

## **DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)**

### **MILTON-FREEWATER FLOODWATER FLOOD CONTROL WORKS REHABILITATION OF THE NURSERY BRIDGE STRUCTURE MARCH 2016**

#### **I. Introduction/Background**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Walla Walla District, (Corps) proposes to repair high flow scouring on the downstream gabions and rip rap of the Nursery Bridge Drop Structure (Structure) on the Walla Walla River in Milton-Freewater, Oregon. The action is proposed to improve reliability and functionality of the Structure during high flow and flood stage events.

The Corps built the Structure as part of the Milton-Freewater Flood Control Project (MFFCP) in 1952 to protect the Nursery Bridge and a railroad crossing, and supports the diversion of water for a local canal company. The Structure was constructed in phases between 1949 and 1952 to arrest degradation that was occurring within the levee system of the Walla Walla River. In 1966 the Corps added a fish ladder for fish passage on the west shore of the drop Structure. However, changes in river flows shifted flows from the west shore to the east shore; essentially leaving the fish ladder dry. In 2001, a new fish ladder was constructed on the east shore.

Under Public Law 84-99, the Corps has authority to provide emergency response/disaster assistance; including rehabilitation of flood control works (FCW) threatened or destroyed by flood. To be eligible, levees must be active in the Corps Rehabilitation Program (RP). The Nursery Bridge drop structure is eligible under this authority for emergency assistance (rehabilitation assistance) from the Corps. The proposed rehabilitation assistance is not the first. In 2014, the Structure was repaired under the RIP as a result of damage caused by a high flow event, which involved construction of a gabion mattress and a steel armor plate on the drop structure itself. On May 14, 2015, the Milton-Freewater Flood Control District (MFFCD) requested assistance from the Corps to repair the Structure again as a result of damage caused by a high flow event in the Walla Walla River between February 9 and 13, 2015. The proposed action is in response to that request.

#### **II. Purposed and Need**

The project purpose is to restore original flood risk reduction capability of the MFFCP by repairing damages to the Structure. This repair work is being proposed pursuant to the RP and in accordance with Engineer Regulation 500-1-1. The Structure is part of the MFFCP, which provides flood risk reduction benefits to the City of Milton-Freewater and surrounding residences and businesses. The MFFCD is the local sponsor and operator of the MFFCP. The

structure also provides erosion protection for Eastside Road and a railroad bridge, and includes a fish ladder that provides migration access to the upper Walla Walla River for salmonid species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Damage to the Structure occurred during a high flow event between February 9 and 13, 2015 and includes erosion to the shotcrete surfaces of the gabion baskets located downstream of the stilling basin end sill. There is exposed gabion wire all along the corner of the second gabion step, and holes in the shotcrete and gabion basket on the third step down. The gabion mattress was coated with shotcrete coating a year ago. There is also minor concrete erosion adjacent to the drop structure steel armor plates and damaged or missing sealant between the steel plates and between the steel plate/concrete interface. Failure to complete these repairs before the next high flow event could cause the undermining of the drop structure which would cause further headcutting/downcutting of the stream channel which could cause a significant release of sediments, the loss of fish passage, and loss of riparian vegetation both up and downstream from the drop structure.

### **III. Alternatives Considered**

1. No Action: Under this alternative, the Corps would not repair the drop structure, but would allow the structure to continue to function in its damaged state. No ground disturbing activities would take place and no alterations of the drop structure would occur. Periodic monitoring and inspections would take place and annual removal of sediments from the stilling basin would continue. Without repair, the drop structure would likely deteriorate and may eventually fail, leading to the loss of private property and public infrastructure.
2. Proposed/Preferred Alternative: Under the proposed alternative, the Corps would repair the damaged shotcrete coated gabions below the end sill on the Nursery Bridge drop structure by installing a riprap blanket from the upstream end of the gabions to the toe of the gabion mattress connecting the rip rap to the restoration project constructed in 2014 by the Walla Walla River Watershed Council. The rip rap would extend approximately 90 feet beyond the toe of the gabion mattress to provide dissipation of energy and stability to both the gabion mattress and the stream restoration efforts downstream. The proposed alternative would consist of installing riprap from the upstream end of the gabions for approximately 60 feet downstream, and across the full width of the gabion mattress. The rip rap would connect to the downstream rock grade control structure constructed in 2015 by the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council. Proposed action repairs are broken into two actions (1) installation of rip rap along the gabion mattress, and (2) water diversion during construction. The repair consisting of installing rip rap along the entire length of the spillway is divided into two sections; placing a riprap blanket at the toe of the spillway, and riprap or erosion protection extending 60 feet from the existing gabion foundation. All work would be conducted during the summer in-water work window (July 1 – September 30) to minimize effects to sensitive resources.

