

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION / UNDERGOING REVIEW/SUBJECT TO CHANGE

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) are co-leads in preparing this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under NEPA on the coordinated water management functions for the operation, maintenance, and configuration (“management”) of the 14 federal dam and reservoir projects that comprise the Columbia River System (System). The U.S. Congress authorized the Corps and Reclamation to construct, operate and maintain the System projects to meet multiple specified purposes, including flood control (also referred to as flood risk management), navigation, hydropower production, irrigation, fish and wildlife conservation, recreation, municipal and industrial water supply, and water quality, though not every project is authorized for every one of these purposes. BPA is authorized to market and transmit the power generated by these coordinated System operations.

The on-going action that requires evaluation under NEPA is the long-term coordinated management of the System projects for the multiple purposes identified above. An underlying need to which the co-lead agencies are responding is reviewing and updating the management of the System, including evaluating measures to avoid, offset, or minimize impacts to resources affected by the management of the System in the context of new information and changed conditions in the Columbia River basin. In addition, the co-lead agencies are responding to the Opinion and Order issued by the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon¹ such that this EIS will evaluate how to insure that the prospective management of the System is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat, including evaluating mitigation measures to address impacts to listed species. The EIS will evaluate actions within the co-lead agencies’ current authorities, as well as certain actions that are not within the co-lead agencies’ authorities, based on the District Court’s observations about alternatives that could be considered and comments received during the scoping process. The EIS will also allow the co-lead agencies and the region to evaluate the costs, benefits and tradeoffs of various alternatives as part of reviewing and updating the management of the System.

The co-lead agencies will use the information garnered through this process to inform future decisions and allow for a flexible approach to meeting multiple responsibilities including resource, legal, and institutional purposes.

Resource Purposes:

- Provide for a reliable level of flood risk by managing the System to afford safeguards for public safety, infrastructure, and property
- Provide an adequate, efficient, economical and reliable power supply that supports the integrated Columbia River Power system
- Provide water supply for irrigation, municipal, and industrial uses

¹ *NWF v. NMFS*, 184 F. Supp. 3d 861 (D. Or. 2016).

- Provide for waterway transportation capability
- Provide for the conservation of fish and wildlife resources, including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species
- Consider and plan for climate change impacts on resources and on the management of the System
- Provide opportunities for recreation at System lakes and reservoirs
- Protect and preserve cultural resources

Legal and Institutional Purposes:

- Act within the authorities granted to the agencies under existing statutes; and when applicable, identify where new statutory authority may be needed
- Comply with environmental laws and regulations and all other applicable federal statutory and regulatory requirements, including those specifically addressing the System such as requirements under the Northwest Power Act “to adequately protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife, including related spawning grounds and habitat, affected by such projects or facilities in a manner that provides equitable treatment for such fish and wildlife with the other purposes for which such system and facilities are managed and operated.” 16 U.S.C.A. § 839b(11)(A)
- Protect Native American treaty rights and trust obligations for natural and cultural resources
- Continue to utilize a collaborative Regional Forum framework to allow for flexibility and adaptive management of the System
- Ensure project Water Control Manuals adequately reflect the management of the System