

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Bonneville Power Administration

Funding of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks' Sekokini Springs Isolation Facility

Finding of No Significant Impact

Summary

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), Department of Energy (DOE), is proposing to partially fund construction and operation of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks' (MFWP) Sekokini Springs Isolation Facility Project (Sekokini Springs Project). Under the Proposed Action, the MFWP would modify the existing infrastructure to improve the hatchery facility and create naturalized rearing ponds and water conveyance channels. The new facility would allow the spawning, rearing, and isolation of up to four genetically unique stocks of westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) originating from parent stocks obtained from the drainages where the offspring would be released. The alterations to the site, as proposed by MFWP, would require the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS) to modify MFWP's existing Special Use Permit (SUP), which expires on December 31, 2017.

The USFS has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluating the proposed changes to the Sekokini Springs Isolation Facility. BPA is a cooperating agency for the EA. The USFS analyzed the impacts of the project and found that there would be no significant impacts to the quality of the human environment based on construction, operation and maintenance of the facility. Based on the finding of no significant impact (FONSI), USFS will modify the SUP. MFWP has decided to move forward with project implementation once it has secured funding.

Based on the analysis in the EA and the determination in the USFS FONSI, BPA agrees 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. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required and BPA is issuing this FONSI for its funding of the Sekokini Springs Project.

Public Availability

The USFS FONSI will be mailed directly to interested parties by the USFS; a notification of availability will be mailed to other potentially affected parties; the USFS FONSI will be posted on the USFS Web site; and the BPA FONSI will be posted on BPA's Web site with links to the additional documents.

Copies

For copies of this FONSI, please call BPA's toll-free document request line: 800-622-4520. This document is also available at the BPA website: www.efw.bpa.gov; please refer to the project by name.

For copies of the USFS FONSI or the Final EA, please write or call the Hungry Horse-Glacier View Ranger District: 10 Hungry Horse Dr. Hungry Horse, MT 59919; 406-387-3863. The documents are also available online: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=28374

For Further Information

Hannah Dondy-Kaplan, Bonneville Power Administration- KEC-4, PO BOX 3621, Portland, OR, 97208-3621; phone number: 503-230-4071; fax: 503-230-5699; email: hadondy-kaplan@bpa.gov.

Background

The Sekokini Springs site is proposed for the WCT rearing and isolation facility because it offers (1) artesian spring water sources free of fish pathogens, and (2) existing infrastructure that could be upgraded or supplemented rather than requiring completely new construction. Wild trout cannot be transported to state hatcheries, so existing public hatcheries are unavailable. In addition, existing facilities do not have the capacity to raise wild native fish in isolation while they are examined for genetic purity and reportable fish pathogens. For these reasons, the EA considered only two alternative actions: No Action and the Proposed Action, described below.

BPA and the USFS announced the proposed Sekokini Springs Project on November 25, 2009. On December 1, 2009 a scoping letter was sent to potentially affected individuals, government agencies, organizations, and groups interested in, or affected by, the Sekokini Springs Isolation Facility. The USFS received feedback on the Proposed Action from three people through letters and emails.

Since the scoping comment period, a planning team comprised of specialists from many natural resource disciplines reviewed public feedback; incorporated design features associated with the original proposed action; and analyzed potential effects from the proposed activities.

A preliminary EA that addressed all comments received during scoping was issued for additional public review and comment on February 4, 2011. No comments were received before the closing of the 30-day comment period. The USFS issued a FONSI on April 6, 2011. On April 12, 2011, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council approved MFWP proceeding with the renovation and operation of the Sekokini Springs Isolation Facility, as per the Sekokini Springs Master Plan and Independent Scientific Review Panel recommendations.

Proposed Action

BPA proposes to partially fund MFWP's Sekokini Springs Project. Under the Proposed Action, the existing infrastructure would be modified to improve the hatchery facility and create naturalized rearing ponds and water conveyance channels. To accomplish this, the following activities would take place:

- Expand the SUP area boundary to provide access to the Flathead River to restore hydrologic stability and habitat at the site;
- Expand the existing hatchery building and construct a roof extension;
- Re-contour existing ponds and construct stream channels connecting ponds and water sources;
- Continue the existing noxious weed management program;
- Prepare a vegetation management plan to guide restoration of portions of the site that are currently in disturbed condition because of past management activities.

