

CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) must mitigate for fish and wildlife habitat that was lost during development of the Federal Columbia River Power System; it does so in part by funding individual watershed programs and projects recommended by the Northwest Power Planning Council. (Watershed is defined as an area(s) drained by a specific stream.) At present, Bonneville addresses all watershed project issues and impacts on a site-specific basis: project by project and watershed by watershed. This approach is inefficient, because BPA must readdress many common issues that arise repeatedly with each successive project, and because it does not foster consistency across projects, jurisdictions, and regions, or over time. BPA needs to find a way to ensure that consistency.

1.1 UNDERLYING NEED FOR ACTION

The network of rivers that feeds into the Pacific Northwest's Columbia River Basin has been altered by dams built to generate power, as well as to control flooding and to provide navigation, irrigation, and recreation services. Twenty-nine Federal hydroelectric dams and numerous other dams now regulate the flows of many of these rivers. Figure 1-1 shows the Columbia River Basin watersheds.

Development of this hydropower system has had far-reaching effects on wildlife and fish, and their habitats. Many floodplains and riparian habitats important to fish and wildlife were inundated when reservoirs filled behind dams. These developments have acted to change or eliminate fish and wildlife habitat. The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is responsible for mitigating the loss of fish and wildlife habitat caused by the construction and operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System. (See Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act [Northwest Power Act], 16 U.S.C. 839 *et seq.*, Section 4.[h][10][A].)

Specific mitigation actions that BPA may support to satisfy this responsibility are generally developed in a public process managed by the Northwest Power Planning Council (Council). BPA is asked to implement projects included in the Council's Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program (Fish and Wildlife Program). BPA's proposed approach to the watershed planning process and this EIS is designed to be fully consistent with the Council's Fish and Wildlife Program. The EIS anticipates future refinements to the Council's Fish and Wildlife Program by providing flexibility through a wide array of techniques, and through a planning approach that does not dictate site-specific solutions. Potential actions addressed under this EIS cover a wide range of activities and a variety of potential implementors, each with different points of view and mandates. For instance, present and future BPA fish mitigation and watershed conservation and rehabilitation actions with potential environmental effects are expected to include the following:

- in-channel modifications and fish habitat improvement structures;
- riparian restoration and other vegetation treatment techniques;
- agricultural management techniques for crops, animal facilities, and grazing;
- road management techniques;
- forest management techniques;
- urban area techniques;
- recreation management techniques;
- mining reclamation; and
- similar watershed conservation actions.

Potential project implementors and managers include Indian tribes, state agencies, property owners, private conservation groups, and Federal agencies. The range of actions and actors means that ensuring consistency from project to project is difficult. BPA needs to ensure that individual watershed management projects are planned and managed with appropriate consistency across projects, jurisdictions, and ecosystems, as well as over time.

1.2 PURPOSES

BPA intends to base its choices among alternatives on the following objectives:

