

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
Bonneville Power Administration

**Methow Valley Irrigation District Project
East and West Diversion Screening Project**

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

SUMMARY: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) has proposed to fund fish screen replacements at the Methow Valley Irrigation District's (MVID's) East and West Diversion canals, both located near Twisp, Washington, in Okanogan County. BPA prepared a Preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) (DOE/EA-1486) in December 2003 that evaluated the proposed action and alternatives. Public input to the preliminary assessment was requested, and we have subsequently prepared a final EA. Based on this environmental review process for this project analysis, including public input, BPA has determined that the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the proposed action.

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: BPA has decided to fund the replacement of the existing fish screens at the East and West Diversion canals. The existing screens, which were constructed decades ago, are deteriorating and do not meet current Federal and State standards and criteria for safe and effective fish passage. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) has documented that listed fish are making their way behind the MVID fish screens and being diverted into the canals and dying. Both diversion sites are used by anadromous salmonids including Chinook, sockeye, and coho salmon, and steelhead. Non-migratory resident fish in the Methow and Twisp systems include rainbow, brown, brook, cutthroat/rainbow hybrid, and bull trout, and mountain whitefish.

BPA and the MVID have selected the option to install fish screens by the spring of 2004. Implementation of the proposed action in this EA would, in part, help expedite MVID to meet the consent decree responsibility and halt the unlawful take of ESA-listed fish. The new screens would comply with current standards and criteria for fish passage and screens as documented in the National Marine Fisheries Service's Juvenile Fish Screen Criteria and Anadromous Salmonid Passage Facility Guidelines and Criteria.

Table 9 in the final EA summarizes the impacts of the proposed action and alternatives. BPA has determined, based on the context and intensity of these impacts, that the impacts of the proposed action 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 factors for evaluating intensity that are listed in section 1508.27, with relevant aspects of context and intensity identified.

1. Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

Implementing the proposed action is expected to offer long-term fish protection and conservation, improve fish movements around the new fish screen facility, prevent entrapment and entrainment, help satisfy a court-ordered consent decree requiring MVID to avoid a “take” violation under section 9 of the ESA, meet the standards and criteria for fish screening and passage by NOAA Fisheries and the State of Washington, and improve fish returns. The following impacts would likely result from construction-related activities that are categorized as short-term, localized, and minor: soil and vegetation surface disturbance on a total of about 1.3 acres that have already been impacted from previous human-caused disturbances at both sites, temporary displacement of wildlife, sediment and turbidity discharges from the construction and removal of cofferdams in the Methow River, possible disturbance of ESA-listed fish from in-water work, tree removal, and localized noise. These impacts would be mitigated by the implementation of a number of measures intended to offset, compensate, or mitigate the possible adverse effects caused by project construction. These measures include such activities as an operations and maintenance plan, pollution and erosion control plan, site rehabilitation plan, revegetation/seeding procedures, and noxious weed control, which are listed in the Mitigation Plan (Appendix B) of the Final EA.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

The project is not expected to affect public health or safety. Security fences to be constructed around each screen facility (each about 1/3 acre in size) would be locked to prevent unauthorized entry, to protect the newly constructed screens and appurtenances, and promote human safety. The Final EA provides that, during construction of the new fish screens, certain measures would be made to avoid/minimize unnecessary pollution or contaminant discharges into the environment. This includes preparation and implementation of a Pollution and Erosion Control Plan, and monitoring any leakage of equipment fluids. These are identified in Appendix B of the Final EA.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

a. The MVID canal system was recommended as eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) because the properties associated with the proposed fish screen replacements have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history in the Methow Valley. The irrigation system has been the most prominent irrigation feature in the valley. Although neglect and considerable changes in the structural materials of

the MVID, over time, have caused substantial deterioration, both the east and west canals still remain located in the original rights-of-way.

The current fish screens were constructed after the canal systems were built, and were replaced in the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, because the screens are less than 50 years of age, they are considered non-contributing elements of the National Register eligibility. A cultural resources survey of the east and west screen sites was last conducted in November 2003 by a BPA archaeologist and no cultural materials were found. A follow-up letter from the Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer concurred with BPA's findings that the fish screens would have no adverse effects on the National Register-eligible MVID canal system.

b. There are no parklands or public recreational facilities in the immediate vicinities of either screen site.

c. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has designated most of the soils on the valley bottoms as farmland of statewide importance. The location and extent of prime and other important farmlands designated by the NRCS were obtained from NRCS soil survey information. There are no prime farmlands in the immediate location of the screen sites on the Methow and Twisp rivers, so the proposed action would not affect these farmlands.

d. Naturally occurring wetland environments that could be affected by the proposed action are found only at the west canal screen site, and are associated with the Twisp River. The National Wetland Inventory classification system identifies Palustrine and Riverine wetlands in the project vicinity; however, the project would not cause long-term adverse or beneficial effects on wetlands. The fish screen replacement would occur in an artificially created canal (ditch) system that was previously excavated from a wetland in the 1930s, but no additional filling or permanent impacts to the wetland will occur. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers does not claim jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act because the canal is not considered a navigable waterway and less than 30 cubic yards of fill would be deposited. The artificial canal (ditch) to be disturbed by replacement of the drum screen will be rehabilitated (graded and revegetated) in accordance with the rehabilitation plan (Appendix B of the Final EA).

