Department of Energy

BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION

White Sturgeon Mitigation and Restoration in the Columbia and Snake Rivers Upstream from Bonneville Dam

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

Summary: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to fund the White Sturgeon Mitigation and Restoration in the Columbia and Snake Rivers Upstream from Bonneville Dam Project. The project proposes to continue to carry out harvest monitoring and stock status updates coordinated with fisheries management planning, annual young-of-the year recruitment indexing, research, experimental artificial propagation, and transport of white sturgeon to less densely populated areas of the river(s). Additionally, release of hatchery-reared juveniles is proposed to evaluate release strategies. Actions will take place in the following Columbia River mainstem reaches: Bonneville, The Dalles, John Day, and McNary Reservoirs; Hanford Reach, as well as the Wanapum and Rock Island Reservoirs; and the following Snake River mainstem reaches: Ice Harbor, Lower Monumental and Little Goose Reservoirs. Spawning and rearing are undertaken at established hatcheries at McNary Dam and also the Abernathy Fish Technology Center. BPA has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOE/EA-1367, April 2003) evaluating the proposed project. Based on the analysis in the EA, 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. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required, and BPA is issuing this FONSI.

Copies: For copies of this FONSI/EA, please call BPA's toll-free document request line: 800-622-4520. Leave a request naming this project and giving your complete mailing address. It is also available on our website at www.efw.bpa.gov.

For Further Information, Contact: Colleen Spiering, KEC-4, Bonneville Power Administration, PO Box 3621, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3621. Her phone number is 503-230-5756; fax 503-230-5699; e-mail: caspiering@bpa.gov.

Public Availability: This FONSI will be distributed to all persons and agencies known to be interested in or affected by the proposed action or alternatives.

Supplementary Information: BPA proposes to continue funding the White Sturgeon Mitigation and Restoration in the Columbia and Snake Rivers Upstream from Bonneville Dam Project. Since 1986, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW);

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Columbia River Fisheries Program Office; U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) Biological Resources Division; and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) have been gathering data and studying habitats, movements, population dynamics, feeding, and distribution of white sturgeon in the Columbia River system. With the decline in anadromous salmonid runs there has been an increase in the importance of the white sturgeon fisheries. The project participants have been working to determine the cause of white sturgeon declines in the reservoirs and to take actions that will restore abundance and productive fisheries. Over time, project goals have changed as new information clarified potential restoration actions.

The study goals of the proposed project correspond to those of the "White Sturgeon Research Program Implementation Plan" (Plan) developed by BPA in cooperation with State and Federal fishery agencies, tribes, universities, and the private sector, and approved by the Northwest Power Planning Council in 1985. The earlier phases of the study focused on gathering high-priority information in high-priority areas, as designated in this Plan. The study also addresses research priorities described in the White Sturgeon Management Framework completed by the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission in 1992.

The focus for this phase of the project is to continue with activities that involve testing to determine the most successful ways of spawning and rearing white sturgeon as well as moving fish from parts of the river where their recruitment rates are higher to parts of the river where recruitment rates are low. Additionally, this phase of the project proposes the experimental release and monitoring of three age groups of hatchery-raised white sturgeon. The project involves the following activities: (1) Transplanting juveniles, (2) Broodstock collection, spawning, rearing, and releasing, (3) Experimental releasing of hatchery-raised juveniles; (4) Stock status updates, (5) Describing the maturation cycle for white sturgeon, (6) Describing the genetic stock structure of white sturgeon, (7) Annual young-of-year indexing, (8) Annual fisheries management planning and monitoring of harvest in Bonneville, The Dalles, and John Day Reservoirs, (9) Completing reports on timing and development of white sturgeon embryos in relation to incubation temperature, (10) Completing reports on habitat use and movements of white sturgeon, and (11) Completing laboratory work and reports on effects of turbidity and size on vulnerability of age-0 white sturgeon to predation.

With the continued analysis of research information being collected, the project proponents anticipate that recommendations for actions involving changes to hydropower system operation and configuration to optimize physical habitat conditions for white sturgeon will eventually be made. However, such recommendations are not being made at this time and were not analyzed as part of the EA.

This project was recommended for funding by BPA under the Northwest Power Planning Council's Fish and Wildlife Program and is to be jointly conducted by ODFW, WDFW, USFWS, CRITFC, and USGS.