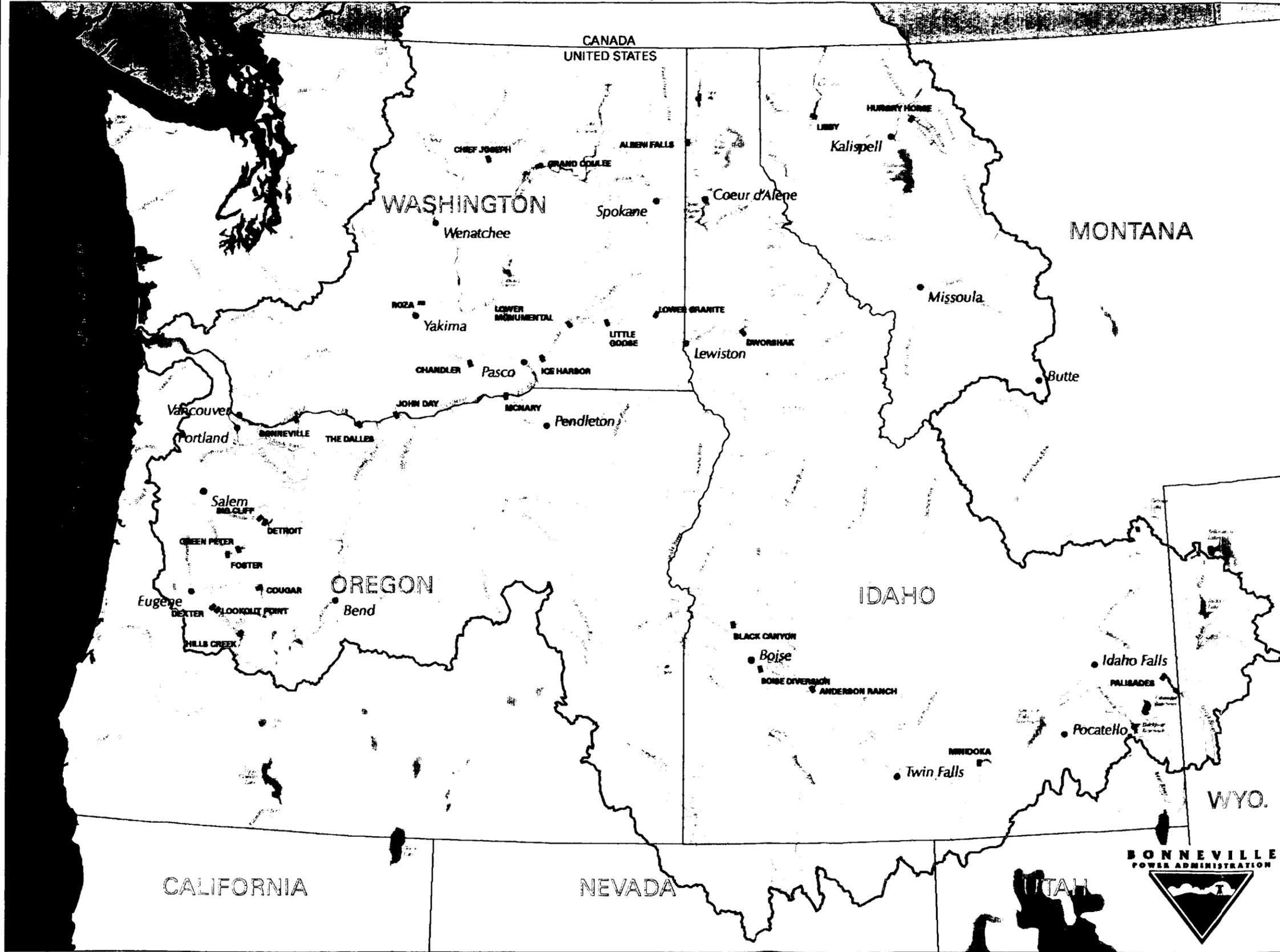
- Achievement of the Fish and Wildlife Program's aquatic habitat objectives through an ecosystem-based approach for watershed management projects to be funded by BPA. Reports by at least three independent scientific panels (Independent Scientific Group, National Research Council, and the National Marine Fisheries Service Salmon Recovery Team) have called for ecologically oriented approaches to restoration of fish and wildlife habitat. While the primary emphasis of the watershed program is to address anadromous and resident fish habitat impacts, BPA realizes the importance of looking for ways to address mitigation from an ecosystem standpoint, not focusing just on fish;
- Achievement of cost and administrative efficiency;
- Compliance with all laws and regulations; and
- Environmental protection.

See Council's Fish and Wildlife Program (sections 7.6A, Habitat Goal, and 7.6D, Habitat Objectives) for more detailed information on the program's aquatic habitat objectives.

1.3 USES OF THIS DOCUMENT

This environmental impact statement (EIS) is being prepared to help meet BPA's goals by establishing a process and protocols to standardize and coordinate the environmental decision and

BPA Watershed Management Program - Fig. 1-1: "Columbia River Basin Watersheds"

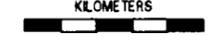


Legend

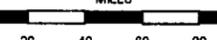
-  Federal Hydroelectric Dam
-  Hydrologic Unit
-  River
-  State Boundary
-  Columbia River Basin



SCALE 1:4015000
KILOMETERS



MILES



compliance processes needed to approve watershed projects within various watershed management plans. This EIS, and the processes within it, will be used by BPA staff to meet their National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance requirements as they make decisions about funding proposed projects. We anticipate that projects could fall into two categories:

- Proposed projects that do not adhere to the guidance and procedures discussed in this EIS. They will either be denied (if they are contrary to the preferred alternative) or will be evaluated under a separate and project-specific NEPA process.
- Proposed projects that follow the general procedures and protocols discussed in the EIS. They are more likely to be funded and are more likely to be processed promptly if their techniques and impacts are considered consistent with this EIS.

