

144 FERC ¶ 62,243
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Public Utility District No. 1 of Douglas County,
Washington

Project No. 2149-162

ORDER APPROVING WELLS HATCHERY UPPER COLUMBIA RIVER
STEELHEAD HATCHERY GENETIC MANAGEMENT PLAN
PURSUANT TO ARTICLE 404

(Issued September 18, 2013)

1. On July 2, 2013, Public Utility District Number One of Douglas County, Washington (licensee) filed, for Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (Commission) approval, its Wells Hatchery Upper Columbia River Steelhead Hatchery Genetic Management Plan (plan) for the Wells Hydroelectric Project. The plan is required by Article 404 of the project license¹ and the Wells Hydroelectric Project Anadromous Fish Agreement and Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP).² The project is located on the Columbia River in Chelan, Douglas, and Okanogan counties, Washington.

BACKGROUND AND LICENSE REQUIREMENTS

2. License Article 404 requires the licensee to file for Commission approval, a plan to address the effects of the Wells Complex summer steelhead hatchery program (summer steelhead program) on federally-protected salmon and steelhead species under the Endangered Species Act. The licensee must include with the plan, documentation of consultation with the Wells Habitat Conservation Plan Coordinating Committee,³ copies of comments and recommendations on the plan after it has been prepared and provided to the consulted parties, and specific descriptions of how the consulted parties' comments

¹ Order Issuing New License, 141 FERC ¶ 62,104 (issued November 9, 2012).

² The Anadromous Fish Agreement and Habitat Conservation Plan was approved by the Commission on June 21, 2004 and incorporated into the existing project license by ordering paragraphs D, E, and G.

³ The parties to the HCP Committee include the National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Confederated Tribes and the Bands of the Yakima Nation, and the licensee.

are accommodated by the plan. The plan must be filed within one year of license issuance, or November 9, 2013.

LICENSEE'S PLAN

3. The licensee's plan is an integral part of its summer steelhead program which aims to restore naturally reproducing populations of Methow River summer steelhead in their native habitats using locally- adapted broodstock while maintaining genetic and ecologic integrity and supporting harvest where and when consistent with restoration objectives. The role of the plan within the summer steelhead program is to substantially reduce the number of Wells Hatchery-reared steelhead released into the Methow Basin and to emphasize locally-adapted broodstock and management strategies designed for the recovery of the steelhead populations upstream of Wells Dam. The proposed plan employs an adaptive management approach in order to maintain consistency with the management objectives of its summer steelhead program, which are set forth in the HCP.

4. The licensee would rely on three main programs within the summer steelhead program to fulfill the goals of the plan. Together, these three programs should gradually boost the overall average proportionate natural influence of natural-run summer steelhead in the Methow Basin by limiting smolt releases from the Wells Hatchery, using conservation fisheries to reduce the number of excess hatchery spawners, and removing excess hatchery steelhead from traps and weirs associated with the summer steelhead program facilities. The licensee states that these strategies should ultimately provide more rearing habitat for natural-run summer steelhead and reduce competition levels and mixing with hatchery-origin steelhead in the Methow Basin.

5. The first of the three programs, referred to as the "Twisp River Integrated Component," would focus on rebuilding the natural steelhead population in the Twisp River, a major tributary of the Methow River. This program would serve primarily as a steelhead recovery program. The second program, the "Lower Methow Safety-Net Component," would serve as a safety-net program⁴ for the Methow Basin by incorporating Methow Hatchery and natural-origin broodstock from the Twisp River Component. These steelhead would be reared at the Wells Hatchery downstream of Wells Dam on the Columbia River and released in the Methow River. The licensee would implement management strategies under the program to control excess hatchery escapement to the upper Methow Basin. The third program, the "Mainstem Columbia

⁴ In the event that the natural summer steelhead population levels become depressed, a safety-net program could function to supplement the natural population with hatchery reared, natural-origin broodstock.

Component,” would serve as a safety-net for steelhead populations upstream of Wells Dam. This program would segregate fish that were formerly released in the Methow Basin and provide harvest opportunities.

6. In addition, the plan contains details regarding broodstock collection and program size; spawning, incubation, rearing, residual management, and release of summer steelhead; and, escapement and management of returning adults. The licensee’s plan also contains proposed monitoring activities to evaluate performance indicators. These monitoring activities are regulated by an internal Monitoring and Evaluation Plan and analytical framework that the licensee has developed in consultation with the HCP Committee to, in part, satisfy its Endangered Species Act Section 10 Permit with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Under the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan, the licensee would prepare and file annual reports with the HCP Hatchery Committee and NMFS in accordance with its Section 10 Permit. The licensee does not propose to file the annual Monitoring and Evaluation Plan report with the Commission; however, the same information would be captured in the licensee’s HCP report, which is filed with the Commission on an annual basis.⁵

AGENCY CONSULTATION

7. The licensee’s plan details its consultation history for the plan. The plan was developed in consultation with the HCP Hatchery Committee, a subset of the HCP Coordinating Committee, during a series of HCP Hatchery Committee meetings that occurred between 2009 and 2011. The licensee received final HCP Hatchery Committee approval on its plan on March 9, 2011.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

8. The licensee’s proposed plan should assist in restoring naturally-producing populations of Methow River summer steelhead by using locally-adapted broodstock, while maintaining genetic and ecologic stock integrity. Additionally, the annual HCP report should serve as a sufficient means of keeping the Commission apprised of activities taking place under its plan.

9. The licensee’s Wells Hatchery Upper Columbia River Steelhead Hatchery Genetic Management Plan satisfies the requirements of license Article 404 and therefore, should be approved.

⁵ The annual HCP report is a requirement of the HCP.

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The Director orders:

(A) Public Utility District Number One of Douglas County, Washington's Wells Hatchery Upper Columbia River Steelhead Hatchery Genetic Management Plan, filed July 2, 2013, pursuant to Article 404 of the Wells Hydroelectric Project No. 2149 license, is approved.

(B) This order constitutes final agency action. Any party may file a request for rehearing of this order within 30 days from the date of its issuance, as provided in section 313(a) of the Federal Power Act, 16 U.S.C. § 8251 (2006), and the Commission's regulations at 18 C.F.R. § 385.713 (2013). The filing of a request for rehearing does not operate as a stay of the effective date of this order, or of any other date specified in this order. The licensee's failure to file a request for rehearing shall constitute acceptance of this order.

Thomas J. LoVullo
Chief, Aquatic Resources Branch
Division of Hydropower Administration
and Compliance

Document Content(s)

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