No Action Alternative

Under the No-Action Alternative, MFWP would continue to operate the existing Sekokini Springs facility at the existing level of use under the existing SUP. There would be no changes in extent of the SUP area or reconstruction of the existing ponds and stream channels. Regular maintenance and efforts to manage noxious weeds and stabilize areas of active erosion would continue.

Significance of Potential Impacts of the Proposed Action

To determine whether the Proposed Action or the No Action alternative has the potential to cause significant environmental impacts, the potential impact of each alternative on the human and natural environment was evaluated. This impact analysis is detailed in Chapter 3 of the EA and summarized below for the Proposed Action.

The USFS determined that, based on the context and intensity of the impacts identified for the Proposed Action, the Sekokini Springs Project would have no significant impacts. After reviewing the EA and the USFS FONSI, BPA has determined that partially funding the Sekokini Springs Project would have no significant impact. This determination is based on the following discussion.

Vegetation; Threatened and Endangered Plant Species;

Impacts to vegetation, including threatened and endangered plant species would be low.

- Although construction activities would disturb and destroy some vegetation (primarily of grass, forb, and weed species), the total area of affected vegetation would be less than two acres.

- Disturbance minimization would come from staging construction materials during the winter months when ground is frozen, and using existing access roads. Best Management Practices for weed control would be implemented. MFWP would restore disturbed sites after construction is complete. The total amount of restored acres would result in a net gain of native vegetation (see table 2 in the EA for more information).
- Habitat for threatened water howellia (*Howellia aquatilis*) and Spalding's catchfly (*Silene spaldingli*) exists in the project area, but no species have been observed on field visits. The Forest Service Botanist prepared a Biological Assessment (BA) and determined that the Proposed Action would have no effect on these threatened species.
- The Botanist also prepared a Biological Evaluation (BE) and determined that the Project would have no effect for sensitive plants that are not threatened or endangered.

Wetlands and Floodplains

Impacts to wetlands and floodplains would be low.

- There would be direct and indirect effects on wetlands from the construction/expansion of ponds and stream channels. The new construction would result in a net increase of wetlands in the project site. The forested wetland would not be affected.
- No floodplain functions or elevations would be altered.

Soils

Impacts to soils would be low.

- Approximately two acres of soil would be disturbed during construction, which could result in the loss of the surface organic layer, increased erosion, sediment transport, or create unstable slopes.
- Montana State Best Management Practices and Forest Service Soil and Water Conservation Practices would ensure that soil and water resources are protected. Additionally, construction design plans would improve existing or potential eroding slopes and stream banks.

Water Resources

Impacts to water resources would be low.

- Construction would not affect water quantity; there would be no consumptive use and springs would be routed around construction areas.

- Soil disturbance and removal of vegetation during construction could result in erosion, suspension of fine particulates, and sediment transport to water bodies. These amounts are expected to be small however due to construction occurring “in the dry”. BMPs would further reduce the likelihood of turbidity and sediment deposition.

Fisheries

Impacts to fisheries would be low.

- There would be no activities that would alter the riparian corridor.
- Construction of Reach 5 would involve only limited removal of woody vegetation.
- There would be limited fines introduced to the system and BMPs would further reduce sediment during construction. At no time is the level of suspended sediment expected to reach a level that would adversely affect fish. After construction is complete an overall net reduction of sediment in the channels is expected.

Operational effects to fish are expected to be very low and likely undetectable.

- The impact to riparian vegetation would be minimal.
- There would be no change to water quantity delivered to the Flathead River.
- There would be no change to impervious surface or surface run-off.
- Plans have been developed that address the potential for introduced pathogens from the donor stock and any effects to water quality from the fish rearing itself. These plans address protocol for when a situation arises if any potential pathogens are detected.

