

**Bonneville Power Administration's
Record of Decision
For Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project
August 2015**

Decision

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) has decided to fund implementation of the Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project in Idaho County, Idaho. BPA's decision is based on the analysis documented in the Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (DOE/EIS-0506, June 2015) and project record, and the selection of Alternative 2 by the United States Forest Service Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests (Forests) as documented in their July 21, 2015 Final Record of Decision (ROD). Alternative 2 was identified in the Final EIS as the preferred alternative for the rehabilitation of the lower two miles of the Crooked River valley, including Crooked River.

The Forests, in cooperation with the Nez Perce Tribe (NPT), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and BPA, prepared the EIS and evaluated the potential impacts of the proposed project and its alternatives. As a cooperating agency, BPA has adopted the EIS. USACE has also adopted the EIS and the Forests' ROD.

As described in the Final EIS, Alternative 2 consists of: (1) constructing a 6,000 foot temporary bypass channel and temporary access road/levee and, following construction of the channel, removing and decommissioning these structures; (2) regrading approximately 115 acres of floodplain by moving dredge tailings; (3) filling in approximately 10,960 feet of the current channel, reconstructing approximately 7,400 feet of new channel, and constructing more than 2,700 feet of side channels; (4) replanting the valley bottom with native and approved non-native plant species; (5) staging materials and equipment at campgrounds; and (6) monitoring project activities and effectiveness.

Background

BPA is a one of four regional Power Marketing Administrations within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and operates in the Pacific Northwest. BPA's operations are governed by several organic statutes, including the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act (Northwest Power Act). Among other things, this Act directs BPA to protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife affected by the development and operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS). The proposed Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation project is consistent with BPA's implementation of the Northwest Power Act. Specific details of the proposed project are fully described in the Final EIS and Appendices, and are incorporated here by reference.

The proposed project also helps BPA fulfill its obligations under the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) (ESA). Specifically, BPA identifies and funds tributary habitat restoration projects under Reasonable and Prudent Alternative action 35 of the National Oceanic

and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service 2008 FCRPS Biological Opinion, as supplemented in 2010 and 2014.

Crooked River is a tributary of the South Fork of the Clearwater River which in turn is a major tributary of the Snake River. During the 1930s through the 1950s the main stem of Crooked River was heavily impacted by dredge mining, which left large tailings piles and deep ponds throughout the valley bottom. Physical changes to the valley bottom have altered stream and riparian processes and affected aquatic and terrestrial habitat conditions. The lower two miles of Crooked River have been altered so drastically that the natural migration pattern of the stream channel and floodplain functions are restricted, instream habitat complexity is low, and the development of riparian vegetation has been impaired. These alterations have resulted in degraded fish habitat and increased water temperatures harming fish populations in Crooked River.

The selected alternative (Alternative 2) will improve fish habitat for ESA-listed fish species (Snake River steelhead trout and Columbia River bull trout) and the Forests' sensitive aquatic species (west-slope cutthroat trout, interior redband trout, spring/summer Chinook salmon, and pearlshell mussel) in part by restoring instream fish habitat complexity. Alternative 2 will also improve fish habitat and water temperatures by reestablishing natural stream meanders and floodplain connections, and improving conditions for development of healthy riparian vegetation.

Alternatives Considered

The Forests, as the lead agency under NEPA, and BPA and the other cooperating agencies (NPT and USACE) considered two alternatives in detail in the Final EIS: the No Action and the Proposed Action alternatives. The following is a description of these alternatives. More specific descriptions can be found in the Final EIS on pages 2-1 through 2-20.

Alternative 1 - No Action

Under the No Action alternative (Alternative 1), rehabilitation actions would not be conducted. Alternative 1 would not have the temporary impacts to the natural environment (land uses, vegetation, wildlife, visual resources, etc.) from construction that Alternative 2 will.

Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Alternative 2 will rehabilitate the lower two miles of Crooked River. The project area extends from 0.1 mile upstream from the mouth of Crooked River (at the Idaho Department of Fish and Game intake weir) to approximately 2.1 miles upstream. Alternative 2 includes multiple activities implemented in sequential phases over a period of four to six years beginning in 2015 and ending in 2021. The sequential phases were developed to meet requirements for managing bypass channels, stabilizing unconsolidated materials necessary to transition from each phase, balancing earthwork volumes (cut and fill), and maintaining fish passage. Rehabilitation activities that will occur throughout the phases are described below:

- **Temporary Bypass Channel and Access Road/Levee.** A temporary bypass channel will be constructed to reduce direct impacts of construction to water quality, as well as to fish and other aquatic organisms. The bypass channel (about 6,000 feet) will be constructed prior to any instream or floodplain work and remain in place (three to four years) until completion of the new floodplain and stream channel. Cofferdams or headgates will be constructed in the mainstem channel to divert Crooked River into the bypass channel. Fish and other aquatic organism salvage will occur in the main channel, mining ponds, and bypass channel before dewatering actions. Following construction, the new channel of Crooked River will be slowly rewatered during low flow, cofferdams or headgates removed, and the temporary bypass channel reshaped into the floodplain.

A temporary access road/levee will be constructed through the project area to reduce impacts to Forest Road 233 and public travelers during construction. The length of the road/levee will be approximately 6,000 feet. About 23,200 cubic yards of material excavated for the temporary bypass channel will be used in construction of the temporary access road. Three existing access roads will be used to access the valley bottom from Forest Road 233. Stream crossing structures will be installed on these existing access roads over the temporary bypass channel. Following construction of the channel, the temporary access road will be decommissioned and the stream crossing structures removed from the existing access roads. The existing access roads will be retained for recreational use.

- **Floodplain Regrading.** Approximately 115 acres of floodplain, including existing dredge tailings, will be regraded. All dredge material will be redistributed within the project area. Trees, shrubs, and rocks will be removed and stockpiled in designated staging areas. This salvaged material will be used in bank and floodplain treatments. Floodplain grading includes dredge pile excavation, pond filling, and upland construction. The total estimated earthwork quantity is 190,000 cubic yards. The new floodplain will be constructed to allow for moderate flood disturbance and distribution of sediment.

Approximately 50 acres of the new floodplain will be regraded to allow for seasonal flooding to create conditions for the formation of approximately 64 acres of wetlands, including 14 acres of open water. This will provide a net increase of 12 acres of wetlands in the project area. Secondary features, which include swales and depressions, will also be constructed to further contribute to the development of wetlands.

Another approximately 49 acres of the new floodplain will be roughened to provide microtopography such as ridges and furrows. Large woody debris will be partially buried on the floodplain to provide microsites and roughness. This will help create stability in the floodplain by breaking up flows across the surface, providing depositional areas for sediment and seeds, and increasing the water holding capacity of the soils in the floodplain.

- **New Channel Construction.** Approximately 10,960 feet of the current channel will be filled in and approximately 7,400 feet of new stream channel will be reconstructed to establish natural stream meanders and connections to floodplains. Woody bank

material will be installed along the new stream channel to provide protection from erosion. Large woody debris will also be added along approximately 9,400 feet of the stream channel to provide habitat complexity. To provide nutrients and a food source for fish, cobble substrate and large woody debris will be added to the newly created channel from the temporary bypass channel.

The stream channel will be constructed so as not to interfere with Forest Road 233. More than 2,700 feet of side channels will be constructed to provide areas of slow water for fish during high flow events, and restrict access during low flows in summer to avoid stranding.

- **Replanting.** The valley bottom will be replanted with native plant species to facilitate the continuous and natural recruitment of wood and instream substrate material. Replanting will include salvaged materials and container grown plants. Non-native plant species, approved by the Forests' native plant coordinator, will also be used to replant the project area. Groupings of plant species (vegetation communities) were identified that will fit the specific site conditions, maximize aquatic habitat function, and be sustained by channel processes. Rehabilitation treatments (floodplain features, such as swales and depressions) will create the conditions necessary to support development of the vegetation communities over time. However, the floodplains will be replanted to speed up the recovery efforts. Approximately 20,000 plants will be used to replant the project area.

To increase plant productivity, soil material will be salvaged during floodplain construction and used within the upper foot of the new floodplain to provide rooting material for the replanted vegetation. Woody material and wood chips will be distributed throughout the site to improve soil productivity. The wood chips and soil will also increase water retention in the substrate and improve plant survival.

