

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Bonneville Power Administration

Finding of No Significant Impact

Sandy River Delta Section 536 Ecosystem Restoration Project

Summary

This notice announces Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) environmental findings for BPA's proposed action as part of the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Sandy River Delta Water Resources Development Act Section 536 Ecosystem Restoration Project. BPA's proposed action involves the construction of three helicopter landing areas, two footpaths, and use of rock storage locations on Sundial Island and in the Thousand Acres area near Troutdale, in Multnomah County, Oregon.

BPA's proposed action is tied to the removal of road access to Sundial Island as part of the Corps' restoration project. Helicopter landing areas and footpaths would allow BPA to access its transmission lines and towers, located on the island since the 1950s, for regular maintenance activities. Rock stored at nearby locations would be available to reestablish road access in the event of an emergency. The restoration project would improve access and habitat for juvenile salmonids (salmon and steelhead) in the Sandy River Delta and would help fulfill a portion of the 2010–2013 Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion Implementation Plan.

The Corps, in cooperation with the US Forest Service (USFS) and BPA, prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluating potential impacts of the proposed restoration project (including the helicopter landing areas, footpaths, and rock storage locations) and its alternatives. As a cooperating agency, BPA has adopted the EA. Based on the analysis in the EA, BPA has determined that a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is appropriate and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. The Corps and USFS each have agency-specific FONSI for the project.

Public Availability

This FONSI is available at BPA's Environment, Fish and Wildlife website at http://efw.bpa.gov/environmental_services/Document_Library/Sandy_River_Delta/. The Corps and USFS FONSI can be found at <http://www.nwp.usace.army.mil/> and <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/crgnsa/landmanagement/projects>, respectively.

Proposed Action

The Corps is proposing to remove a low, narrow, rock and timber dam, built in the 1930s, from the original main channel of the Sandy River. The dam is 750 feet long, 45 feet wide, and 8 feet high. The Corps would excavate a pilot channel about 7,350 feet long and restore disturbed areas with native vegetation. The project would be located on

USFS land within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA). BPA's proposed action is limited to constructing three helicopter landing areas and footpaths for routine access needs, and storing clean rock resulting from dam deconstruction at up to four locations on Sundial Island and in the Thousand Acres area. BPA may use this rock in the future to reestablish road access to transmission lines and towers in the event of an emergency.

BPA would construct three helicopter landing areas to provide maintenance access to BPA's Ostrander-Troutdale 500-kV and Big Eddy-Troutdale 230-kV transmission lines. For each of the three proposed helicopter landing areas—consisting of one 100-foot and two 45-foot diameter circular areas—all existing vegetation would be cleared, and a total of approximately twenty trees, all common native species and none larger than about 18 inches in diameter and about 20 feet high, would be flush-cut to the ground level. For two of the three landing areas, ground that is cleared of vegetation would be covered with geotextile fabric and 3-inch minus rocks would be applied. Additionally, two footpaths approximately 1,750 feet long and 4 feet wide would be constructed to connect one of the helicopter landing areas to existing paths by clearing vegetation, covering cleared ground with geotextile fabric, and applying 3-inch minus rock.

BPA would store up to 13,200 cubic yards of clean rock at locations on Sundial Island and in the Thousand Acres area for emergency transmission maintenance access. BPA, the Corps, and USFS identified possible locations in the EA where rock may be stored, with three of these locations on USFS land. Ground at the locations where rock would be stored has been previously graded or disturbed. At each of these locations, rock would be shaped into a stable configuration no higher than approximately 4–6 feet, topped with soil, and planted with native vegetation to minimize visual and riparian impacts.

Alternatives

The EA considered five alternatives that ranged from no action to increasingly more extensive restoration activities. Two alternatives involve dam removal and would require BPA to implement its proposed action. The Corps prepared a FONSI for its preferred alternative, which would involve full dam removal.

Significance of Potential Impacts of the Proposed Action

Potential impacts of BPA's proposed action would be limited to vegetation and tree removal for the helicopter landing areas, as well as potential low-level visibility impacts from vantage points at or within Key Viewing Areas of the Columbia River Scenic Gorge. The helicopter landing areas and footpaths would avoid wetlands and would not affect soils because construction activities would not require grading or ground disturbance, therefore no impacts such as erosion or sedimentation would occur. There would be some loss of site productivity from rocks covering areas of soil underneath the rock storage locations, two of the helicopter landing areas, and along footpaths.

BPA will mitigate the impacts of its action by undertaking habitat improvements and native vegetation replantings on Sundial Island in coordination with USFS. To avoid and

minimize potential avian impacts, tree removal for helicopter landing area construction will occur only after the critical nesting season on Sundial Island concludes on July 15 and before nesting resumes on April 1. Rock at storage locations will be piled low in a stable configuration, covered with soils, and replanted with native vegetation. BPA will adhere to all USFS Special Use Permit requirements for rock storage locations to minimize potential impacts.

There is no potential to affect cultural or historic resources from BPA's proposed action. Further, no impacts are expected to air quality, water quality, recreational resources, or species listed under the Endangered Species Act or their designated critical habitat.

The Corps submitted a CRGNSA Management Plan consistency determination application to the USFS for all actions associated with the ecosystem restoration project, which was approved by the USFS National Scenic Area Manager on March 29, 2013. There are no further impacts expected to environmental resources of the CRGNSA.

As a cooperating agency, BPA has reviewed the EA and concluded that it adequately evaluates the proposed action and addresses BPA's comments and suggestions. Therefore, BPA has adopted the EA.

Thus, consistent with considerations of context and intensity under section 1508.27 and the requirements of section 1508.13 for findings of no significant impact from the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), BPA's action would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment.

Determination: Based on the analysis in the EA, as summarized here and incorporated by reference, BPA determines that the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is not required and BPA is issuing this FONSI.

Issued in Portland, Oregon, on June 12, 2013.

<i>/s/ F. Lorraine Bodi</i>	<i>June 12, 2013</i>
F. Lorraine Bodi	Date
Vice President	
Environment, Fish & Wildlife	