

Kootenai River Lower Meander Project Final Environmental Assessment

Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA-2051
May 2017

This document is the final Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Kootenai River Lower Meander Project. This document has been prepared as an abbreviated final EA because there have been no substantial changes to the proposed action, alternatives, or environmental analysis presented in the draft EA. This abbreviated final EA provides comments received on the draft EA and Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) responses to the comments. This final EA should be used as a companion document to the draft EA (DOE/EA-2051, dated March 2017), which contains the full text describing the project, its potential environmental effects, and mitigation measures to reduce impacts. For readers of this final EA who do not already have a copy of the draft EA, it is available on the project webpage at www.bpa.gov/goto/KootenaiMeander.

Summary

BPA proposes to fund the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (Tribe) to restore portions of the Kootenai River near Bonners Ferry, Idaho. The Kootenai River Lower Meander Project would involve installing structures on the river banks and excavating areas in the river to create deeper pools of water, as well as developing and enhancing islands to be planted with native riparian vegetation. The project would improve Kootenai River habitat to benefit Endangered Species Act-listed Kootenai River White Sturgeon and other native fish, would complement other restoration on the Kootenai River, and would help mitigate for effects caused by Libby Dam located upstream in Montana.

Draft EA Comment Period

To solicit comments on the draft EA, BPA mailed the EA, or notification of its availability, to affected governments, agencies, tribes, organizations, and individuals. The comment period ran from March 24, 2017, to April 25, 2017.

In addition, BPA posted the EA on the project website and posted an advertisement in the local newspaper. One comment in support of the project was received through the project website and so did not necessitate a change to the EA.

Comments and Responses

One comment was received during the public comment period for the draft EA.

KootEA17 0001 - Monzingo

Does the draft EA analyze the resources important to you? (question from BPA comment form): Yes, because it helps make better fishing on the river and helps stop the river banks from washing away. I think all of these projects will help all wildlife and help the fish in the river. I hope you are planning on fixing the bank and pools on the north side project 2015.

Response to Comment KootEA17 0001 - Monzingo

Thank you for your comment. BPA provides funding to the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho to maintain all of the structures that have been installed as part of the Kootenai River Restoration Master Plan.

Changes to the EA

4.3.4 Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle Protection Act

The two paragraphs describing the project's compliance with the Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle Protection Act have been revised:

The Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle Protection Act (16 USC 668–668d) addresses taking, or possessing of, and commerce in bald and golden eagles, with limited exceptions. The Act only covers intentional acts or acts in “wanton disregard” of the safety of bald or golden eagles.

No golden eagles have been observed in the project area. Three bald and golden eagles nests exist within or near the project area. These nests have been occupied recently and so are expected to be occupied in 2017 and 2018. These nests have been observed regularly over the past several years and eaglets have fledged (left the nest) in mid-July. Construction activities for the proposed project are scheduled to begin in August 2017 and August 2018 so that effects on nesting bald eagles from construction noise would not occur. may temporarily use the proposed project area, but no nesting sites or long term occupancy has been observed. Therefore, because the project would not involve knowing take or other acts in wanton disregard of bald or golden eagles, its implementation would not violate the provisions of the Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

Table 6 Mitigation Measures

The following mitigation measure was listed in Table 6 as being associated with Cultural Resources:

Install permanent signs at the Twin Rivers boat ramp requesting that boaters and tubers stay clear of the restoration area in order to protect the restoration work. Signs would also contain an educational element to describe the different project locations, the types of structures, and the benefits they provide for fish.

This mitigation measure is associated with Recreation, not cultural resources.