

# Concrete Panel Fabrication for the Mill Creek Fish Passage Project

Finding of No Significant Impact

As described in the

## Mill Creek Fish Passage Project Section 408 Permissions Walla Walla, Washington Environmental Assessment

Bonneville Power Administration

DOE/EA-2162

March 2021

### INTRODUCTION

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Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings for a proposal to fund concrete panel fabrication to support ongoing implementation of the Mill Creek Fish Passage Project located in Walla Walla, Washington. In April 2016, the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) issued the *Mill Creek Fish Passage Project Section 408 Permissions Walla Walla, Washington Environmental Assessment*. Under the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), BPA hereby adopts the USACE EA (DOE/EA-2162) which describes and analyzes BPA-funded activities associated with the Mill Creek Fish Passage Project described in the Environmental Assessment (EA) under 40 CFR 1506.3 and incorporates the EA by reference.

BPA proposes to fund the Tri-State Steelheaders, a non-profit organization that promotes healthy salmon and steelhead populations, to oversee concrete panel fabrication for the ongoing Mill Creek Fish Passage Project in Walla Walla, Washington. The concrete panels would replace existing in-channel concrete that has presented depth and velocity barriers to migrating fish. The fabricated panels would be used to create channel roughness and resting pools for Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed mid-Columbia steelhead, and bull trout that migrate through channelized portions of Mill Creek to vital upstream spawning and rearing habitat.

The BPA-funded program activities are described in the USACE EA as part of the Proposed Action. USACE issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on the Proposed Action in April 2016. BPA has further determined that the BPA-funded portions of the Proposed Action do not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of 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 FONSI for BPA's funding of the project activities, which are not the type of actions that normally require preparation of an EIS and are not without precedent.

Required mitigation measures are described in the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and US Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) ESA programmatic biological opinion, *Washington State Fish Passage and Habitat Enhancement Restoration Programmatic Consultation* (NMFS tracking number 2008-03598; FWS No.: 13410-2008-USFWS # F-0209), and USACE Nationwide Permit 27, Aquatic Habitat Restoration, Enhancement, and Establishment Activities (USACE reference NWS-2018-438), and will be completed by project implementers.

### PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

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The Final EA and this FONSI will be posted on BPA's project website:

[www.bpa.gov/goto/MillCreekFishPassage](http://www.bpa.gov/goto/MillCreekFishPassage)

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

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BPA is proposing to fund parts of the ongoing Mill Creek Fish Passage Project under the Pacific Northwest Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act), 16 USC § 839 et seq. The Northwest Power Act directs BPA to protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife affected by the development, operation, and management of federal hydroelectric facilities on the Columbia River and its tributaries. These actions would also support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with NMFS and USFWS on the operations and maintenance of the Columbia River System. The project would benefit the conservation and recovery of mid-Columbia steelhead and bull trout, which are listed as threatened under the ESA.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED**

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BPA needs to respond to a request from Tri-State Steelheaders to fund materials fabrication to support the ongoing Mill Creek Fish Passage Project. While meeting this need, BPA seeks to achieve the following purposes:

- Act consistently with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies that guide the agency;
- Support efforts to mitigate for effects of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) on fish and wildlife in the mainstem Columbia River and its tributaries under the Northwest Power Act; and
- Seek to fulfill commitments to support conservation of ESA-listed species considered in the 2020 ESA consultations with NMFS and USFWS on the operation and maintenance of the Columbia River System.

## **PROPOSED ACTION**

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Under the Proposed Action, BPA would provide funding toward manufacture and delivery of concrete roughness panels to support the Mill Creek Fish Passage Project in the City of Walla Walla, Washington. The panels would be used to increase roughness in the concrete channel, and make resting pools available for returning summer steelhead, bull trout, and spring Chinook. BPA would not fund the installation of the panels.

## **NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

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Under the No Action Alternative, BPA would not fund panel fabrication. Tri-State Steelheaders could seek program funding from other entities, or discontinue planned implementation work in 2021 and 2022. If planned implementation work discontinued, existing height and velocity barriers within channelized portions of Mill Creek would continue to impede fish passage and migration toward Mill Creek headwaters where higher quality spawning and rearing habitat is present.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

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To determine whether the Proposed Action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, the potential impacts on human and natural resources were evaluated and presented in Chapter 3, *Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences*, of the EA. The Proposed Action, with implementation of selected mitigation measures, would have no significant impacts. The following

discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

### **Water Quality**

- Dewatering and bypass channel installation and subsequent removal and re-watering could result in a short-term, localized adverse impact to water quality in the project area.
- Panel installation would occur within a dewatered work area, and any epoxy, concrete, or fill material would be cured prior to re-watering. No impact to water quality during panel installation would occur.
- No long-term impact to water quality would be expected from panel installation.

### **Aquatic Environment**

- Short-term adverse impact to migration potential for fish and freshwater aquatic species during construction would be expected when the channel is dewatered and species are directed through a channel bypass during construction.
- Funding for panel fabrication would provide long-term indirect benefits to fish and aquatic freshwater species. The new roughness panels would improve fish passage and increase habitat availability for migrating fish and aquatic species.

### **Threatened and Endangered Species**

- Short-term, low impact to ESA-listed species (mid-Columbia steelhead and bull trout) would be expected during panel installation when the channel is dewatered and fish are moved outside the project area.
- Long-term increase in channel roughness would slow flow velocities and provide resting pools for migrating species. Long-term increase in fish passage to over 40 miles of upstream spawning and rearing habitat for ESA-listed fish. Increased channel roughness, resting pools, and fish passage potential would have a positive impact to ESA-listed species.

### **Cultural Resources**

- While Mill Creek Channel was determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, the modifications to the channel would not alter the historically significant flood risk management elements. The project would have no adverse effect on cultural resources.

### **Climate Change**

- The project would have a negligible impact on climate change as any greenhouse gas emissions from operation of construction equipment would be temporary and of low quantities.
- Climate change could affect the project long-term with increased temperatures and lower flow conditions throughout the Columbia River basin, however, channel modifications would improve fish migration and access to cooler water at higher elevations in the Mill Creek basin.

## **DETERMINATION**

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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.

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