

Umatilla Hatchery Programs (Umatilla River Spring Chinook, Fall Chinook, and Coho)

Finding of No Significant Impact
Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA-2249
April 2024

INTRODUCTION

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings for its proposal to continue funding the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), and Westland Irrigation District (WID) to implement the ongoing Umatilla River Spring Chinook, the Umatilla River Fall Chinook, and the Umatilla River Coho hatchery programs.

BPA developed an environmental assessment (EA) evaluating the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. The EA was released for a 30-day public comment period in February 2024. BPA received comments from one individual, one representative from the CTUIR Fisheries Program, and one federal agency. BPA responded to these comments in the final EA.

BPA hereby adopts the 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) as amended (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 Finding of No Significant Impact (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

The FONSI will be posted on BPA's project website: <https://www.bpa.gov/nepa/umatilla-hatchery>.

PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, BPA would continue funding the following Umatilla production program and hatchery facility actions: (1) ongoing collection, spawning, transport, production, and release of Umatilla River Spring Chinook salmon and Umatilla River Fall Chinook subyearling salmon; (2) the collection, spawning, acclimation, and release of Umatilla River Coho salmon; (3) maintenance of the Umatilla Hatchery, satellite facilities, and grounds including site and facility upgrades beyond routine annual maintenance that requires site disturbance, facility reconstruction, or new construction within the program's existing facilities and site boundaries; (4) development of an additional water source at or near the Umatilla Hatchery complex; and (5) ongoing research, monitoring, and evaluation (RM&E) of the programs' production and release actions, and adult returns and out-migration of hatchery-produced and naturally produced smolts. The Proposed Action also continues funding operations and maintenance for the program facilities used in the BPA-funded Umatilla Hatchery Programs (listed in Table 2 of the final EA).

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, BPA would not fund broodstock capture, hatchery production, or juvenile acclimation and release of Chinook salmon. There would also be no funding for coho capture, transportation, acclimation, or release. Production supporting RM&E activities and routine maintenance of the Umatilla Hatchery Complex would not be funded. There would be no facility upgrades or additions and no additional water sources would be developed. The No Action Alternative is a federal funding decision by BPA, not a decision to proceed or not proceed with these programs. CTUIR, ODFW, and WID could acquire funding from other sources and proceed with these actions. For the purposes of this EA, however, the No Action Alternative assumes that the hatchery production and related actions would cease.

SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

To determine whether the Proposed Action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, BPA analyzed the potential impacts of the proposal on human and natural resources and presented them in Chapter 3 of the 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.

Geology and Soils

There would be a low adverse impact to geology and soils:

- There would be short-term adverse impacts to soils resulting from drilling and excavation activities to construct wells. These construction activities would occur at a small scale, limiting soil impacts to about a 0.05 acre for the well pads. In addition, affected soils resulting from construction would be seeded with native grass and forbs to control erosion and recover soil structure. Therefore, due to the small scale of well construction and revegetation after construction for site recovery, this impact would not be significant.
- Other actions disturbing soils could occur within facilities or other areas with previously disturbed soils or with small areas of undisturbed soils. Minimization measures would limit the extent of these potential effects to geology and soils, which would result in a low overall impact.

Water Resources (Water Quantity and Groundwater, Water Quality)

There would be a low adverse impact to water resources:

- *Water Quantity and Groundwater:* Ongoing operations would continue to withdraw water from the Umatilla River for satellite facilities, from the Walla Walla River for a holding pond at Walla Walla Hatchery, and from the groundwater aquifer for the Umatilla Hatchery.

The resulting impact to water quantity would not be significant because the volume of water withdrawn would be less than one percent of the Umatilla River's flow with no measurable effects on physical or biological features. A small (11 cubic feet per second) reduction in flows would occur along a 200-foot stretch of the Walla Walla River between the Walla Walla holding pond facility diversion intake and discharge locations with low-level effects to river features from these slightly reduced flows.

The Umatilla Hatchery would continue to rely on groundwater to support operations. Because the well serving the hatchery does not withdraw groundwater from an isolated aquifer and the future well construction sites under evaluation would not interfere with existing wells, there would be no impact on the quantity of available groundwater. Taken together, the resulting impacts to water quantity would be low.