Two possible alternative plans have been identified and are addressed in the EA (Chapter 2). Briefly, they are as follows:

White Sturgeon Mitigation and Restoration in the Columbia and Snake Rivers Upstream from Bonneville Dam: BPA would fund the efforts to continue the research on White Sturgeon. Much of the focus would be to continue to determine the most successful ways of spawning and rearing white sturgeon as well as moving fish from parts of the river where there recruitment rates are high to parts of the river where they are low. Additionally, hatchery-raised white sturgeon would be released and monitored.

No Action Alternative: BPA would not fund the White Sturgeon Mitigation and Restoration in the Columbia and Snake Rivers Upstream from Bonneville Dam Project. As a result it most likely would not be implemented. Under this alternative significant tribal and sport fisheries would not realize historic potential production. This alternative would not allow the completion of a comprehensive plan for addressing research on the causes of the low production levels of white sturgeon in the Columbia and Snake Rivers. Some isolated populations in the upper Columbia River Basin reaches may face extirpation or extinction if the lack of natural production is not addressed. Additionally, activities to help mitigate for white sturgeon losses would not be implemented.

Table 3 in the EA summarizes the impacts of these two alternatives. The negative impact of the no-action alternative is that it would not follow the Northwest Power Planning Council's recommendations on white sturgeon and it would not complement the activities of fish and wildlife agencies and appropriate Tribes. Additionally the no-action alternative would not provide needed data and experience gained from this project to help shape the future of white sturgeon restoration in the Columbia and Snake Rivers.

BPA has determined, based on the context and intensity of the impacts identified for the preferred alternative (funding the white sturgeon research, outplanting, and monitoring), that they are not significant, using the definition of this concept in Section 1508.27 of the *Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act*. This determination is based on the following discussion of the points in section 1508.27.

1) The project aims to continue to conduct research on white sturgeon to determine the most successful ways of spawning and rearing white sturgeon as well as moving fish from parts of the river where their recruitment rates are higher to parts of the river where recruitment rates are low. Additionally, this phase of the project proposes the release and monitoring of hatchery-raised white sturgeon. The information gathered from this project will be used to guide fish management agencies in developing plans to keep the white sturgeon from extirpation or extinction.

2) Implementation of the proposed action would not affect the health or safety of the people of the project area. Project activities would occur in the rivers or at existing hatcheries.

3) The project would take place in the Columbia and Snake Rivers, and at two existing hatcheries. No ground disturbance is planned; thus no sensitive areas such as historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas would be affected.

4) The impacts of actions proposed under the preferred alternative are not significant due to their controversy. No comments surfaced during the development and review of the Preliminary EA.

5) The impacts of the proposed action are not significant due to the degree of highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks. This is a project that involves research as well as moving fish in the rivers and outplanting hatchery-raised fish. No impacts to listed fish are anticipated, or any other living species.

6) The actions proposed would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7) The proposal is not connected (40C.F.R. 1508.25 (a)(1)) to other actions with potentially significant impacts, nor is it related to other proposed actions with cumulatively significant impacts (40 C.F.R. 1508.25 (a)(2)). Moreover, this is a small-scale scientific research project and not a major Federal action. (Department of Energy Regulations for Implementing NEPA, 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B B3.3, and Appendix C C8).

8) As this project takes place in water or on previously disturbed ground and does not involve additional ground disturbance, this project would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9) The following listed threatened or endangered species are found in the vicinity of the proposed actions: Lower Columbia River Steelhead, Middle Columbia River Steelhead, Snake River Basin Steelhead, Upper Columbia River Steelhead, Columbia River Chum, Lower Columbia River Chinook, Upper Columbia River Spring-run Chinook, Snake River Fall-run Chinook, Snake River Spring/Summer-run Chinook, and Snake River Sockeye. Consultations with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA-Fisheries) have determined that the proposed activity is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed salmonid species. Additionally, consultation with USFWS has concluded that sampling work for this project would have no effect on bull trout.

10) The actions would not threaten to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Determination: Based on the information in the EA, as summarized here, BPA determines that the proposed action, the White Sturgeon Mitigation and Restoration in the Columbia and Snake Rivers Upstream from Bonneville Dam Project, as described and analyzed in the EA, 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, Oregon.

/s/ Therese B. Lamb *4/23/03*

Therese B. Lamb
Acting Vice President
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Date