Wildlife, Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species, ESA-Listed Wildlife

Impacts to wildlife would be low to moderate.

- During construction, wildlife would likely avoid the area due to noise.
- Some small animals, such as rodents, amphibians, and reptiles, may be harmed or killed by machinery.
- Increasing the size of the ponds would increase habitat for native species. If excessive predation of WCT occurs, fencing would be installed and the native wildlife utilizing those ponds would have to relocate. Overall, the effect on the local amphibian population is expected to be minor.

Impacts to threatened or endangered species would be low.

The USFS completed biological assessments that found the following:

Species	Determination
Grizzly Bear	May effect – not likely to adversely affect grizzly bears or their habitat.
Gray Wolf	May effect – not likely to adversely affect gray wolf or their habitat.
Canada Lynx	No Effect on Canada Lynx and Canada lynx critical habitat.
Bull Trout	No Effect on Bull trout and critical bull trout habitat
Spalding's Catchfly	No effect
Water Howellia	No effect

For further details on the effects to specific species, please refer to sections 3.7 and 3.8 of the EA.

Aesthetic and Recreational Resources

Impacts to aesthetic and recreational resources would be low.

- The primary effect on visual and recreational resources would be noise associated with construction. Noise from heavy equipment necessary for excavation of the stream channels and ponds is expected to be detectable from the river corridor. Equipment operation would occur over the course of several days to four weeks every year during the summer months for about three years.
- It is unlikely that any equipment or construction activity would be visible from outside the proposed SUP boundary, with the exception of construction of a short portion of Reach 5 downstream from the two-way fish barrier to the Flathead River.
- Although construction would take place during the period of highest recreational use of the river, construction activities would be of such short duration that relatively few users are expected to be affected.
- Day-to-day operations of the facility would not be visible and likely not detectable from the river corridor and generally would not be different from the No Action Alternative.

- River users would encounter the Reach 5 stream channel but it would appear natural and should not detract from the users' experience of the river corridor.

Air Quality

Impacts to air quality would be low to moderate.

- Road dust would be created from the construction of the Proposed Action, but dust abatement would be used if needed on the access road.
- Emissions from construction would temporarily degrade local air quality.

Heritage Resources

There would be no impacts to heritage resources

- There are no known sites in the project area. If any unknown sites are discovered during construction BPA or the USFS's inadvertent discovery provisions would be followed.

Cumulative Effects

- There would be a minimal but positive gain for native vegetation communities over time.
- There are no Threatened and Endangered plant species or sensitive plant species in the project area.
- The net gain of wetland on the project site is only 0.4 acres, which would not result in measurable changes in habitat, run-off detention, or other wetland function at any larger temporal or spatial scale.
- There would be short-term soil impacts during construction but over the long term slopes would be more stable and less erosion would occur.
- Because the springs are hydrologically connected to the upstream kettle lakes, there may be an effect to the quality and quantity of the springwater based on future development or groundwater withdrawal.
- There would be no cumulative effects on fish or fisheries on the upper portion of the Flathead River.
- The overall environment for wildlife would be improved, but there would be an increased human presence as well. However, this change combined with expected increases in human disturbance in the area at-large, is unlikely to trigger a measurable impact.

- Effects from implementing the Proposed Action are not likely to be a measurable contribution to any cumulative adverse effects on any threatened, endangered or sensitive wildlife species.
- There would be no cumulative impact on recreational access or on the recreational experience. Noise impacts would only be during construction.
- Any negative effects on air quality would be temporary.

Determination

Based on the descriptions and analyses in the EA, as summarized here, BPA determines that the Proposed Action, the partial funding of MFWP's modifications to the Sekokini Springs Isolation Facility, is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA, 42 U.S.C.4321 et seq. Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared, and BPA is issuing this FONSI.

Issued in Portland, OR.

/s/ F. Lorraine Bodi

F. Lorraine Bodi

Vice President

Environment, Fish and Wildlife

May 9, 2011

Date