

5.3.8 Aesthetics

a. Affected environment:

General description of the aesthetic resources

The Project area is located within the middle reach of the Columbia River, which is the geographic center of Washington State. However, because the Project is on the east side of the Cascade mountains, it is considered to be within eastern Washington. The Project setting is primarily rural (with the exception of the urbanized areas of Wenatchee and East Wenatchee). In general, the area surrounding the three dams includes rangeland, irrigated farmlands, and a mixture of private and federally owned lands.

A broad river valley surrounds the Rocky Reach Hydroelectric Project dam, with apple orchards lining both sides of the Columbia River. Private residences, a residential subdivision, some commercial uses, and several parks are also part of the visual setting of the area. The land surrounding Rocky Reach Hydroelectric Project reservoir is generally rural in character, with approximately half of the land being undeveloped shrub-steppe, grasslands, or exposed rock. The other half is developed for agriculture, recreation, and residential uses. The several parks and agricultural land intermixed with the non-irrigated shrub-steppe hills provide an impression of a desert and oasis setting outside of the winter months.

The Rocky Reach Hydroelectric reservoir dominates the scene in the local area, being visible from a large area (the lake extends upriver about 43 miles and has a surface area of approximately 98,000 acres). Because the river terraces are relatively level and sparse vegetation is present, there is little or no visual screening of the dam facility and reservoir. Where slopes along the shoreline are relatively gentle, narrow bands of riparian vegetation and wetland areas exist.

Adjacent to the visitor center and powerhouse, 30 acres of lawns and gardens add to the scenery. On Petunia Island, within the reservoir, 8,000 colorful annual flowers are planted in a new design each year. In addition, a display of bright red, white, and blue annual flowers depicts the U.S. flag, and several varieties of dahlias add to the color at the visitor center grounds.

Aesthetics and project structures and transmission lines

The Rocky Reach Hydroelectric Project dam, spillway and powerhouse are located at Columbia River mile 437.7, approximately seven miles north of the city of Wenatchee. The reservoir extends approximately 43 miles upstream to the Wells Hydroelectric Project. Access to the dam is by way of paved roads from

State Highway 97A on the west side of the Columbia River and State Highway 97 on the east side. The Project contains fish passage facilities, and fish rearing facilities at Turtle Rock Island and near the dam's left abutment, both upstream and downstream of the dam. These facilities are funded and maintained by Chelan PUD and operated by WDFW. The fish rearing facilities upstream and downstream of the dam are associated with the Rock Island Hydroelectric Project.

Five sets of 230-kV transmission lines convey power from the powerhouse to the switchyard, which is located on the Project west abutment. These lines are part of the Project, while the transmission lines beyond the switchyard are not part of the licensed Project.

b. Environmental impacts and recommendations:

Prior to construction of the Rocky Reach Project, the Columbia River shoreline between Rocky Reach and Wells dams was comprised largely of cobble, gravel, and sand river bars, that resulted from scouring during spring runoff (described in more detail in Section 5.3.3.2 Terrestrial and Wildlife Resources.) A thin line of riparian vegetation could be found at places along the channel fringe, although flooding and arid conditions prevented substantial riparian development. The development of the Rocky Reach Project changed the aesthetics of the area as a new, relatively stable, river elevation promoted mature plant communities. Additionally, the aesthetic conditions of the area changed as many areas converted to orchards and other agricultural uses, parks were built, and portions of the shoreline were rip-rapped to prevent erosion.

The Social Sciences Working Group made no proposals or recommendations that pertain directly to the aesthetics of the Rocky Reach Hydroelectric Project area.

Our analysis

None of the enhancements proposed or recommended by any party would have a negative impact on the aesthetic resources of Rocky Reach Hydroelectric Project area. **[PUD - Any enhancements?]**

c. Unavoidable adverse impacts:

None.