Because the exact locations and designs of the MVID screens were not finalized at the time of the announcement of the environmental process for this project, BPA included a notice of floodplain and wetlands involvement. However, through the floodplain/wetlands assessment process (see section 5.5 of the final EA) we have subsequently determined that the screen replacement project will occur outside of the 100-year floodplains of the Methow and Twisp rivers. Therefore, no floodplain findings are required.

e. The Methow River system, including the entire Twisp River and over half of its tributaries, has been recommended for inclusion in the Washington State Scenic Rivers Program. The Twisp River is also considered a River of Statewide Significance. Implementation of the proposed action would have no bearing on potential inclusion of the Twisp River as a State scenic river because the proposed action would replace the existing screens essentially in the same footprint, which is located approximately 300 feet off the main channel. The actual project footprint is very small on the landscape, the general character of the project areas will not

change, and there will be no change to water flows or hydrology in the immediate area of the screens, compared to existing circumstances.

f. There are no ecologically critical areas in the immediate vicinities of both project sites. The new screen would be positioned in an artificial water conduit system. Although critical habitat for bull trout has been proposed, there is no designated critical habitat for bull trout in the project area. Until adequate information is presented to warrant formal critical habitat designation, there is no need for formal management steps or measures to be taken. Conservation measures, terms, and conditions spelled out in the USFWS Biological Opinion will adequately address the concerns for bull trout proposed critical habitat. Therefore, construction and maintenance of the proposed fish screen replacement would not affect habitats, landscapes, or ecological settings known to be particularly important, unusual, unique, or critical.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The environmental effects of the proposed action are not considered to be highly controversial. Only one public comment letter was received on the preliminary EA and this letter did not raise any controversy over environmental effects of the proposed action.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment is highly uncertain or involves unique or unknown risks.

Implementation of the project is not likely to cause effects on the human environment that are uncertain, unique, or unknown. Fish screen replacements are fairly routine and the effects are well documented. The anticipated effects from this specific screen replacement project are straightforward, documented in the Final EA, and do not present any degree of uncertainty.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

Fish screen replacement is an ongoing practice throughout the Pacific Northwest that is being employed in an effort to facilitate easy and safe fish passage, particularly for the early life stages of anadromous fish species. The MVID fish screen replacement is a stand-alone project and will not establish a precedent for future actions. BPA's decision to fund the screen replacements also does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Additional modifications to the MVID irrigation system may be proposed in the future, but the replacement of the screens has independent utility, corrects an immediate problem, and is designed to accommodate a range of flows that includes both the current operation and the flows required under the new Washington Department of Ecology Order. This new order is described in section 1.3.2 of the final EA.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.

The 1997 EA prepared for the MVID irrigation system improvement project evaluated a variety of possible actions that could be undertaken to address the broader need and purpose. The fish screen replacement currently proposed is not intended to correct or offset irrigation system problems or deficiencies; instead, this project is designed to complement the current and reasonably foreseeable future improvements.

The MVID may need to take additional actions, such as repairing or replacing portions of the remaining canals to slow or stop the issue of leaking of water from them, to be able to meet the new Washington Department of Ecology (WDOE) order while still providing an adequate supply of water to its members. Also, the BOR is currently drafting plans that would upgrade the MVID diversions to address fish passage problems and replace the annual push-up dam on the Twisp River (west canal diversion) with a more permanent, reliable and fish-friendly structure. No funding has yet been identified for implementing these additional actions but, to the extent possible, they have been addressed in the EA. See section 4.8 of the EA for a more detailed discussion of cumulative effects. The proposed fish screen replacement project at the east and west diversion diversion canals is independent of other actions that have, or are expected to have, individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

See the discussion under 3(a) above.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

The primary intent of this project is to provide long-term benefits to all fish species, including anadromous and resident species that are protected under the ESA (see discussion under item 1 above). Fish entrapment and stranding in the canals resulting from holes in the existing screens has, in part, necessitated corrective actions to prevent fish from entering the irrigation canals. The proposed fish screen designs at the east and west diversion canals are also intended to correct other fish screen problems/constraints such as velocity flows and angles, effective routing of fish to the bypass, and avoiding impingement during high flows. The proposed screens are intended to meet current Federal and State fish screening technologies and standards and correct existing fish screening and passage problems. The potential benefits are substantial to the local and possibly regional population of resident and anadromous salmonid species that are listed under the ESA.

While project implementation is expected to provide substantive long-term benefits, there will be some adverse effects from project construction. These have been discussed in response to item 1 above. As stated, these impacts will likely be short-term, very localized, and of a small magnitude, without foreseeable secondary adverse effects. Appendix B of the final EA

documents the terms and conditions and other mitigation measures that would be implemented to offset, compensate, avoid, and/or minimize potential adverse effects on listed species and critical habitat from project construction.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The proposed action does not threaten or affect an existing Federal, State, or local violation or requirements for the protection of the environment. As part of the environmental process for this project, BPA has consulted on and complied with the applicable laws and requirements. This consultation has resulted in the commitment by BPA to a number of environmental conservation and mitigation measures (see Appendix B of the Final EA).

On December 16, 2003, the WDOE issued its Administrative Order (No. DE 03WRCCR-5904) which was the result of a court-ordered review of the MVID's irrigation system. The new fish screens are designed to accommodate the short- and long-term requirements of this Order, so no conflicts are envisioned.

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 the National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is not required and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the proposed action.

Issued in Portland, Oregon, on 3/15/04.

/s/ Therese B. Lamb _____

Therese B. Lamb, Vice President
Environment, Fish and Wildlife