Chewuch River Mile 15.5-20 Fish Enhancement Project

Finding of No Significant Impact

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
Bonneville Power Administration
May 2017

Summary

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings on funding of the Chewuch River Mile 15.5-20 Fish Enhancement Project. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in partnership with the Yakama Nation and BPA have proposed this restoration project on the Chewuch River from River Mile (R.M.) 15.5 to 20.0 on USFS land. The proposed project would enhance fish habitat by increasing habitat complexity through the placement of large woody debris (LWD), increasing pool habitat, and restoring historical off-channel habitat. The intended result of the proposed project is to re-establish, enhance, and improve the diversity of fish habitat for threatened and endangered fish species including Chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout.

The USFS and BPA issued and requested public comment on a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOE/EA-2059 dated February 2017) that evaluated the proposed action and its potential environmental effects. 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 (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 et seq.). Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and BPA is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the proposed action.

As a cooperating agency, BPA hereby adopts the Final EA. 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 (42 United States Code [USC] 4321 et seq.). Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required and BPA is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Proposed Action. On April 10, 2017, the USFS issued its own agency-specific FONSI for the project.

The Final EA specifies the permits required to implement the proposed action would be obtained prior to construction. The EA also confirms that the environmental commitments defined as best management practices would be built into the proposed project or result from agency permit conditions to minimize impacts to environmental resources. The Yakama Nation is responsible for these commitments and permit conditions which are stipulated in section 2.1.4 of the Final EA.

Public Availability

The Final EA and FONSI will be posted on BPA's project website www.bpa.gov/goto/ChewuchRiver.

Proposed Action

The USFS and the Yakama Nation, funded by BPA, are currently proposing restoration actions on the Chewuch River from R.M. 15.5 to 20.0. The proposed project has been designed to enhance fish habitat and to improve fish habitat diversity by:

- Increasing habitat complexity by the introduction of large wood,
- Increasing pool habitat, and
- Restoring historical off-channel habitat.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the project would not occur and thus, no restoration activities would take place in the 15.5 – 20 R.M. reach. The wood needed for increasing large wood complexity would occur through natural processes. Recovery of pool habitat and restoring the quantity and quality of off-channel rearing habitat in the river would occur through natural processes.

Significance of Potential Impacts of the Proposed Action

Chapter 3 of the EA describes the affected environment and the current condition of the project area and the environmental consequences of the Proposed Action. The current conditions were used to evaluate and predict the effects of the No Action Alternative or implementing the Proposed Action. The environmental consequences of the two alternatives present the potential effects on the physical, biological, and socioeconomic environment. The cumulative effects are also included in Chapter 3 of the EA.

The following discussion provides a summary of the potential impacts from the Proposed Action and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

Botany

- Project activities would have minor, short-term, adverse impacts on unique habitats containing cedar, cottonwood, and aspen, as ground disturbance would occur.
- Replanting of cedar and the removal of invasive species would have long-term, moderate, beneficial impacts.

Invasives

- In the short term, the project area would be susceptible to new infestations of invasive plants because all vehicles are a vector for carrying and distributing weed seeds. However, Best Management Practices would be implemented to minimize such impacts.
- Rehabilitation and revegetation of disturbed areas, along with annual inspections of sites and temporary access locations minimize the potential for new invasive plant infestations.
- Known invasive plant sites would be inspected and treated annually by the Forest Service after the implementation of this project.

Water Resources

- Effects to water resources would be minimized by following the design criteria and conservation measures for Programmatic Biological Opinion for Aquatic Restoration Activities in the States of Oregon and Washington (ARBO II) (FWS No.: 01EOFW00-2013-F-0090 & NMFS Tracking No.: NWP-2013-9664).
- Short-term increases in turbidity could result from the placement of dewatering structures (large sandbags) and excavating into the riverbanks. Increases in turbidity downstream of the site are expected to be measurable for about 100 feet downstream of the disturbance and would last less than an hour following construction.
- The temporary degradation of habitat due to bank alteration, sediment delivery, reduction in riparian vegetation, and increases in nutrients may disrupt normal feeding and hiding behavior that would displace fish but with more off-channel habitat, wood cover, and pool habitat there would be long-term, moderate, beneficial effects to the fish and fish habitat.

Wild and Scenic Rivers (Recreation and Scenery)

- There would be 29 new large wood structures constructed along the Chewuch River. While the structures would be noticeable constructed features soon after completion, over time the structures would become less noticeable and only slightly deviating from the undeveloped landscape character of the rest of the river.
- One of the proposed structures could be viewed from a dispersed camp site and visible from the river where people spend time but the presence of the new structure would not change the elements of the setting of the site that make it popular – direct river access, shallow water, swimming beach, large trees, and relatively close proximity to Winthrop.
- Noise disturbances to visitors at Chewuch Campground would be temporary and last only a few days.

- Some of the dispersed campsites along the Chewuch River would be temporarily closed during construction for four to six weeks but with many other sites remaining open, visitors would be able to find different spots.

Wildlife

- No raptor nests were observed within ½-mile of the project area during surveys in June through September 2016, but if a new active raptor nest is discovered in spring 2017 (or following years if implementation is delayed) then implementation within 450 meters of the nest would be delayed until after August 15.
- The construction activity would likely disturb any wildlife that were utilizing the area during that time, but due the limited time and spatial scale of this project the potential for disturbance would be minimal and temporary.

Soil Resources

- The proposed in-stream wood placement and riparian plantings would have short-term minor impacts to the soil resource resulting from soil disturbance to construct log jams along the stream bank and from the movement of construction equipment.
- Project Best Management Practices would ensure that there is limited impact to existing soil conditions, and riparian plantings would help stabilize and enhance the soil long-term. Access route prisms would be recontoured to reduce soil compaction, increase infiltration capacity, and prevent unauthorized motorized access. Construction areas would be replanted to protect bare ground.

Cultural Resources

- A cultural survey of the project area identified one cultural resource site; a bridge abutment. The bridge abutment was determined to be not eligible for listing on the National Historic Register. The Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation concurred with that determination on October 3, 2016.
- If unanticipated sites are discovered during construction, they could be affected; however, the EA includes mitigation requirements related to unintended discoveries of cultural resources, such as requiring the contractor to stop work, notify appropriate entities, and to first try to avoid potential effects.

Determination

Based on the information in the EA, as summarized here, BPA determines that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA (42 USC 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

Issued in Portland, Oregon

/s/ F Lorraine Bodi
F Lorraine Bodi
Vice President
Environment, Fish and Wildlife

May 31, 2017
Date