

Department of Energy

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

ENVIRONMENT, FISH AND WILDLIFE

May 30, 2013

In reply refer to: KEC-4

To: People Interested in the Kootenai River White Sturgeon and Burbot Hatcheries Project

Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) has prepared the Final Environmental Assessment (EA), which includes a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), for the Kootenai River White Sturgeon and Burbot Hatcheries Project.

Copies Available: If you previously requested it, the Final EA/FONSI is enclosed. If you did not receive a copy of the Final EA/FONSI with this letter and would like one, please call our toll-free document request line: 1-800-622-4520. Leave a request naming this project and giving your name and complete mailing address. It is also available on the Internet at www.bpa.gov/go/kootenaiaquaculture.

Proposal: BPA is proposing to fund the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (Tribe) to improve their Kootenai River Native Fish Conservation Aquaculture Program (aquaculture program). BPA has funded the Tribe's existing aquaculture program since 1991. The aquaculture program currently propagates Kootenai River white sturgeon, which are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Tribe proposes to improve the program by upgrading their existing Tribal Hatchery and constructing a new hatchery for the production of Kootenai River white sturgeon and burbot.

Background: Kootenai white sturgeon were listed as endangered under the ESA in 1994. Prior to listing, the Kootenai Tribe initiated a Kootenai sturgeon conservation aquaculture program near Bonners Ferry in 1988 to preserve an adequate demographic and genetic base for a healthy future population until ecosystem-based habitat restoration activities could be implemented. BPA has historically been a source of funding for activities of this program.

Following the listing of Kootenai white sturgeon, the USFWS established the Kootenai River White Sturgeon Recovery Team to advise the USFWS in the development and implementation of a recovery plan. The USFWS completed the Kootenai River White Sturgeon Recovery Plan in 1999, which identified a long-term goal of down-listing and delisting Kootenai white sturgeon when the population becomes self-sustaining. Short-term objectives included reestablishing natural recruitment and preventing extinction through conservation aquaculture.

Burbot were proposed for ESA listing in 2000; however, the USFWS determined that this population was not eligible for listing because it did not comprise a Distinct Population Segment. Although burbot was not ESA listed, the Tribe, along with the USFWS, agency partners, and additional stakeholders, proposed the Kootenai River drainage as a "pilot project" to develop, implement, and evaluate a Conservation Strategy for Lower Kootenai River Burbot

(Conservation Strategy). The resulting Conservation Strategy was developed by the Kootenai Valley Resource Initiative (KVRI) Burbot Subcommittee and formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in spring 2005 by 16 agencies and entities (including BPA). The Tribe's proposed burbot program is intended to produce and release sufficient numbers of burbot to support long-term population restoration objectives defined in the Conservation Strategy.

For More Information: If you need more information or have any questions, please call me toll free at 1-800-622-4519, or directly at (503) 230-5756. You may also e-mail me at esgresh@bpa.gov. Thank you for your interest in our work.

/s/ Ted Gresh

Edward Gresh
Environmental Project Manager

Enclosures (if requested)
Final EA
FONSI and Mitigation Action Plan