Summer 2018

Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter

Hungry Horse Dam, Montana

This newsletter is part of an ongoing effort to inform the public about the progress made in developing the CRSO EIS, which will provide documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act for long- term system operations, configuration, and maintenance of the 14 federal dam and reservoir projects in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. Please visit the CRSO webpage for project information and earlier project newsletters.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

BONNEVILLE POWER ADMINISTRATION

Welcome to the Summer 2018 issue of the CRSO EIS newsletter

This newsletter provides an update on development of the Columbia River System Operations Environmental Impact Statement (CRSO EIS). This EIS, undertaken by the co-lead agencies—the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), will inform future decisions to meet the system's multiple congressionally authorized purposes, address changing conditions within the system, and develop mitigation measures to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

The CRSO EIS Team, consisting of the co-lead and cooperating agencies, continue developing the reasonable range of alternatives and the detailed analysis necessary to identify any significant impacts from the potential implementation of these alternatives. This analysis will guide the refinement of alternatives and the mitigation measures. Developing these draft alternatives and mitigation measures is a complex, but an important step in the CRSO EIS process.

The co-lead agencies are committed to conducting an open and transparent process and look forward to providing additional updates.

Developing alternatives to meet objectives

From public input during the scoping phase of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, the CRSO EIS Team, categorized more than 100 project objectives and over 500 initial measures or actions at specific locations to achieve these objectives. The CRSO EIS team distilled these into a focused set of eight broad objectives representing problems that could be addressed with changes to system operations and/or configuration. The CRSO EIS team then grouped measures to accomplish one of the eight objectives to form single-objective alternatives.

Evaluation of the single-objective alternatives helps the team understand the tradeoffs between implementing different alternatives to meet a specific objective, while capturing a broad range of measures to help frame the analysis of impacts. The eight single-objective alternatives can be generally placed into two categories: Fish Passage & Survival (which includes consideration of increased spill, anadromous and resident fish survival, and breaching of the lower Snake River dams); and Operational Flexibility (which includes hydropower generation, water management, and water supply).

Next, the EIS team combined measures into alternatives intended to achieve more than one objective, called multiple-objective alternatives. The multiple-objective alternatives are designed to address more than one objective. Five multiple-objective alternatives are proposed for further analysis. One is the "No Action" alternative which is required under NEPA to use as a point of comparison, describing the conditions that would exist if the current system operations and management continued with no changes. The four others represent a combination of measures drawn from the single-objective alternatives. The single-objective and multiple-objective alternatives are evaluated and compared to each other to determine their benefits and impacts.

During a public webinar on May 30, 2018, the co-lead agencies outlined the eight objectives, provided more detail on the alternatives development process, the ability to incorporate measures from one alternative into another (the modularity concept), and discussed the content of the potential range of alternatives. The webinar presentation is available on the CRSO EIS webpage under Documents.

What is next?

Results from the preliminary analysis of both the single- and multiple-objective alternatives, the cumulative assessment of measures and consideration of variations in how the projects are currently operated and configured, will yield a reasonable range of alternatives.

This reasonable range of alternatives will undergo evaluation to understand the impacts of the measures individually and comprehensively as combined. After the initial impacts analyses are completed, the EIS team will identify mitigation measures to avoid, offset or minimize impacts to resources that will be incorporated into the alternatives as appropriate. The EIS team will use what is learned during the analysis process about measures in the single-objective or multiple-objective alternatives and make adjustments to the alternatives as necessary to assist in identifying a preferred alternative. Subsequently, the team will determine if an alternative can meet the co-lead agencies' resource, legal and institutional purposes.

A discussion of this reasonable range of alternatives, including the analysis of direct, indirect and cumulative impacts, will be available in the draft EIS in March 2020.

Definitions

Objectives: describe the results the EIS is trying to achieve (the "why").

Measures: the actions at a specific location to achieve a desired effect (the "how"). One measure may be used to achieve multiple-objectives and may be used at multiple locations.

Alternatives: an alternative is the combination of measures when implemented together that would meet one or more objective.

FAQs on navigation

This newsletter segment features our responses to questions we've heard from stakeholders in public meetings or public forums.

Why have the co-lead agencies not included specific authorized purposes, such as navigation, as objectives in the CRSO EIS?

A: The objectives developed for the CRSO EIS focus on what the co-lead agencies are considering changing based, in part, on input from the public scoping process. Through the public scoping process the co-lead agencies did not receive recommended changes to how the Columbia River system is operated for commercial navigation, nor did the agencies identify a needed change in commercial navigation. Therefore, there was no need to include an objective to make changes to commercial navigation within this EIS.

The Corps is responsible for ensuring safe navigation by maintaining certain components of the dam and reservoir projects, including the federal navigation channel, locks and training walls, as well as operating the projects to provide specified water depths that support safe navigation through the management of flow and reservoir elevations.

Will navigation, as a project purpose, be evaluated in the CRSO EIS?