Watershed Plans developed through the Watershed Management Planning Process for specific watersheds in the basin are expected to contain many concepts, policies, and individual projects. It is not anticipated that the Plans themselves would be submitted to BPA for approval and funding; rather, specific projects *within* such Plans would be submitted. Therefore, this EIS has no direct relationship to future Watershed Plans except to provide guidance as to the types of steps that BPA expects that proposers will follow in order to receive funding approval for the projects within those Plans and to do so in a coordinated NEPA process.

In the future, BPA expects to continue to receive applications for funding watershed improvement projects in various watersheds. To receive approval, the projects must have been evaluated by sponsors using the eight-step process (described in Chapter 2). BPA further expects that such projects will have been proposed and evaluated within a Watershed Management Plan that would have examined numerous projects—some near term, and some for future consideration. BPA will consider projects proposed individually or collectively, use this EIS as appropriate to help satisfy the NEPA process for funding those projects, and make funding decisions on those projects. BPA considers Watershed Management Plans to be a vehicle for proposing and evaluating watershed projects by the authors of the Plans. Thus, this EIS may assist in plan development, but it is not *intended to be used as a NEPA compliance document for plans*. This EIS will be used as a NEPA compliance document for projects only.

1.4 BACKGROUND

The Northwest Power Act recognized that development and operation of the Federal hydroelectric dams of the Columbia River and its tributaries have affected fish and wildlife resources. The Act created the Council, in part, to develop a program to protect, mitigate, and enhance recovery efforts for fish and wildlife in the Columbia River Basin.

Since 1992, BPA has funded a number of small demonstration projects under the Model Watershed Program. The intent of these projects was to design a restoration plan and begin to carry out some of the activities on a small scale. The model watersheds include the Grande Ronde River and its sub-basins in Oregon (Board of Directors of the Grande Ronde Model Watershed Program 1994); the Tucannon River and Pataha Creek watersheds (which currently have plans in the draft stage in Washington); the Asotin Creek watershed (Asotin Creek

Bonneville Power Administration Watershed Management Program Final EIS

Conservation District 1995), also in Washington; and the Lemhi River, Pahsimeroi River and East Fork Salmon River watersheds in Idaho (Idaho Soil Conservation Commission 1995).

In addition to the Model Watershed Program, the Council approved (April 1996) a number of "Early Action" watershed projects for implementation with FY 1996 funds earmarked for Endangered Species mitigation. The goal of these projects is to assist recovery efforts for anadromous and resident fish in the Columbia River Basin.

The Council has incorporated the principle of adaptive management as part of its Fish and Wildlife Program:

In forging a program to address the needs of fish and wildlife in the Columbia Basin, the region faces the problem of resolving these facts: 1) prompt action must be taken to arrest the declines in many populations; and 2) the scientific basis for many actions is limited and often conflicting. This conflict is recognized in the (Northwest) Power Act. Congress directed the Council to use the best *available* scientific information and not to await scientific certainty prior to acting.

Reflecting this charge, the Council has taken, and will continue to take, a number of significant actions on the basis of the available, and often limited, scientific information. The Council continues to recognize the need for prompt action despite scientific uncertainty. . . . The Council emphasizes the need to improve the scientific basis for the program and to *learn* from the implementation of the program. [Council 1995, pages 2-5]

With planning completed for many of the model watersheds and with the potential to expand the watershed program, BPA decided to prepare this Watershed Management Program EIS to evaluate the potential environmental impacts, both positive and negative, of establishing a guidance framework for all future watershed projects.

1.5 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

1.5.1 Other BPA Watershed Mitigation Program Environmental Analysis

Planning for several watershed management projects, and associated environmental review, has proceeded during preparation of this EIS. These projects are as follows:

- Watershed Management Program Early Actions Projects (Categorical Exclusion or CX), covering several projects throughout the Columbia River Basin in the states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana.
- Methow Valley Irrigation District Project (Environmental Assessment or EA), covering a specific project to provide in-stream flows for fish in the Methow and Twisp rivers in the state of Washington.

BPA decisions regarding these projects have been covered by separate NEPA compliance documents; these are independent of this EIS and will not in any way dictate its outcome.

