from the SOR EIS proposed action relevant to environmental concerns, and 2) there are no significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the SOR EIS proposed action or its impacts (40 C.F.R. §1502.9(c)). Therefore, to proceed with adoption of the FWPO as a winter management operation will not require preparation of a supplemental or new EIS.

The Corps and BPA are soliciting comments from the public; Federal, State, and local agencies and officials; Indian tribes; and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of this activity and the preliminary conclusion that no supplemental EIS is needed to implement FWPO. Any comments received will be considered to determine whether to issue, modify, condition, or not proceed with the proposed operations. We will consider all submissions received before the expiration date of this notice.

Two public meetings are scheduled to further explain the proposal and the anticipated impacts:

- August 3 at the Camas Center in Usk, Washington from 5 to 7 pm.
- August 4 at the Panhandle Bank in Sandpoint Idaho from 4 to 7 pm.

The draft EA is available online under the project name “Albeni Falls Dam Flexible Winter Power Operations, Bonner County, Idaho” at: <http://bit.ly/n0a0wx>.

Requests for additional information should be directed to 800-622-4519.

Comments should be submitted via the following website: <http://www.bpa.gov/comment>.

Written comments can also be sent to:

Ms. Leah Wickstrom
CENWS-PM-CP-CJ
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 3755
Seattle, Washington 98124-3755