

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

STILLING BASIN SEDIMENT REMOVAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Tiered From the 2014 Lower Snake River Programmatic Sediment Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement

Section 2 of the River and Harbor Act of 1945 (Public Law 79-14)

Columbia, Franklin, Garfield, Walla Walla, and Whitman Counties, Washington

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Walla Walla District (Corps) has conducted an environmental analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended. The March 2024 *Stilling Basin Sediment Removal Environmental Assessment* (EA), identifies and evaluates the potential environmental effects associated with the Corps' proposed action of dredging, and related in-water disposal of accumulated sediment from the stilling basins at Lower Granite, Little Goose, and Lower Monumental dams (Projects). The proposed dredging-disposal action is planned in accordance with the 2014 *Lower Snake River Programmatic Sediment Management Plan* (PSMP), and this EA is tiered to the associated Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), both of which are incorporated herein by reference¹. The proposed schedule for the stilling basin sediment removal would be spaced out with Lower Granite and Lower Monumental to be cleaned out first from December 2024 to March 2025 followed by the clean out of Little Goose which would be completed from December 2025 to March 2026, subject to any delays and available funding/resources.

USACE authority to construct, operate, and maintain the Lower Snake River Projects (LSRP) was first established in Section 2 of the River and Harbor Act (Public Law (PL) 79-14) and approved March 2, 1945, in accordance with House Document 704, 75th Congress, 3rd Session. The Projects are also considered under the River and Harbor Act and the Flood Control Act of 1944 (PL 78-534), both Acts grant USACE authority to construct, operate, and maintain these structures.

The purpose of the proposed dredging and related in-water disposal is to identify existing and prevent further damage to the stilling basins at the Projects. The selected alternative should clear cobbles and sediment from the stilling basins to expose the basins for inspection. Removal of cobbles would also prevent further damage to the basins, at least in the short-term. An action is needed large cobble is drawn into the stilling basins, where it circulates in strong, spill-driven eddies. The cobble both damages and obscures the spillway aprons, creating unknown, but potentially hazardous conditions. Without periodic inspection and completed of appropriate repairs,

¹ <https://www.nww.usace.army.mil/Missions/Projects/Programmatic-Sediment-Management-Plan/>

the spillways could erode the base of the Projects. (see EA Section 1.1.3 and Section 3.3.2.1 of the PSMP FEIS for more details regarding the purpose and need).

The EA evaluates the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1), Alternative 2 – Dredging with In-water Disposal, and Alternative 3 – Dredging with Upland Disposal. Alternative 2 is the proposed action and has been identified as the preferred alternative, which includes:

- The proposed removal of accumulated debris and sediments from the stilling basins of Lower Granite Lock and Dam, Little Goose Lock and Dam, and Lower Monumental Lock and Dam.
- All collective dredged material (approximately 36,150 cubic yards) would be disposed in-water either near Swift Bar HMU at river mile (RM) 96 in the lower Snake River in Washington State or near Joso HMU at RM 57.

More detailed information on alternatives considered can be found in Section 2 of the EA. In addition to a “No Action Alternative”, only dredging in combination with 2 disposal options alternatives were evaluated. The disposal options were evaluated in detail in the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation, Appendix A of the EA. The PSMP/FEIS determined that dredging is the only option for immediate need sediment management (i.e., once sediment has accumulated and is interfering with Project purposes).

For Alternative 2, the potential effects to the following resources are shown here:

Resource	Less than significant effects	Insignificant effects as a result of mitigation	Resource unaffected by action
Sediment	X	-	-
Water Quality	X	-	-
Aquatic Resources, with Threatened and Endangered Species	X	-	-
Recreation	X	-	-
Terrestrial Resources, with Threatened and Endangered Species	X	-	-
Wildlife	X		
Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice	X	-	-
Historic and Cultural Resources	X	-	-
Climate Change	X		
Cumulative Effects	X	-	-

All practical means identified to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects were analyzed and incorporated into the proposed action, and no compensatory mitigation is

required. See Table 3-1 in the EA for a list of environmental resources not evaluated in detail and the associated explanation.

Pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, USACE determined that the preferred alternative may affect and is likely to adversely affect ESA-listed fish species. Formal consultation with the USFWS and NMFS was not required as they determined that the proposed action was within the scope of the 2020 Columbia River System Operation Biological Opinion and that coordination with the Fish Passage Operation and Maintenance workgroup should be conducted. That coordination was completed on May 11, 2023. USACE also believes immediate need dredging (i.e., for sediment and debris that have already accumulated and are interfering with authorized project purposes) is covered under the PSMP BiOps received by the USFWS and NMFS on November 14, 2014.

Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, USACE analyzed the potential effects of the alternatives on cultural resources in the proposed action area in the EA and prepared a Cultural Resources Review that was sent to the Washington State Historic Preservation Officers (SHPO) and five area Tribes on January 22, 2024 for a 30-day review. USACE determined that the proposed action would not have an adverse effect on any historic properties, including any of traditional or cultural importance to area Native American Tribes. The proposed work is only maintenance of an existing facility and would not result in any changes to the use of that facility that might adversely affect historic properties.

USACE received concurrence with the Determination of No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties from the SHPO on March 4, 2024 and is attached to the EA as Appendix A.

Pursuant to the Clean Water Act of 1972 (CWA), as amended, the discharge of dredged material associated with the proposed action/preferred alternative was evaluated under the substantive requirements of Corps Section 404 regulations (33 CFR Part 335-338) and the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) CWA Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines (40 CFR Part 230) (Guidelines). The Section 404(b)(1) evaluation is Appendix B of the EA. The dredged material disposal alternatives evaluated in the Section 404(b)(1) Evaluation focus on the appropriate disposal location and method for the proposed immediate need dredging action. The Corps is also required by policy to identify and choose the least cost, technically feasible, and environmentally acceptable disposal method (i.e., the Federal Standard). In-water disposal at RM 96 and 57 1 was identified as the appropriate disposal option for all dredged material.

The Corps began coordination with the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) early and requested a water quality certification (WQC) pursuant to Section 401 of the CWA on October 10, 2023. The Corps received Section 401 WQC from Ecology on March XX, 2024. All conditions of the WQC will be implemented to minimize adverse impacts to water quality.

Because the Corps prepared a Section 404(b)(1) evaluation and issued a Public Notice that provided an opportunity for interested parties to review and comment on the

proposed action, the Corps has met the requirements of the River and Harbor Act (RHA) Section 10. As the four lower Snake River dam and reservoir projects were originally authorized under the RHA of 1945 (PL 79-14), they do not require separate Section 10 permitting for operation and maintenance actions.

In compliance with NEPA, the draft Finding of No Significant Impact, EA, and all supporting appendices were made available for a 15-day review and comment period from March 30, 2024, through April 15, 2024. The comment response document is attached hereto and incorporated herein and provides summaries of the comments received and the Corps' responses.

All applicable laws, executive orders, and regulations were considered in the evaluation of alternatives. Based on the EA, the reviews by other federal, state, and local agencies, Tribes, input of the public, and the review by my staff, it is my determination that the proposed action/preferred alternative would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and, therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The Corps will implement Alternative 2, Dredging with In-water Disposal, at the earliest opportunity and subject to the availability of funding.

Date

SHAILIN Y. KINGSLACK
Lieutenant Colonel, EN
Commanding