

I. Introduction

This document constitutes the Record of Decision (ROD) of the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), Pacific Northwest Region, in which the alternative from the Banks Lake Drawdown Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) selected for implementation is identified. The FEIS (INT-FES-04-09) was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on May 20, 2004. The FEIS was prepared pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Department of the Interior policies, and Reclamation's NEPA handbook. The FEIS provides an analysis of the potential impacts to the human environment related to a potential 10 foot drawdown of Banks Lake compared to the No Action Alternative, which has a 5-foot drawdown.

The FEIS was developed in response to the December 2000 National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS; now the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA] Fisheries) Biological Opinion (BiOp) issued to the Bureau of Reclamation, Bonneville Power Administration, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System (NMFS 2000). The BiOp included a Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA), of which Action 31 advised the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to "assess the likely environmental effects of operation of Banks Lake up to 10 feet down from full pool during August."

Reclamation complied with RPA Action 31 by preparing the Banks Lake Drawdown environmental impact statement (EIS), which describes and analyzes the environmental effects of lowering the August water surface elevation of Banks Lake annually to elevation 1560 feet, which is 10 feet below the full pool elevation of 1570 feet.

II. Reclamation's Decision

Reclamation's decision is to implement the No Action Alternative, identified as the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS. The No Action Alternative is also the Environmentally Preferred Alternative. Implementing this alternative will avoid adverse impacts associated with implementation of the Action Alternative.

III. Alternatives Considered

Two alternatives were described and analyzed in the FEIS. The No Action Alternative described the Banks Lake August water surface elevations that would occur if Reclamation decided not to implement the Action Alternative. Four

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scenarios were presented to illustrate how reaching a water surface elevation of 1565 feet by August 31 might occur. The Action Alternative, also with four illustrative scenarios, described the proposed operational modification of August water surface elevations to achieve elevation 1560 feet by August 31.

No Action Alternative

Under No Action, Banks Lake water surface elevations would normally range from 1570 feet to 1565 feet between August 1 and September 22. Under the No Action Alternative, Reclamation would still have the discretion to manage the lake level to other water surface elevations for authorized purposes.

Three different scenarios to draft this volume of water in August were modeled, while another scenario assumed no draft during August. All four scenarios were evaluated in the FEIS. Scenarios consisted of Low Water, an Early Draft, a Uniform Draft, and a Late Draft. The Low Water scenario assumed that Banks Lake was at water surface elevation 1565 feet on August 1, while the remaining three scenarios assumed that the water surface was at elevation 1570 feet on August 1. Under the No Action Alternative, the September 1 Banks Lake water surface elevation would be no lower than 1565 feet. Projected refill would occur over the period from September 1 until September 22 when the reservoir could reach elevation 1570 feet.

Action Alternative

In the Action Alternative, Banks Lake water surface elevations would normally range between elevation 1570 feet and 1560 feet between August 1 and September 22 annually. This is an additional 5 feet of drawdown compared to the No Action Alternative. This alternative would provide 127,200 acre feet of water that could be used to increase the flow of the Columbia River at McNary Dam by about 1 to 2 percent during the month of August, compared to No Action. Reclamation would still have discretion to manage the lake level to other elevations for authorized purposes.

The Action Alternative included a refill beginning on September 1, reaching elevation 1565 feet by September 10 and 1570 feet by September 22. The range of possible water surface elevations under the Action Alternative was evaluated by selecting four scenarios, consisting of Low Water, an Early Draft, a Uniform Draft, and a Late Draft. The first scenario assumed that the water surface was at elevation 1565 feet on August 1. The other scenarios assumed that the Banks Lake water surface elevation was at 1570 feet on August 1. Under the Action Alternative, August 31 Banks Lake water surface target elevation would be 1560 feet. Refill at the fastest rate possible would start on September 1 and would continue at that rate until approximately September 18 when the reservoir would be at about 1569 feet. The refill rate would be based on pumping during all hours while meeting irrigation demand, and assumed two pumps were unavailable because of annual maintenance. On September 18 the Banks Lake water surface elevation (1569 feet) would be identical under both the Action and No Action Alternatives and additional refill to elevation 1570 feet would be identical to refill

under the No Action Alternative with the reservoir reaching elevation 1570 feet on September 22. Reclamation would continue to have discretion to manage the lake level to fill at other times for other authorized uses.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The Environmentally Preferred Alternative is the No Action Alternative. This alternative will best promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA, and will cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment, while best protecting and preserving historic, cultural, and natural resources.

IV. Issues Evaluated and Basis for the Decision

The issues identified during the NEPA scoping process and considered throughout the discussion of the affected environment and environmental consequences in the FEIS were:

- Lake elevations, instream flows, and water quality
- Irrigation deliveries
- Fish and wildlife
- Threatened and endangered species
- Recreation
- Public safety—roads, boating, and fire hazards
- Cultural resources
- Economics, particularly for local economy and power

Reclamation is implementing the No Action Alternative to avoid adverse impacts identified in the FEIS to recreation, resident fish, vegetation, cultural resources, the local economy around Banks Lake, and Federal and non-Federal power production. Reclamation has concluded the very small incremental benefit to ESA-listed salmon and steelhead associated with the contribution from the drawdown of Banks Lake, 1-2 percent of the flow objective at McNary Dam, is not sufficient to outweigh the adverse impacts to other resources.

V. Public Response to the FEIS

No comments were received on the FEIS.

VI. Environmental Commitments in Implementing the Decision

No mitigation actions would be necessary or implemented as part of the No Action Alternative.

VII. Decision

Based on the factors discussed above, it is my decision that the Area Manager, Upper Columbia Area Office, and the Deputy Area Manager, Ephrata Field Office, proceed with implementing the Preferred Alternative, the No Action Alternative, as described in the FEIS and this ROD.

Approved:

J. William McDonald
Regional Director
Pacific Northwest Region
Boise, Idaho

June 29, 2004
Date