

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 132 FERC ¶ 62,179
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSIONPublic Utility District No. 1 of Chelan County,
Washington

Project No. 2145-107

ORDER APPROVING WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT PLAN
PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 403

(Issued September 22, 2010)

1. On January 22, 2010, Public Utility District No. 1 of Chelan County, Washington (licensee) filed its wildlife habitat management plan (plan), pursuant to article 403 of its license¹ for the Rocky Reach Hydroelectric Project. The project is located on the mid-Columbia River, in portions of Grant, Yakima, Kittitas, Douglas, Benton and Chelan Counties, Washington, and occupies about 3,052 acres of federal land managed by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the U.S. Department of the Army (Army), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).

LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

2. License article 403 requires the licensee to file, for Commission approval, a 5-year wildlife habitat management plan. The plan is to be prepared after consultation with FWS, BLM, U.S. Forest Service, the Rocky Reach Development Forum, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (Washington DFW). The plan is to include measures to protect and enhance wildlife habitat within and immediately adjacent to the project reservoir and to include (1) a detailed description of the habitat improvement measures, including methods to be used; (2) a detailed description of any annual or periodic maintenance and monitoring needed to ensure the success of the measures; (3) a detailed description of the location where the improvements will occur, including maps and drawings; and (4) a detailed implementation schedule.

3. Further, the plan is required to contain provisions to document any modifications to land management procedures and update the 5-year status report as required by the Commission. Any such modifications must be accomplished in accordance with the Rocky Reach Wildlife Forum (RRWF) as conditions change.

¹ 123 FERC ¶61,049

LICENSEE'S PLAN

4. Washington DFW manages approximately 30,000 acres of land within the Chelan Wildlife Area that includes Chelan Butte, Swakane, and Entiat Wildlife Units located within the Rocky Reach Wildlife Area (RRWA). The licensee will assist Washington DFW with its goal to convert approximately 1,400 acres of abandoned agricultural fields within the Chelan Butte and Swakane Wildlife Units to self-sustaining shrub-steppe habitat. Implementation will consist of a progression of measures, with approximately 200 acres initiated each year. (1) Treatments for field restoration include chemical and mechanical weed control efforts, soil preparation, seeding, and shrub planting over a 5 to 6-year period for each group of fields. The estimated cost is approximately \$1,100 per acre for restoration of approximately 1,400 acres. Washington DFW and the licensee estimate 15 to 20 years to convert all of the abandoned fields to self-sustaining shrub steppe, (2) in addition to field restoration, the licensee will assist Washington DFW with other wildlife improvement measures within the Chelan Wildlife Area.

5. The BLM is responsible for approximately 12,000 acres within 6 miles of the Columbia River in Chelan County upstream from the Wenatchee River Confluence. For this plan, the BLM lands were divided into three areas: Azwell, Chelan Butte, and Swakane. Projects planned for each area include:

- a. Azwell, 4,500 acres. Planting containerized bitterbrush and blue elderberry in 5 units totally 473 acres; develop a spring to provide water for wildlife south of Deer Mountain in section 8; and control noxious weeds.
- b. Chelan Butte, 3,380 acres. Restoring native shrub-steppe plant communities on the 25 acres of agricultural land on Chelan Butte (to be coordinated with Washington DFW field restoration); control noxious weeds; and potentially planting bitterbrush and other native browse species on 244 acres (not proposed over the next 5 years).
- c. Swakane, 5,722 acres. Developing a spring near Tenas George Canyon and Swakane Creek to provide water for mule deer and bighorn sheep; and control noxious weeds.

