

Columbian White-tailed Deer Translocation

Finding of No Significant Impact

Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA-2088
June 2019

SUMMARY

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) announce their environmental findings for their proposal to translocate up to 50 Columbian white-tailed deer (CWTD) (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*) from an island in the Columbia River to conservation land owned by Columbia Land Trust and purchased with funding from BPA in Columbia County, Oregon. BPA would fund the translocations; the Service would implement the trapping, transport, and release of CWTD.

BPA and the Service prepared an environmental assessment (EA) evaluating the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative. A draft of this EA was released for public comment in October 2018. Four responsive letters were received¹, with comments emphasizing the impact translocated CWTD might have on adjacent landowners' use of their property. A public meeting was held on March 21, 2019, to meet with landowners and others to discuss the translocation proposal and their concerns.

Based on the analysis in the EA and the comments provided by the public, 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) of 1969 (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 its funding of the Proposed Action. The Service would issue their own FONSI for their implementation of the project. The Proposed Action is not the type of action that normally requires preparation of an EIS and is not without precedent.

The attached Mitigation Action Plan identifies the mitigation measures that BPA and the Service are committed to implementing as part of the Proposed Action.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

This FONSI will be mailed to individuals who previously requested it; a notification of availability will be mailed to other potentially affected parties; and the EA and FONSI will be posted on BPA's project website: www.bpa.gov/goto/CWTDtranslocation.

PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, BPA would fund the Service to translocate up to 50 deer from Tenasillahe Island, which is a part of the Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the Columbian White-tailed Deer (JBH), to the Columbia Stock Ranch (CSR), which is a 935-acre parcel owned and managed by Columbia Land Trust for conservation. The Service would translocate about 30 deer in 2019 and

¹ A fifth letter was also received which was provided as Exhibit A for one of the four comment letters received. This exhibit is a copy of a comment letter sent in response to a separate project previously proposed on Columbia Stock Ranch.

about 20 deer in 2020. The specific number of deer transferred in 2020 will depend on the success of the 2019 effort. Translocations would occur during the winter between December 1 and March 31 each year.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, BPA would not fund the Service to translocate CWTD from Tenasillahe Island to CSR.

SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

To determine whether the Proposed Action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, the potential impacts on human and natural resources were evaluated and presented in Chapter 3 of the EA. To summarize potential impacts, four impact levels were used - high, moderate, low, and no impact. These impact levels are based on the considerations of context and intensity defined in the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1508.27). High impacts could be considered significant impacts, if not mitigated, while moderate and low impacts are not. Based on the analysis presented in the EA, the Proposed Action is expected to 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. Many of the effects discussed below would be minimized through the application of mitigation measures identified in the Mitigation Action Plan.

The resources considered in detail included:

- Wildlife and Fish
- Land Use and Recreation
- Socioeconomics

Because the Proposed Action does not include ground-disturbing or site-modifying actions, the following resources were considered and eliminated from detailed analysis because there would be little to no impacts.

- Geology and Soils
- Water (quality and quantity)
- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Vegetation
- Cultural Resources
- Scenic Values
- Transportation

Impacts to vegetation by browsing deer were not addressed, because browse effects by CWTD (i.e., the only foreseeable effects on vegetation) are likely indistinguishable from those already created by the Columbian black-tailed deer (CBTD) which currently occur on CSR and adjacent lands.

Wildlife and Fish

Impacts to wildlife and fish would be low to moderate.

- Under the Proposed Action, the Service would translocate up to 50 deer. The number of

CWTD in the Columbia River Distinct Population Segment would not immediately change; it would merely be redistributed.

- The new CSR subpopulation would be anticipated to link to the Ridgefield and Sauvie/Scappoose subpopulations (upstream) and the Cottonwood/Kalama subpopulation (downstream) through dispersing individuals. This new subpopulation and the connectivity it would provide may have a moderate long-term beneficial effect on the recovery of CWTD.
- A reduction in the CWTD subpopulation on Tenasillahe Island decreases competition for available resources, which may improve physical condition of the remaining animals, potentially increasing survival and fecundity. Deer numbers on the island are above management goals, would be so after the translocation reductions, and are expected to rebound. There would be a low effect on the Tenasillahe Island subpopulation even if no rebound occurred.
- For deer being translocated, the stress of capture, handling, transport, and adaptation to a new location may lead to somewhat higher mortality than what is expected for a population that is not moved, though this mortality is anticipated to be low. Implementation of mitigation measures would aid in keeping injury and mortality rates low.
- Additional risk to the translocated CWTD could come from hazards at CSR not experienced at Tenasillahe Island. Motor vehicle collisions, as an example, may occur, but anticipated to be low as has been the case with prior translocations.
- Some Columbian black-tailed deer (CBTD) are expected to be displaced by CWTD at CSR. Roosevelt elk would likely be unaffected. Coyote numbers would likely decline in the short-term because of control measures to be implemented at CSR. No effects are expected on other small mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles at CSR.
- The Proposed Action has no ground-disturbing activities, and would take no action within aquatic habitats. No fish or fish habitats would be affected by this action.
- Habitats for other ESA-listed species in the area (streaked horned lark and listed salmonids) would not be affected, and transplanted CWTD disturbance of these species would be no different from that of current resident CBTD.

