



UNITED STATES  
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

March 23, 2017

Mr. Mark E. Reddemann  
Chief Executive Officer  
Energy Northwest  
PO Box 968 (Mail Drop 1023)  
Richland, WA 99352-0968

SUBJECT: TRANSMITTAL OF THE NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE'S  
MARCH 10, 2017, FINAL BIOLOGICAL OPINION FOR COLUMBIA  
GENERATING STATION

Dear Mr. Reddemann:

The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) concluded formal consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (ESA) on March 10, 2017, with the NMFS's issuance of a final biological opinion regarding renewing the operating license for the Columbia Generating Station (CGS). The NMFS's transmittal letter and the biological opinion are enclosed and are available at Agencywide Documents Access and Management System (ADAMS) Accession No. ML17072A036. The biological opinion considers the effects of the continued operation of CGS under the terms of Renewed Facility Operating License No. NPF-21 on Upper Columbia River (UCR) spring-run Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) and UCR steelhead (*O. mykiss*). This letter follows the NMFS's transmittal of an electronic copy of the biological opinion to the NRC and Energy Northwest on March 10, 2017.

Pursuant to ESA section 7, the NRC initiated communications with the NMFS in 2010 during the NRC staff's review of Energy Northwest's license renewal application for CGS. The NRC submitted a biological assessment to the NMFS on August 23, 2011 (ADAMS Accession No. ML11165A023), that concluded that the renewal of the CGS operating license "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" the two federally listed salmonids. Following its review of the biological assessment, the NMFS responded by letter dated October 24, 2011 (ADAMS Accession No. ML11307A393), stating that it did not concur with the NRC's conclusion. This letter directed the NRC to initiate formal ESA section 7 consultation with the NMFS. Consultation between the NRC and the NMFS continued until the NMFS's issuance of the enclosed biological opinion.

After reviewing and analyzing the current status of the listed species and critical habitat, the environmental baseline within the action area, the effects of the action, any effects of interrelated and interdependent activities, and cumulative effects, the NMFS concluded in the biological opinion that the continued operation of CGS through the duration of the renewed operating license period

...is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of UCR spring-run Chinook salmon or UCR steelhead or to destroy or adversely modify either species' designated critical habitat.

The biological opinion includes an Incidental Take Statement (ITS) that applies to UCR spring-run Chinook salmon and UCR steelhead during operation of CGS through the duration of the renewed operating license period (i.e., through December 20, 2043). The ITS exempts the incidental take of individuals that may occur as a result of

- entrainment and impingement at the water intake screens;
- exposure to concentrations of chlorine, copper, zinc, and selenium shown to affect survival; and
- angling and, if needed, electrofishing for resident fish during Radiological Environmental Monitoring Program (REMP) sampling.

The ITS specifies allowable numbers for such takes on an annual basis or, in the case of chemical exposure, constituent concentration limits that function as a surrogate for identifying an exceedance of take.

The biological opinion also includes Reasonable and Prudent Measures (RPMs) that the NMFS determined to be necessary or appropriate to minimize the impact of the amount or extent of incidental take, along with Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) needed to implement these RPMs, both of which are non-discretionary. Section 2.9.4 of the biological opinion states that

...the licensee (Energy Northwest) must make compliance with [the T&Cs] a requirement of its renewed license for CGS in order to implement the RPMs (50 CFR 402.14).

Accordingly, if Energy Northwest wishes to take advantage of the protective coverage of ESA section 7(o)(2) that compliance with the ITS contained in the enclosed March 10, 2017, biological opinion would afford, Energy Northwest should submit to the NRC a license amendment request requesting appropriate changes to the Environmental Protection Plan (EPP) contained in Appendix B of the CGS renewed operating license. For instance, Energy Northwest could request to change the EPP so that it states that Energy Northwest shall adhere to the specific requirements within the ITS in the currently applicable biological opinion.

Finally, I would also like to highlight the NMFS's conservation recommendation, which is included in Section 2.10 of the biological opinion. As part of formal ESA section 7 consultation, the NMFS may provide with the biological opinion a statement containing discretionary conservation recommendations. Conservation recommendations are suggestions of the Service regarding discretionary measures to minimize or avoid adverse effects of a proposed action on listed species or critical habitat or regarding the development of information. Conservation recommendations are advisory and are not intended to carry any binding legal force. The enclosed March 10, 2017, biological opinion includes one conservation recommendation for your consideration.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Ms. Briana Grange, Biologist, at 301-415-1042 or by e-mail at [briana.grange@nrc.gov](mailto:briana.grange@nrc.gov) or Mr. John Klos, Project Manager, at 301-415-5136 or by e-mail at [john.klos@nrc.gov](mailto:john.klos@nrc.gov).

Sincerely,

*/RA/*

Jeffrey J. Rikhoff, Acting Chief  
Environmental Review and Project  
Management Branch  
Division of License Renewal  
Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation

Docket No. 50-397

Enclosures:

1. NMFS's Transmittal Letter
2. Biological Opinion

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ADAMS Accession Nos.: ML17072A270 (package), ML17072A265 (letter), ML17072A036 (enclosure)  
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