3. Other Alternatives Considered: During the planning process three additional alternatives were considered but dismissed because they did not satisfy the purpose and need of the project or were non-viable. These other alternatives considered included: 1) the restoration of the drop structure to its pre-flood condition without any “resilience” incorporated, 2) the complete restoration of the degraded stream channel downstream from the drop structure, and 3) the improvement or betterment of the existing drop structure. The first of these was dismissed because it would not satisfy the purpose and need for the proposed action, as it was already been attempted in 2010 and had sustained extensive damaged during runoff events in 2013. The second would include the installation of multiple grade control structures to restore nearly one mile of degraded stream below the drop structure, and is beyond the scope of the purpose and need. The third alternative would require improvements to the existing drop by installing new sheetpile walls and 7,000 square feet of articulated block matting structure, which is also considered a “betterment” and beyond the scope of the purpose and need. Consequently, only the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives were analyzed further.

#### **IV. Environmental Effects**

The proposed action would divert water during construction to perform construction under dry conditions. This would cause minor discharge of sediment and turbidity at the repair site and for some distance downstream. The effects would be localized and short term. To minimize transport of turbidity, the work will be conducted under dry conditions, while water flows are low and when all water is being diverted to the east fish ladder. Increased sediment may occur during summer storm events that can occur during the late summer and early fall. These events are rare and would be captured using secondary diversion structures such as sandbags and eco-blocks. The placement of rip/rap boulder/cobble will be a benefit to micro-invertebrate populations and would provide better migration habitat for fish populations.

The project area is designated critical habitat for both bull trout and steelhead trout. To minimize effect, the Corps will conduct the construction activities during the established in-water work window, between July 1 and September 30. Water will be diverted from the construction footprint to reduce sediment and maintain fish passage during construction. Construction activities are anticipated to be within four weeks of initiation. All fish within the dewatering area will be returned to the Walla Walla River. Work will be coordinated with Oregon Game and Inland Fisheries during dewatering activities.

#### **V. Public Comment/Involvement**

A draft FONSI and EA will be made available to potentially interested members of the public and local, state, and federal agencies for a 30-day review and comment period from March 15 to April 15, 2015. The Corps will review the individual comment documents and consider each substantive comment submitted and summaries comments and provide responses in a Comment Summary Document which will be attached to the FONSI as Attachment B.

## **VI. Compliance with other Laws and Regulations**

The Corps has initiated Endangered Species Act (ESA) formal consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service. The Corps determined the project would have “may affect and is likely to adversely affect” mid-Columbia River steelhead and Columbia Basin bull trout as well as their designated critical habitat and is awaiting concurrence from both the National Marine Fisheries and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Concurrence letter from both agencies will be attached to the FONSI and labeled as Attachment A.

The Corps also made a finding of “no properties affected” under Section 106 National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The Nursery Bridge drop structure was originally built in 1952, the Oregon SHPO declared the structure as not eligible on June 2, 2014 (SHPO Case No. 14-0703). The proposed rehabilitation effort is set to occur complete within the confines of the structure, and with no new ground disturbance. Therefore, the project has no potential to affect historic or cultural resources.

The Army Corps of Engineers has prepared a biological assessment report, titled Nursery Bridge Drop Structure Repair Milton-Freewater, Oregon that will be formally reviewed by the USFWS and NMFS. The Corps had determined that the proposed action “may affect and is likely to adversely affect” mid-Columbia River steelhead and Columbia Basin bull trout as well as their designated critical habitat. The results of the ESA consultation will be described in the final Finding of No Significant Impact should it be determined that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the proposed action under NEPA.

The Corps also made a finding of “no properties affected” under Section 106 National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. The Nursery Bridge drop structure was originally built in 1952, the Oregon SHPO declared the structure as not eligible on June 2, 2014 (SHPO Case No. 14-0703). The proposed rehabilitation effort is set to occur complete within the confines of the structure, and with no new ground disturbance. Therefore, the project has no potential to affect historic or cultural resources.

See Section 4 of the EA for a discussion of compliance with other laws, regulations and Executive Orders. The proposed action complies with other federal laws, applicable regulations and Executive Orders.

## **VII. Findings and Decision**

Having reviewed the Milton-Freewater Floodwater Flood Control Works Rehabilitation of the Nursery Bridge Drop Structure EA, I find that the document provides sufficient discussions on the purpose of and need for the proposed action, alternatives, the environmental effects of the proposed action and the alternatives, and a listing of agencies and persons consulted. I have taken into consideration the technical aspects of the project, best scientific information available and public comments received. These documents provide sufficient evidence and analysis to

meet the District's requirements pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Based on this information, I find that implementation of the proposed action would not result in significant impacts on the quality of the human environment in that an environmental impact statement is not required. The district will implement Alternative 2- (Proposed Action) at the earliest opportunity, subject to availability of funding and construction schedule.

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Timothy R. Vail  
Lieutenant Colonel, Corps of Engineers  
District Commander

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Date