- *Water Quality:* Effluent discharges into the Columbia, Umatilla, and Walla Walla rivers would occur from the ongoing production program operations at hatchery and satellite facilities and include trace amounts of fish food, waste, and chemicals used in hatchery operations. In addition, discharges from abatement ponds could result in low-level increases in water temperature. Because all discharges are treated where needed, pollutant levels monitored, and all National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permitting requirements met to ensure discharges do not result in adverse effects—and because receiving water bodies are large in comparison to discharge volumes—the impact on water quality would not be significant.

Vegetation

There would be a low adverse impact to vegetation:

- Well construction, the buried pipeline, and temporary road access for construction equipment would disturb vegetation. Well-pad construction would disturb about 0.05 acre of vegetation. In total, less than one acre of vegetation would be affected. These areas of disturbed soil and vegetation would result in temporarily bare soils susceptible to the spread of invasive species; however, these areas would be reseeded with native grasses and forbs to minimize that potential spread. The limited extent of program activities affecting previously undisturbed vegetation, and the implementation of minimization measures that limit disturbance areas as well as reseeded those areas after construction, would result in a low effect to vegetation.

Wetlands and Floodplains

There would be no impact on wetlands and a potential negligible adverse impact on floodplains:

- *Wetlands:* Existing satellite facilities sit on graveled pads and therefore do not contain wetland habitat. Because well locations would be sited away from wetlands and are designed not to deplete groundwater, their construction would not have any potential to affect wetlands.
- *Floodplains:* Drilling new wells to supply water to the Umatilla Hatchery could occur in close proximity to a narrow floodplain tracing the Columbia River shore, but would be sited above the floodplain and outside of wetlands on small footprints (about 0.05 acre) with minimal potential for off-site effects. Routine operations at the satellite facilities, though located in floodplains, would not lead to new effects to their condition or function. Hatchery operations, acclimation, juvenile release, and RM&E activities have no potential to impact floodplains.

Fish

Impacts to fish species would range from a low adverse impact to moderately beneficial impact:

- There would be adverse effects from hatchery and satellite facility operations because fish would be trapped, handled, and marked, and some individuals may be injured or die as a result. Adherence to the fish handling protocols and mitigation measures described in final EA Section 2.3 would minimize these risks. Effluent releases would also have minimal potential to affect water quality sufficiently to impact individual fish.

- Released hatchery-reared fish would interact with natural-origin fish populations with potential adverse effects from genetic mixing, disease transfer, competition, predation, and increased fishing pressure. Effects also include some potential for adverse genetic influence of native stocks in the Snake River basin by stray Chinook and coho, though these interactions would be carefully monitored to reduce this potential adverse effect. In addition, effective acclimation and direct release strategies would be applied to Umatilla River Fall Chinook to reduce potential straying; and inserting PIT tags allows collection facilities in other watersheds to identify and exclude these strays as they are encountered thereby minimizing genetic influence by these stray hatchery fish.
- Moderately to highly beneficial effects would result from increasing Chinook and coho adult returns to the Umatilla River Basin, providing a short-term juvenile salmon food source for native fish, and contributing to the cycling of marine nutrients throughout the basin.
- Overall, because the adverse effects from operations would be minimized and mitigated through the fish handling protocols, release practices, and monitoring; and because there would be benefits from increased fish populations resulting from these hatchery programs, the effects would be moderately beneficial, weighted largely by the restored runs of Chinook and coho to the Umatilla River Basin. On balance, potential effects would not be significant.

Wildlife

Impacts to wildlife would be low and adverse:

- Impacts to wildlife or their habitats would occur from drilling wells near the hatchery and from operational activities at all facilities. Ongoing operations would affect few wildlife species since these actions, such as maintenance like lawn mowing, are temporary and would occur only within the facility's grounds, which provides little habitat. There would be no impacts to designated critical habitat for ESA-listed species or identified priority habitats for any other special-status wildlife species.
- RM&E activities would not modify wildlife habitats. Surveys would result in a negligible effect from the presence of researchers for short periods of time.
- Releasing juvenile Chinook and coho would potentially affect wildlife by increasing anadromous fish returns to the Umatilla River and altering, beneficially, the food web.
- Because of limited potential for the actions to modify wildlife habitat or disturb wildlife in their existing habitat, and the likelihood of beneficial effects from a broadened food web from increased fish in the river, wildlife impacts would not be significant.

Land Use and Recreation

Impacts to land use and recreation would range from no impact to land use to a low-to-moderate beneficial impact for recreation.

- *Land Use:* There would be no change to land uses by the continued operations and maintenance of the Hatchery and the satellite facilities, RM&E, or from the new water source developments. In addition, no facility expansion would occur. For these reasons, there would be no change to existing land use designations and therefore no significant impact to land use.

