



Department of Energy

Bonneville Power Administration
P.O. Box 3621
Portland, Oregon 97208-3621

ENVIRONMENT, FISH AND WILDLIFE

September 30, 2020

In reply refer to: EC-4

To: People Interested in the Bonneville Adoption of Reducing Predation Impacts on At-Risk Fish by California and Steller Sea Lions in the Columbia River Basin Environmental Assessment

Bonneville is issuing a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) for its decision to provide funding to the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (CRITFC) for a sea lion barge and transfer cages and a request from CRITFC to provide Bonneville funding for activities that would support intentional take, by lethal methods, of California sea lions (CSL) and Steller sea lions (SSL) under the Section 120(f) Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) authorization that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) recently issued to eligible entities which would test the efficacy of lethal removal CSL and SSL to reduce predation impacts on salmon and steelhead.

Background: NMFS considered an application pursuant to Section 120(f) of the MMPA to intentionally take, by lethal methods, sea lions by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game; the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation; and the Willamette Committee (eligible entities). NMFS convened the Pinniped-Fishery Interaction Task Force to establish recommendations and inform its determination to either approve or deny the eligible entities' application. NMFS prepared an EA to help the agency determine if the authorization would cause significant impacts that would warrant preparing an environmental impact statement. NMFS issued a FONSI on August 14, 2020, and partially approved the eligible entities' application with recommendations from the task force.

In addition to applying for the authorization, the eligible entities submitted a funding request to Bonneville for a one-time purchase of equipment large enough to handle Steller sea lions, including a barge and transfer cages. In addition, CRITFC has requested changes to its existing contract with Bonneville to transition from sea lion hazing activities to activities supporting the lethal removal of CSL and SSL.

Specifically, CRITFC requests funding for the following CSL and SSL activities that would be primarily focused at the tailrace of the Bonneville Dam:

- Scouting trap deployment sites and identifying animal use and haul-out areas
- Trap deployment, setup, and monitoring
- Active trapping of sea lions
- Transferring sea lions to a handling barge
- Moving sea lions from traps to a dispatching area
- Handling sea lions and carcasses

These activities would test the efficacy of lethal removal of CSL and SSL to reduce predation impacts on salmon and steelhead. Bonneville would fund such actions under its authority under Section 4(g)(3) of the

Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act, which allows Bonneville to “investigate possible measures” for inclusion in the Northwest Power and Conservation Council’s Power Plan (which includes its Columbia River Basin Fish and Wildlife Program).

While Bonneville was a Cooperating Agency in the development of the NMFS EA, the short timelines required under the MMPA Section 120(f) program implementation procedures prevented Bonneville from commenting on the final draft. Therefore, Bonneville adopted the NMFS EA with minor text revisions and issued a FONSI on September 30, 2020.

Decision: Based on the analysis of the adopted EA, Bonneville proposes to provide funding to the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho and CRITFC for a barge and transfer cages (and related equipment) and to fund CRITFC’s activities supporting the intentional take, by lethal methods, of California sea lions and Steller sea lions in the mainstem of the Columbia River, subject to the conditions under the section 120(f) authorization, which would test the efficacy of lethal removal of California sea lions and Steller sea lions to reduce predation impacts on salmon and steelhead.

The adopted EA and FONSI are available on BPA’s website at:
www.bpa.gov/goto/ReduceSeaLionPredation

Thank you for your interest in our work.

Sincerely,

/s/ Dan Gambetta

Dan Gambetta

Environmental Protection Specialist