1.5.2 Columbia River System Operation Review (SOR) EIS

In December 1995, BPA, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), as joint lead agencies, published the SOR final EIS (DOE/EIS-0170). That EIS examined the impacts of various hydro system operating strategies, including impacts on fish resources. Appendices C and K of the EIS focus on resident and anadromous fish and recommended mitigation measures that may be included in future Fish and Wildlife Program amendments.

1.5.3 Wildlife Mitigation Program EIS

In March 1997, BPA published a Final EIS (DOE/EIS - 0246) on its Wildlife Mitigation Program. As with the Watershed Management Program, BPA proposes to establish standards and guidelines for planning and implementing wildlife conservation and rehabilitation projects throughout the Columbia River Basin. Although the underlying need of the Wildlife Mitigation Program is mitigation for the loss of wildlife habitat caused by the construction and operation of Federal hydroelectric projects in the Basin, many of the program's techniques are similar (but not identical) to those for watershed mitigation. Much of the environmental impact analysis and many of the potential standards and guidelines addressed in the Watershed Management Program EIS have also been included in the Wildlife Mitigation Program EIS (BPA 1997).

1.5.4 Coordination with Other Federal Agency Ecosystem EISs

BPA has attempted to integrate this EIS with other Federal ecosystem-type EISs, such as the U.S. Forest Service(USFS)/Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Interior Basin Ecosystem Management Project EISs, by proposing to adopt the watershed-based project planning process developed for the USFS Ecosystem EISs. The eight-step planning process proposed in the Watershed Management Program EIS is adapted from *The Ecosystem Approach: Healthy Ecosystems and Sustainable Economies* (Interagency Ecosystem Management Task Force, 1995). Several of the steps from this report further integration by the following means:

- requiring coordination with other stakeholders, which would include Federal agencies (Step 2); and
- requiring a characterization of the historical and present site conditions and trends, which would include ongoing ecosystem management activities by other agencies and entities (Step 3).

Each of these steps in this EIS has been modified according to the respective emphasis of each alternative. Watershed groups would be encouraged to consult with other agencies regarding management direction that might apply in their watersheds, and to use the database of information developed for these EISs wherever it appears to be useful.

1.6 DECISIONS TO BE MADE

Preparation of this document is intended to fulfill BPA's NEPA requirements. Two decisions will be made from this document.

BPA must decide:

- whether to adopt a set of management principles to guide all watershed management projects as selected by the Council, and
- if so, which set.

In the course of making these decisions, BPA will also be resolving the following issues:

1. Whether and to what extent BPA should prescribe conditions for funding types of watershed mitigation actions.
2. Whether BPA should eliminate any watershed mitigation techniques from future funding consideration.
3. What role(s) might be most appropriate for public, tribal, and agency participation in planning proposed fish and wildlife management projects.

If BPA were to adopt a set of watershed governing principles, individual projects could then be undertaken (once approved for funding) with the development and implementation of a Project Management Plan and a tiered, more focused project-specific NEPA analysis (unless the anticipated impacts or project components were to differ substantially from those evaluated in this EIS). If BPA were to decide *not* to adopt a set of principles (the No Action alternative), each individual project would be required to evaluate environmental impacts under NEPA.

1.7 SCOPING

A Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS for the Watershed Management Program EIS was issued on March 18, 1996. Scoping meetings were held throughout BPA's service area with interested parties, including representatives of Native American tribes and of local and county governments. Meeting sites included Salmon, Idaho; Missoula, Montana; Elgin, Oregon; and Asotin, Starbuck, and Pomeroy, Washington. About 50 people attended these meetings in all, and 48 letters and comment sheets were received on issues of concern for the project.

The following issues were identified during the scoping process:

- the EIS process itself, including the extent to which public involvement and local consultation and review would play a part;
- socioeconomic issues centering on land acquisition and multiple-use opportunities and conflicts, as well as on potential local effects on the economy;
- cultural values and resource protection;
- tribal rights;

Bonneville Power Administration Watershed Management Program Final EIS

- public access;
- project management (who, and by what means);
- resources management: water, vegetation, wetlands, fish and wildlife; weeds/chemicals;
- fire management;
- issues related to public versus private land ownership; and
- government “taking” of private property.

Many of these issues were also identified for and addressed in the Wildlife Mitigation Program EIS.

This page intentionally left blank.

8