

United States Government

Department of Energy
Bonneville Power Administration

memorandum

DATE: March 16, 2005

REPLY TO
ATTN OF: KEC-4

SUBJECT: Supplement Analysis for the Fish and Wildlife Implementation Plan EIS (DOE/EIS-0312/SA-002)

TO: Chris Furey - KEWR-4

Proposed Action: Columbia Basin Riparian Conservation Easement Program

Location: The action area for the pilot initiative includes the Columbia Cascade Province, specifically the Entiat, Methow, Okanogan and Wenatchee subbasins. Geographic scope of the project may be expanded to other areas within the Columbia River basin in the future following the pilot initiative.

Proposed by: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

Description of the Proposed Action: The goal of the Columbia Basin Riparian Conservation Easement Program is to secure permanent or long-term (over 50 years) riparian easements and increase riparian protection for the primary benefit of ESA-listed fish and other depressed fish stocks consistent with the NOAA Fisheries Revised Biological Opinion on the Operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System and 19 U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Projects (November 30, 2004) and the Northwest Power Planning and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program (Implementation Provision A.8). As part of the Updated Proposed Action for the 2004 Biological Opinion, BPA and the Council seek to protect four miles of riparian lands in the Entiat, Methow, Okanogan or Wenatchee subbasins within three years, and a total of 12 miles of riparian lands within six years. These milestones represent the Biological Opinion metric goals for Upper Columbia Spring Chinook and Steelhead. For the pilot state of this initiative, the geographic scope will be limited to several subbasins in the Columbia Cascade Province (Entiat, Methow, Okanogan, and Wenatchee). The geographic scope of the program may be expanded in the future.

The overall purpose of this program is to protect existing productive riparian habitats from human disturbance and development, agricultural activities, logging, channelization and other actions that could contribute to the degradation of remaining quality riparian habitat. While it is difficult to devise a quantitative causal relationship between riparian protection and overall increased survival and species abundance of particular populations, the preservation of existing ecologically healthy ecosystems will, at the very least, protect those critical core areas in the subbasins. This initiative will seek to implement projects that will take advantage of, to the extent practicable, near-term opportunities to protect riparian resources associated with these rivers in the key subbasins.

At the request of BPA, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) will administer the coordination and implementation of this pilot initiative with qualified local entities. In an effort to streamline administrative processes, and to leverage the work of other local groups, NFWF will seek to integrate the Columbia Basin Riparian Conservation Easement Program with the Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program, another BPA-sponsored program currently administered by NFWF. As the administrative agent, NFWF will assemble and chair a Technical Advisory Committee that will assist in the evaluation and selection of the qualified local entities. NFWF will receive, evaluate, and facilitate implementation of project proposals submitted by the qualified local entities. In cooperation with other

entities, BPA and the Council have developed criteria for evaluating riparian easement proposals including accountability criteria, administrative components, ecological/ biological components, economic criteria, and monitoring criteria. NFWF will evaluate and recommend riparian easement proposals to BPA for funding based on the extent to which the proposals satisfy these established criteria. All final funding determinations will be made by BPA. BPA may fund reasonable costs associated with performing due diligence, completing ecological assessment and appraisals, as well as the actual cost of the approved easement transactions. These costs will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

BPA has planned to allocate up to \$1.0 million for the Columbia Basin Riparian Conservation Easement Program in FY 2005. Additional funding may be allocated in subsequent years. Where applicable, NFWF will seek to leverage BPA funds for this program with funds available through other existing Federal and non-Federal grant programs that have similar goals, by encouraging the qualified local entities to consider such opportunities.

Analysis: The Columbia Basin Riparian Conservation Easement Program has been reviewed to determine if the action is a substantial change from what was proposed in the Fish and Wildlife Implementation Plan Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (DOE/EIS-0312, April 2003) and adopted in its corresponding Record of Decision (ROD) (October 2003). In addition, BPA must determine whether there are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns since the EIS was completed.

The Fish and Wildlife Implementation Plan EIS is a cumulative effects analysis of the policy choices available to BPA for managing its fish and wildlife responsibilities in the Pacific Northwest region, including its fish and wildlife mitigation and recovery efforts. Under this EIS, the Administrator adopted a policy direction that protects weak stocks of fish and achieves performance standards and biological objectives—including those set forth in NOAA Fisheries' biological opinions and the Integrated Program—while sustaining overall populations of fish and wildlife. The focus of this adopted policy direction is enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, modifying hydro operations and structures, and supporting hatchery reform to both increase populations of listed fish stocks and provide long-term harvest opportunities.

The Columbia Basin Riparian Conservation Easement Program is consistent with the Fish and Wildlife Implementation Plan EIS and ROD. BPA's adopted policy direction supports the purchase of conservation easements as a method to increase the amount and quality of both upland and riparian/wetland habitats. There are no significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns since the EIS was completed. Prior to the acquisition of any conservation easement under the Columbia Basin Riparian Conservation Easement Program, public involvement will be carried out by the qualified local entities in coordination with NFWF. Public involvement will include a notice in the local paper and notification to adjacent landowners. Parties will be informed of the pending acquisition and allowed to comment. Comments received will be considered by NFWF in its evaluation of proposals and by BPA in its final funding decision.

In the future if BPA proposes to fund site-specific actions such as fencing or vegetation management associated with an established riparian easement, additional NEPA analysis and documentation will be required. In addition, BPA will fulfill its obligations under all other applicable federal laws such as the Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and Clean Water Act for those actions.

Findings: The CBREP is generally consistent with the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program, as well as BPA's Fish and Wildlife Implementation Plan EIS and ROD. This Supplement Analysis finds that: 1) implementing the proposed action will not result in any substantial changes to the Fish and Wildlife Implementation Plan that are relevant to environmental concerns; and 2)

there are no significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the Fish and Wildlife Implementation Plan or its impacts. Therefore, no further NEPA documentation is required.

/s/ Shannon Stewart 3-17-05

Shannon C. Stewart

Environmental Protection Specialist – KEC-4

CONCUR:

/s/ Thomas McKinney

Thomas C. McKinney

NEPA Compliance Officer – KEC-4

DATE: 3-17-05