



WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT
OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
FINAL
July 23, 2004

STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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June 22, 2004

Dear Interested Parties:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has published a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) titled, **Lower Skagit River Steelhead Acclimation and Rearing Facility.** WDFW is considering two possible locations for the proposed steelhead acclimation and rearing facility. One site is on land owned by WDFW in the Birdsvie area near Grandy Creek, and one is on land owned by Puget Sound Energy near the town of Concrete, about six miles upstream from the lower site. This DEIS presents the environmental impacts and mitigation if the acclimation and rearing facility were constructed on one of two alternative sites, as well as if no action were taken. The issue to be resolved is primarily related to the choice of site.

Public Hearing: On Wednesday, July 14, 2004, from 6-8 p.m. in Hearing Room B of the Skagit County Administration Building, 700 South 2nd St. in Mount Vernon, the WDFW will hold a public hearing to gather public input on the proposal to build a facility that will be used seasonally to acclimate up to 334,000 winter-run hatchery steelhead on the lower Skagit.

Following requirements of the State Environmental Policy Act, interested citizens can provide comments on this proposed project by attending the public hearing, or by sending comments on the DEIS via mail or e-mail. Comment are due by **July 22, 2004 5:00 P.M.**, which is the end of the public comment period.

Notice of Availability: The DEIS is available for review and download beginning June 22, 2004 on WDFW's website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/hab/sepa/sepa.htm>. Printed copies are available for review at the Mount Vernon, Burlington, Sedro Woolley and Concrete libraries. CDs and a limited supply of bound copies are available by calling WDFW at (360) 902-2534. Written requests for a copy of the DEIS should be addressed to WDFW, Attention: SEPA Center, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA. 98501-1091, or via e-mail at habitatSEPA@dfw.wa.gov.

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

Grandy Creek Site

- The Grandy Creek site would undergo a change from a disturbed site overrun by invasive plants to an active juvenile fish acclimation and rearing and adult collection facility.
- Some topographic and drainage pattern changes would be inevitable and unavoidable with project development.
- Invasive species would be replaced by native species in many areas of the site, particularly within the riparian zone between the proposed development area and Grandy Creek.

- Due to instream placement of weir and ladder structures during trapping operations (December 1 – March 15), upstream and downstream fish migrants would be temporarily delayed (no more than 24 hours). Following the trapping period, the weir would be removed to allow passage in Grandy Creek, and the fish ladder would be equipped with a bar grate to prevent entrance by upstream migrants.
- Some existing, unauthorized public access would be removed by fencing the central portion of the site; public access would be facilitated along the route between Cape Horn Road and the Skagit River.

Baker River Site

- The Baker River site would be cleared and excavated to accommodate two raceways, associated pipelines and a clarifier pond.
- Some topographic and drainage pattern changes would be inevitable and unavoidable with project development and excavation.
- Instream work to modify the existing intake structure, or to construct a new NOAA Fisheries compliant structure would be necessary. However, because the intake is situated upstream of the barrier dam, which is inaccessible to fish with the exception of stray juveniles that make their way downstream from Baker Lake through PSE turbines, negligible losses to instream habitat would occur.

AREAS OF CONTROVERSY AND UNCERTAINTY

Grandy Creek Site

- Drawdown of Grandy Creek may occur with proposed well pumping and water return. The magnitude of a potential drawdown is unknown.

Baker River Site

- The presence of the sockeye-strain of Infectious Hematopoetic Necrosis Virus (IHNV) in surface water and its potential effect on rearing steelhead.

Both Sites

- Both sites would improve acclimation of more juveniles to the lower Skagit River and the collection of adults at the site may increase ecological interactions in the immediate vicinity of the project site. As the project would attempt to shift a majority of the hatchery adult returns to the lower Skagit River, there may be less hatchery/wild interaction in the upper river.

WDFW believes this draft environmental impact statement will assist decision makers to identify the key environmental issues, and options associated with this action. Based on comments received from agencies and interested parties during public review of this draft document, WDFW will prepare and distribute a final environmental impact statement.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by: Teresa A. Eturaspe

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