Land Use and Recreation

Impacts to land use and recreation would be low to moderate.

- The translocation of CWTD may decrease the acreage and the number of days that grazing occurs by the one rancher that grazes cattle on CSR.
- Some CWTD may establish home ranges on private lands surrounding CSR with resulting deer browse damage to commercial and private property. Though deer browse damage from CBTD is currently occurring, CWTD are listed under ESA and control actions are regulated differently. An existing ESA Section 4(d) rule and other financial and regulatory assistance are available to minimize impacts to private landowners from animal damage by ESA-listed CWTD. Prior translocations in the lower Columbia River have resulted in few such complaints, and few issues are expected here.
- No ongoing land management practices would be affected since land uses currently applied would not intentionally harass or harm CWTD. Also actions likely to take CWTD are currently prohibited under State law concerning wildlife, including CBTD.
- Private landowners and ESA-listed CWTD have coexisted successfully along the lower Columbia River for decades and the Service's assistance and education efforts would help avoid or reduce land use conflicts from the translocation of CWTD to CSR.
- There are currently no recreational opportunities on CSR (i.e., it is closed to public use) and

thus the translocation of CWTD would not impact recreation or public use.

- Private landowners around CSR may allow hunting; and CWTD, which cannot legally be hunted, would now be seen in areas where hunters previously expected to see only CBTD. State-sponsored hunter education has been successful in the past to reduce potential effects on current CBTD hunting, resulting in no changes to local hunting regulations, and the same is anticipated here.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

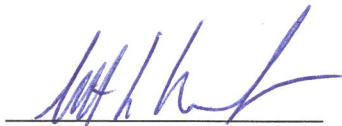
Impacts to socioeconomics would be low.

- The Proposed Action would not create income opportunities for local populations. Jobs would not be created, tourist attractions would not be developed, and wildlife viewing and hunting opportunities would not increase. The translocation efforts may generate additional spending at nearby services while the translocation is being conducted, but this impact is expected to be low.
- Translocations of CWTD to CSR would not result in displacements of human activity or land uses and would not generate any human health or environmental effects to minority or low-income populations, or others.

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.

Issued in Portland, Oregon



SCOTT G. ARMENTROUT
Vice President
Environment, Fish and Wildlife

8/01/2019
Date

Columbian White-tailed Deer Translocation Mitigation Action Plan

Mitigation Action Plan

This Mitigation Action Plan is part of the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Columbian White-tailed Deer Translocation Project. This action would provide funding to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for the translocation of up to 50 Columbian white-tailed deer (CWTD) (*Odocoileus virginianus leucurus*) from Tenasillahe Island in the Columbia River to land owned by Columbia Land Trust in Columbia County, Oregon between 2019 and 2021.

This Mitigation Action Plan is for the Proposed Action and includes all of the integral elements and commitments made in the Environmental Assessment (EA) to mitigate potential adverse environmental impacts.

The BPA, and the Service (and its contractors and co-operators) would be responsible for implementing the mitigation measures during various phases of project work.

If you have any general questions about the project, contact the Project Manager, Steve Gagnon at 503-230-3375, or email skgagnon@bpa.gov.

This Mitigation Action Plan may be amended if revisions are needed due to new information or if there are any significant project changes.

Mitigation Measures

Minimization and mitigation measures have been identified to reduce potential impacts associated with the Proposed Action, and are provided below in the table below.

Mitigation Action Plan

Mitigation Measure	Timing and responsible party
Restrict translocations to the period December 1 to March 31.	Before and during translocations; USFWS
Comply with the Special Terms and Conditions of permits issued for deer capture and translocation.	During translocations; USFWS
Move entire family groups of CWTD together. Does will not be separated from fawns by translocation actions if at all possible.	During translocations; USFWS
Follow trapping guidelines in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's capture plan to minimize stress and reduce time spent handling and transporting deer.	Before and during translocations; USFWS
Release family groups into small shelters where they can calm down, regroup, and then exit volitionally.	During translocations; USFWS
Monitor translocations as described in Section 2.1 of the EA.	During and after translocations; USFWS
Apply predator control through contract with APHIS to ensure it is conducted in an effective manner that minimizes harm to non-target species.	Before and after translocations; USFWS
Conduct outreach and informative actions to inform local communities of the translocated CWTD.	Before and after translocations; USFWS