- **Staging Areas.** Materials such as large woody debris, rock, wood chips, and soil will be staged in developed and dispersed campsites in the project area. Campsites will be temporarily closed prior to beginning construction through the duration of the project to ensure public safety. Much of the staged material will come from within the project area, but some will be imported. All soil will come from within the project area. Large woody debris and wood chips will be imported from within the Crooked River watershed or other areas on the Forests.
- **Project Monitoring.** Monitoring for implementation and effectiveness of the Final EIS design and mitigation measures, the Biological Opinions terms and conditions, and permit requirements will be completed over the life of the project. Project monitoring will evaluate survival of vegetation and changes to the floodplains, wetlands, groundwater, large woody debris, and water temperature, as well as other parameters such as presences of invasive plants.

BPA's Rationale for Decision

In making its decision to provide funding for implementation of Alternative 2, BPA has considered and balanced a variety of relevant factors. BPA considered how well each alternative under consideration – the Proposed Action alternative and the No Action alternative – would fit with BPA's statutory missions and obligations, such as the Northwest Power Act and the ESA, and meet the purposes of and need for this project. BPA also considered the environmental impacts described in the Final EIS, and public comments received throughout the NEPA process, including those received on the Draft EIS. In addition, BPA considered objections to the project received during the Forests' administrative review process (as required under 36 CFR Part 218, subpart A and B), resolutions to the objections, and changes to the Final EIS as a result of the resolutions.

BPA decided that, overall and on balance, funding implementation of Alternative 2 will meet BPA's objectives mandated under Northwest Power Act and the 2008 FCRPS Biological Opinion, as supplemented in 2010 and 2014. Funding Alternative 2 will result in improved tributary fish habitat in the Crooked River.

Funding Alternative 2 also meets the purposes of and need for the project as described in the June 2015 Final EIS (Chapter 1, pages 1-1 to 1-5). Alternative 2 activities will directly improve degraded fish habitat in the lower two miles of the river by restoring channel and floodplain functions, instream habitat complexity, and water quality. Other similar types of fish habitat restoration/rehabilitation projects in the Columbia River Basin have been successful and through project design and monitoring requirements, BPA expects Alternative 2 to be successful as well (see Response to Comment 22; FEIS, Appendix F, page 16).

BPA also considers funding for Alternative 2 to be responsive to public and regulatory concerns received during the NEPA process. Alternative 2 addresses many of these public and regulatory concerns by including mitigation measures that will be applied to reduce the short term effects of construction to soils, water quality (sediment, temperature, mercury, toxins), fish and fish habitat, public access, sensitive and invasive species, mining claims, recreation, and cultural resources (including effects to one National Historic Register Site).

Funding of Alternative 2 takes into account objections received during the Forests' administrative review process. The Forests received a total of seven objections, of which six met the objection process criteria and were reviewed. As a result of the review process, the Objection Reviewing Officer found the project in compliance with laws, regulations and policies, and required the Forests complete several instructions. The Objection Reviewing Officer response letter with specific details of the instructions can be found on the Forests' project webpage at: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=40648. The instructions involved providing additional or clarifying information to better demonstrate compliance with laws, regulations, or policies in regards to economics, water quality, mercury, and mining. Instructions, including edits to the Final EIS, have been completed.

The Forests identified Alternative 1 as the environmentally preferred alternative in their ROD. However, BPA is identifying Alternative 2 as the environmentally preferable alternative because

of the direct improvements to the natural environment. Although Alternative 2 will create short-term construction impacts on various resource areas (e.g., water quality, fish and fish habitat, floodplains, cultural resources), its long-term benefits for fish and water quality in the Crooked River watershed make it the alternative that best enhances the natural environment.

Mitigation

All mitigation measures described in the Final EIS have been adopted by the Forests. A complete list of these measures is in the attached Mitigation Action Plan. The Nez Perce – Clearwater National Forests will be responsible for the execution of all mitigation measures.

Public Availability

This ROD will be available to all interested parties and affected persons and agencies. It is being sent to all stakeholders who requested a copy. Copies of the Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project Draft and Final EISs; the Forests' Draft and Final RODs, and additional copies of this ROD are available from BPA's Public Information Center, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3621. Copies of these documents may also be obtained by using BPA's nationwide toll-free document request line: 1-800-622-4520, or by accessing BPA's project Web site: www.bpa.gov/goto/CrookedRiver.

Decision

BPA has decided to fund implementation of the Crooked River Valley Rehabilitation Project.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

<u>/s/ Elliot E. Mainzer</u>	<u>August 13, 2015</u>
Elliot E. Mainzer	Date
Administrator and	
Chief Executive Officer	