

2003. Comments may also be made at an EIS scoping meeting open house to be held on May 22, 2003, at the time and address below.

ADDRESSES: Send letters with comments and suggestions on the proposed scope of the Draft EIS that is being developed, and requests to be placed on the project mailing list, to Communications, Bonneville Power Administration—DM-7, P.O. Box 12999, Portland, Oregon, 97212. Comments may also be sent to the BPA Internet address at comment@bpa.gov.

On May 22, 2003, a scoping meeting open house will be held from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Regional Headquarters of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 490 N. Meridian Road, Kalispell, Montana.

Information about the project can also be obtained from a BPA website at: <http://www.efw.bpa.gov/cgi-bin/PSA/NEPA/SUMMARIES/MountainLakesTrout>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Colleen Spiering, Environmental Project Manager, Bonneville Power Administration—KEC-4, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3621; direct telephone number 503-230-5756; toll-free telephone number 1-800-282-3713; fax number 503-230-5699; e-mail address: caspiering@bpa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Lead and Cooperating Agencies: BPA shall be the lead agency in preparing and issuing an EIS for this project. The United States Forest Service (USFS), Flathead National Forest, Department of Agriculture; and Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) will participate as cooperating agencies.

Responsible Officials:

- Stephen J. Wright, Administrator and Chief Executive Officer, Bonneville Power Administration, PO Box 3621, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3621.
- Cathy Barbouletos, Forest Supervisor, Flathead National Forest, 1935 3rd Ave. East, Kalispell, Montana, 59901.
- Dan Vincent, Regional Supervisor, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 490 North Meridian Road, Kalispell, Montana, 59901.

Nature of Decisions To Be Made: BPA will be deciding whether to fund the project. USFS will determine if the use of fish toxins and motorized equipment will be permitted in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, the Jewel Basin Hiking Area, and the Flathead National Forest. The rationales for the decisions will be documented in two separate Records of Decision. The USFS decision will be subject to appeal under applicable USFS regulations.

Background: The South Fork Flathead River, above Hungry Horse Dam, contains one of the largest natural populations of native westslope cutthroat trout in the nation. Hungry Horse Dam protects the entire South Fork drainage from exotic fish invasion from fish downstream of the dam. Further protection is afforded in that the entire watershed is on National Forest land, wilderness, and proposed wilderness. However, numerous lakes that drain into the South Fork contain non-native rainbow and Yellowstone cutthroat trout that have interbred with westslope cutthroat trout creating hybrid populations. Presently these populations are providing sources of hybrid trout that threaten genetically pure native cutthroat trout populations downstream of the lakes and in the South Fork Flathead River.

Purpose and Need for Action: Development of the hydropower system in the Columbia River Basin has had far-reaching effects on many species of fish and wildlife. BPA is responsible for protecting, mitigating, and enhancing fish and wildlife affected by the development, operation, and management of Federal hydroelectric facilities on the Columbia River and its tributaries. (See Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 839b(h)(10)(A).) BPA meets this responsibility, in part, by funding projects identified through a regional process led by the Northwest Power Planning Council. The South Fork Flathead Watershed/Westslope Cutthroat Trout Conservation Program, a portion of the Hungry Horse Dam Mitigation Program, was proposed by MFWP for BPA funding. The project is a cooperative effort with MFWP and USFS, Flathead National Forest.

Of the 355 lakes in the South Fork drainage above Hungry Horse Dam, 50 have fish. Twenty-nine of these have genetically pure populations of native westslope cutthroat trout and approximately 21 have hybrid populations (confirmed through the University of Montana's Wild Trout and Salmon Genetics Laboratory)—see Sage, Huston, Leary, Rumsey and Cavigli cited below). The lakes with hybrid populations are being targeted in this project.

Genetic contamination by exotic trout occurred in the past when anglers or fish managers planted the lakes with non-native rainbow and Yellowstone cutthroat trout to provide or enhance recreational angling opportunities. Some of the lakes have no record of stocking of these species, but the exotic trout are present in the lakes. Genetic

surveys have shown that exotic populations in headwater lakes are out-migrating. This threatens to compromise the genetic integrity of pure stocks downstream (Huston 1988, Huston 1989, Huston 1990, Sage 1993, Leary 2002, Rumsey and Cavigli 2002). Extensive examination of westslope cutthroat trout in the South Fork Flathead River presently confirms their genetic purity; however, their continued genetic purity is at great risk due to hybridization from upstream lakes.

Since 1986, most of the lakes have been stocked with genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout from Montana State's M012 brood stock in an attempt to shift the populations toward a genetically pure state through progressive inbreeding. The M012 stock was derived from wild westslope cutthroat trout from 12 populations in the South Fork Flathead River drainage and two from the Clark Fork River drainage. Once the wild fish were acclimated to the hatchery, they were genetically tested to assure purity.

The underlying need for action is to protect the genetically pure populations of native westslope cutthroat trout currently existing in the Flathead River Watershed from hybridization with rainbow trout and Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

Proposed Action: The Proposed Action is to remove all fish from selected lakes in the South Fork of the Flathead River Watershed in the Flathead National Forest, the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and the Jewel Basin Hiking Area. These selected lakes harbor non-native species that threaten to enter and genetically contaminate streams leading from those lakes, down into the Flathead River and Hungry Horse Reservoir. There are approximately 21 lakes targeted for treatment. Two or three lakes would be treated each year for about a 10-year period. The proposed method of fish removal is to utilize registered compounds that are toxic to fish.

Floodplains and Wetlands: In accordance with DOE regulations for compliance with floodplains and wetlands environmental review requirements, BPA will prepare a floodplain and wetlands assessment and will perform this proposed action in a manner so as to avoid or minimize potential harm to or within the affected floodplain and wetlands. The assessment and a floodplain statement of findings will be included in the EIS being prepared for the proposed project in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Process to Date: BPA sent a letter to the public dated November 16, 2001,