A: Yes, although there were no proposed changes to navigation from co-lead agency needs or the public scoping process, the EIS will evaluate any potential changes to navigation as a result of impacts from implementing an EIS alternative. For the purposes of the EIS analysis, the required "No Action" alternative will describe the current operations, maintenance and configuration of the system that meets the congressionally authorized purposes of the projects, including navigation. The co-lead agencies will evaluate all other alternatives in the context of meeting the purpose and need statement, the CRSO EIS objectives, achieving the congressionally authorized purposes, and consistency with all applicable laws and regulations, as compared to the "No Action" alternative. Some alternatives may impact or eliminate certain authorized purposes, such as commercial navigation as a result of lower Snake River dam breaching. As is the case with all alternatives, the tradeoffs analysis for these alternatives will include an assessment of economic impacts.

In the case of commercial navigation, analyzing different modes of transportation (e.g. rail or trucks) will help identify and describe tradeoffs. This analysis also will determine both costs and benefits to regional biological and socio-economic resources to facilitate comparison among all of the alternatives. This comparison will inform the co-lead agencies' identification of a preferred alternative in the draft and final EIS.

Barge in front of John Day Lock and Dam, Oregon

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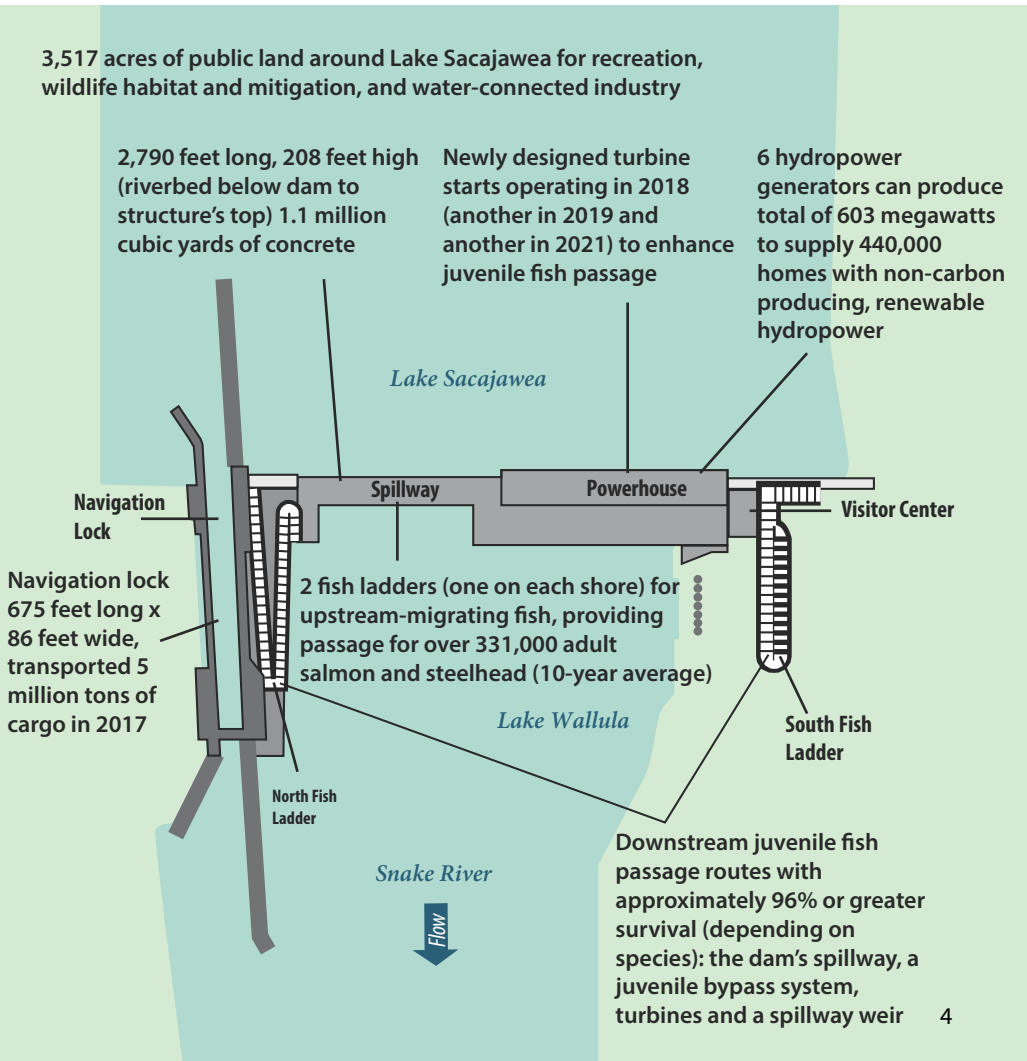
Ice Harbor Lock and Dam

The Columbia River System is a large and complex system. This newsletter feature introduces you to individual projects that play a role in supporting the region's tribes, communities, industries and fish and wildlife species. To learn more, visit the CRSO EIS website.

The Corps operates and maintains Ice Harbor Lock and Dam, the lowermost of the Corps' four dams on the lower Snake River, to fulfill its congressionally authorized purposes of commercial navigation, hydropower generation, fish and wildlife conservation (including fish passage), recreation, irrigation and municipal and industrial water supply. The Corps operates this dam in coordination with the other 13 federal dam and reservoir projects in the Columbia River System.