- *Recreation:* Acquiring additional water would maintain existing production levels of salmon for release, and this would continue to benefit commercial and recreational fishing opportunities. Therefore, this would result in a low-to-moderate beneficial impact to recreation.

Visual Quality

Impacts to visual quality would be low:

- The proposed chiller upgrade at Umatilla Hatchery would extend one side of a hatchery building into an existing, paved parking area within a 30-foot by 50-foot area, which would result in a minor change to the visual appearance at that location; however, because this chiller upgrade would not markedly alter the underlying visual quality of an already-disturbed area, there would not be a significant visual impact.
- Some short-term visual impacts would result from the presence of well-drilling equipment and the loss of shrub vegetation from new waterline excavations. After construction, these impact areas would be revegetated by reseeding and planting, which would return them to their pre-construction visual quality. Overall, because the visual character of the area would not markedly change the current landscape, there would not be a significant visual impact.
- There could be negligible changes to the appearance of satellite facilities from improvements or activities at those locations, but the scenic character at those locations would not change. RM&E activities would have no potential to affect visual quality.

Air quality, noise, and public safety

Impacts to air quality, noise, and public safety would be low and adverse:

- *Air Quality and Noise:* Impacts would primarily occur from short-term emissions of criteria pollutants by construction vehicles, and from particulates (dust) raised by them during the anticipated one month when construction activities would occur. Because these impacts would be temporary, localized in nature, and not exceed air-quality standards, there would not be a significant impact to air quality.
- *Public safety:* Potential for minor releases of petroleum-based liquids from construction vehicles could travel with runoff to contaminate water supplies if not controlled; however, the mitigation measures (outlined in final EA Table 2.3) would be strictly implemented to minimize that risk. Vehicles used for construction would also increase traffic on local roads. With the implementation of mitigation measures, there would be no significant public-safety impact.

Cultural Resources

There would be no impact on known cultural resources:

- The Proposed Action would avoid known cultural resources. With this avoidance of all known cultural resources, BPA determined that the project would not affect historic properties. In addition, mitigation measures establish protocols to protect historical or cultural resources if identified during construction. For these reasons, there would not be a significant impact.
- The Proposed Action would benefit tribal subsistence and ceremonial harvest opportunities by enhancing population levels and harvestable numbers of salmon in the Umatilla River.

- For the Umatilla Hatchery chiller installation, BPA completed a determination of effect of no historic properties affected in a letter sent to the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on February 26, 2024, outlining avoidance and minimization measures identified in discussion with SHPO. BPA did not receive additional comments from consulting parties during the 30-day comment period and therefore assumed concurrence with its determination of effect on March 27, 2024.

Climate Change

Contributions to global greenhouse gas emissions and climate change would be low:

- Exhaust from gasoline- and diesel-powered construction vehicles, as well as the vehicles used to support ongoing operations, would emit greenhouse gas emissions. Due to the small number of vehicles involved in construction and ongoing program activities, the resulting greenhouse gas emissions would have a minor contribution to heat-trapping gases that cause climate change, and therefore would not significantly exacerbate global climate change.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Impacts to socioeconomics would be moderate and beneficial; and impacts to environmental justice populations would range from no to low:

- *Socioeconomics:* Ongoing program activities and production would benefit the local economy by creating jobs, enhancing fishing opportunities, and indirectly supporting related industries. The Proposed Action would continue to provide ODFW employment opportunities at the hatchery and CTUIR employment opportunities at the satellite facilities, benefitting local economies. In addition, the Proposed Action would have an economic multiplier effect for commercial and recreational fishing industries and supporting businesses.
- *Environmental Justice:* The Proposed Action is unlikely to result in disproportionate and adverse impacts on any population, including environmental justice populations.

DETERMINATION

Based on the information in the 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.

Finally, consistent with Department of Energy's regulations in 10 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 1022 *et seq.* (Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements), the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to any wetlands as referenced above and presented in Chapter 3 of the EA. Consistent with 10 CFR § 1022.12 and 1022.13, all impacts to floodplains from the project have been assessed and proper notification provided. Pursuant to the requirements of 10 CFR § 1022.14, Chapter 2 of the Umatilla Hatchery Programs Final EA includes a description of the Project Action including a location map as well as the alternatives; and Chapter 3 explains that program activities would not physically modify Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-designated floodplains. By avoiding additional impacts in floodplain areas, the Proposed Action conforms to the applicable floodplain protection standards.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

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