6. The licensee will assist the Forest Service by implementing the following proposed projects on the Entiat Range District, Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests adjacent to the Rocky Reach Project:

- a. Improve mule deer and bighorn sheep winter range within the Swakane Creek drainage with a combination of slash thinning and/or prescribed fire. Treat approximately 400 acres by prescribed burning and 300 acres with slash

- thinning. Treatments will likely be initiated over a 3-year time period, beginning fall 2010.
- b. The licensee proposes to coordinate with Washington DFW to develop a strategy to test a mineral supplement for wild ungulates. The supplement will be deployed (via helicopter) in locations within the winter range to decrease the need for these animals to go down the highway in the winter where they are subject to collision mortalities.
 - c. Noxious weed control in the Swakane is an ongoing effort by the Forest Service. The licensee proposes no further measures.
7. The licensee includes additional contingency projects in case factors such as wildfire, weather, etc. prevent accomplishment of the above. In such event, the licensee will assist the Forest Service to decommission roads closed by the Forest Service and/or thinning and prescribed burning within key mule deer winter range north of Entiat. If contingency measures are needed, the licensee will revise the plan for Commission approval.
8. As directed by the Commission in article 403 and consistent with the Settlement Agreement, Chelan PUD will provide a 50-foot wide by 3,500-foot long riparian buffer zone on the Chelan PUD's Sun Cover property to preserve its relatively natural condition except for two 100-foot-long access corridors to provide community access.
9. Article 403 of the license requires that the licensee conduct annual winter bald eagle surveys and Canada goose nesting surveys for the term of the license in coordination with the RRWF. The licensee will continue to conduct monthly winter bald eagle counts from November through March annually to monitor winter abundance on the reservoir. Consistent with the bald eagle recovery plan, the licensee has been monitoring bald eagle nests within the RRWA since 2005. The licensee will continue to conduct annual bald eagle nesting surveys in coordination with the RRWF.
10. The licensee will continue monitoring Canada goose nesting platforms during March and April annually. The need for maintaining Canada goose nesting platforms into the future will be evaluated by the RRWF and addressed in subsequent 5-year plans.
11. The licensee currently maintains a noxious weed management program to control noxious weeds on Chelan PUD property. Many of the funding allocations previously described provide resource agencies with funding to manage noxious weeds on their respective lands. Therefore, consistent with the Settlement Agreement, the licensee will continue to make available \$10,000 annually to manage noxious weeds on Chelan PUD lands or other areas within the RRWA not previously described to manage noxious weeds.

12. The plan will be updated and filed for Commission approval at a minimum of every 5 years as required by article 403. The updated plan will provide a summary of habitat improvement measures implemented during the first 5 years and measures proposed for the next 5 years. Annual wildlife survey reports will be provided to Washington DFW and the RRWF as required.

AGENCY COMMENTS

15. The licensee provided FWS and Washington DFW with a copy of the draft plan on October 30, 2009. Comments were received from Washington DFW. Additionally, the plan was provided to the RRRF on November 3, 2009, for review to ensure consistency with project and adjoining public land management goals and objectives. No comments were received from the RRRF. The licensee appropriately addressed all of the agency's comments, and made updates to the plan as needed. FWS approved the final plan by e-mail dated April 8, 2010.

DISCUSSION

16. As required by article 403, the licensee's plan includes measures to protect and enhance wildlife habitat within and immediately adjacent to the project reservoir and includes (1) a detailed description of the habitat improvement measures, including methods to be used; (2) a detailed description of any annual or periodic maintenance and monitoring needed to ensure the success of the measures; (3) a detailed description of the location where the improvements will occur, including maps and drawings; and (4) a detailed implementation schedule.

17. The licensee's plan will improve and enhance wildlife habitat within and immediately adjacent to the project reservoir. The plan satisfies the requirements of article 403, and therefore should be approved.

The Director orders:

(A) The wildlife habitat management plan, filed January 22, 2010, pursuant to article 403 of the license for the Rocky Reach Hydroelectric Project, is approved.

Project No. 2145-107

5

(B) This order constitutes final agency action. Requests for rehearing by the Commission may be filed within 30 days of the date of issuance of this order, pursuant to 18 C.F.R. §385.713.

Robert J. Fletcher
Chief, Land Resources Branch
Division of Hydropower
Administration and Compliance

Document Content(s)

P-2145-107.DOC.....1-5