

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 124 FERC ¶ 62,001
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Public Utility District No.1
of Douglas County

Project No. 2149-140

ORDER APPROVING RECREATION ACTION PLAN UPDATE

(Issued July 01, 2008)

On December 26, 2007, Public Utility District No. 1 of Douglas County (licensee) filed a recreation action plan update (plan) for the Wells Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2149).¹ The project is located on the Columbia River in Douglas and Okanogan Counties, Washington.

BACKGROUND

By order issued August 12, 1987, the Commission approved the public use and recreation action plan for the project, required by article 51 of the project license.² The 1987 order requires the licensee to re-evaluate the project's recreation facilities every five years to determine if the facilities are meeting the recreational demands of the area, and to file updates with the Commission.³

PROPOSAL

The licensee states that it is requesting approval of its plan that has been developed after extensive consultation with various stakeholders and interested parties. The plan includes descriptions of: (1) the regional setting and the immediate vicinity with regard to recreational opportunities; (2) existing recreational opportunities at the project; (3) statewide, mid-Columbia River, and project-area trends in recreational use; (4) regional and project-area recreational needs; and (5) an action plan and associated costs.

¹ The previous plan was approved by Order Approving Recreation Action Plan Update and Amending Recreation Action Plan Under Article 51, issued November 26, 2003 (105 FERC ¶ 62,130).

² Article 51 was added to the license in 1982 by Order Amending License (20 FERC ¶ 62,577).

³ See Order Approving Public Use and Recreation Action Plan (40 FERC ¶ 62,157).

The plan provides for proposed improvements to existing recreational facilities at the Wells Project, including facilities in or near the Cities of Pateros, Brewster, and Bridgeport. In addition, the licensee proposes to design, construct and operate a new boat launch at Carpenter Island below Wells Dam. Improvements are also proposed at Peninsula Park and Memorial Park in Pateros, Columbia Cove Park in Brewster, and Marina Park in Bridgeport. The plan further includes financial and technical assistance to the Friends of Fort Okanogan for media materials, such as brochures, to promote their upcoming 2011 Fort Okanogan Bicentennial.

Numerous proposed improvements are specifically enumerated in Table ES-1 of the plan, entitled: *2007 RAP Update Actions and Cost Estimates for 2007-2012*. The total estimated cost to implement these improvements is \$4,264,000. The locations where these improvements would be implemented either are entirely inside or outside the project boundary, or traverse the boundary, as indicated in Table ES-1. All of the improvements would be implemented within the next five years.

CONSULTATION

Before filing its plan, the licensee consulted with the National Park Service; Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission; Washington Division of Fish and Wildlife; Washington Department of Transportation; Cities of Brewster, Bridgeport, and Pateros; Port of Chelan County; Friends of Fort Okanogan; and Okanogan Historical Society. The licensee conducted numerous meetings and used other forms of consultation with the cities regarding the plan. The licensee also provided a draft of the plan to these entities for their comments and recommendations prior to filing it with the Commission.

The Cities of Pateros, Brewster, and Bridgeport commented on the plan, as did the Friends of Fort Okanogan, and the Port of Chelan County. The plan adequately addresses the comments that are relevant to the project. In sections 7.2 and 7.3 of the plan, the licensee agrees to complete most of the recommendations of Brewster and Bridgeport (with associated improvements to cost \$394,000) within the five-year period covered by the plan. In section 7.4 of the plan, the licensee also agrees to most of Pateros' recommendations (with associated improvements to cost \$1,070,000), and addresses those recommendations not agreed to at this time, in a section-7.4 table, entitled: *Douglas County Response to the November 13, 2007, City of Pateros Letter Regarding the Revised Draft 2007 Recreation Action Plan Update*.

Generally, the licensee states that while present data does not support the need for certain improvements to recreational resources, studies will be completed during the relicensing process that will provide for an in-depth analysis of future recreational needs

in the project area. The licensee also states that while all recommendations were not agreed to, it has committed to major improvements and maintenance actions over the five-year period, during which the relicensing process will take place as well. Further, the licensee states that for future long-term needs, the licensing process will provide these local cities an avenue for further consideration of any remaining issues.

By letters to the Commission dated January 31, 2008, and February 11, 2008, the City of Pateros and the Okanogan County Board of Commissioners (OCB), respectively, state that the plan should not be approved until remaining issues between the two entities are resolved. Both letters are essentially identical, expressing the same concerns and recommendations.

The City of Pateros and the OCB identify the remaining unresolved issues as follows:

(1) Due to a national security-related closure of the visitor center at the Wells Dam in 2001, a new center should be built away from the dam.

(2) In 2007, the licensee conducted a recreational use assessment and found that public recreational use at the Wells reservoir is “miniscule” compared to downstream project reservoirs. The licensee has not conducted adequate recreational use surveys and, therefore, did not have the appropriate survey data from which to plan recreational development.

(3) References to “informal boat launches” should be deleted from the plan. These launch sites are not identified as public sites, and offer no amenities. Also, public use is essentially discouraged at these sites.

(4) The licensee’s commissioners, on December 17, 2007, prohibited the development of all new boat docks on the reservoir, except those within the Pateros city limits. The licensee should fund the development of a new marina within Pateros’ limits to mitigate for the loss of business and access to the reservoir as a result of this new restriction.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The licensee has spent the last two decades cooperating with local city and county governments to develop and improve public recreational opportunities at and around the project. This effort has contributed to tourism and economic growth in the immediate region. Also, this effort is consistent with the intent of the project license, particularly

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article 51, and the Commission's regulations.⁴ The recreational improvements that have been developed over the years by the licensee, in cooperation with the localities, have benefited the recreating public and the December 26 plan carries this commitment by the licensee and localities into the relicense period.

Overall, the cities and county governments have indicated the value of working together with the licensee in improving and adding to the enjoyment of project recreational resources, both for tourists and residents. The licensee acknowledges its ongoing commitment to public recreation, as evidenced by its financial commitment, and the leadership role it has taken in the planning and implementation of recreational opportunities.

The plan provides for a variety of proposed recreational improvements over the next five years, with estimated costs totaling \$ 4,264,000. This financial commitment to enhance recreational experiences in the project area would be distributed among the Cities of Pateros, Brewster, and Bridgeport.

While the licensee indicates it does not support the need for certain improvements at this time, it acknowledges that these issues will be considered during the project relicensing process in the context of an in-depth analysis of future recreational needs in the project area. The licensee states that it has committed to major improvements and maintenance actions over a five-year period. The plan fulfills the requirements of the 1987 order and we agree that any future refinement of the plan is best considered during the ongoing relicensing process. The plan should be approved.

The Director Orders:

(A) Public Utility District No.1 of Douglas County's recreation action plan update filed on December 26, 2007, containing specified improvements to project recreational resources, is approved and made part of the license for the project.

⁴ Licensees are encouraged to cooperate with appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies, and other interested entities, to determine public recreation needs, and to cooperate in the preparation of plans to meet these needs (18 C.F.R. § 2.7).

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(B) This order constitutes final agency action. Requests for rehearing by the Commission may be filed within 30 days of the date of this order, pursuant to 18 C.F.R. § 385.713.

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Administration and Compliance

Document Content(s)

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