DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

MILTON-FREEWATER NURSERY BRIDGE DROP STRUCTURE REHABILITATION

1. BACKGROUND

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Walla Walla District (Corps), proposes to rehabilitate the Nursery Bridge drop structure on the Walla Walla River in Milton-Freewater, Oregon. The structure was damaged by high flows in 2013.

The Nursery Bridge drop structure was first constructed in 1952 to stop the degradation of the stream bed of the Walla Walla River. The Corps is proposing to repair the drop structure under Public Law (PL) 84-99 which gives the Corps the authority to undertake activities; including rehabilitation of flood control works (FCW) threatened or destroyed by flood. The Nursery Bridge drop structure is eligible under this authority for emergency assistance from the Corps. On May 21, 2013 the Milton-Freewater Water Control District requested assistance from Corps to repair the drop structure. This project is in response to that request.

2. PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed action is to restore the original flood risk reduction capability of the Milton-Freewater Flood Control Project (MFFCP) by repairing damages to the Nursery Bridge drop structure caused by high flows that occurred between April 19 and 21, 2013. The Nursery Bridge structure is part of the MFFCP, which provides flood risk reduction benefits to the City of Milton-Freewater and surrounding residences and businesses. The drop structure also provides erosion protection for the 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 drop structure includes displaced riprap downstream of the end sill and eroded concrete at the toe of the spillway. High flows displaced riprap exposing the end sill to a depth of approximately six feet, while flows along the toe of the spillway have exposed rebar and eroded portions of six of its eight sections. There is also damage to the 1:1 concrete slope. Without repair, the drop structure will likely continue to deteriorate and may eventually fail, leading to the loss of private property and public infrastructure.

3. PROJECT ALTERNATIVES AND PREFFERED ALTERNATIVE

The Environmental Assessment (EA) considered two alternatives, No Action and the Drop Structure Rehabilitation, or the Proposed Action. Three additional alternatives were considered but dismissed because they were either not viable or are outside the authority of PL 84-99. These included: 1) the restoration of the drop structure to its pre-flood condition, without resilience built in, 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 proposed action is divided into two sections; concrete repair of the spillway, and erosion protection of end sill. All work would be conducted during the summer in-water work window (July 1 – September 30) to minimize effects to sensitive resources. The spillway would be repaired by placing grout at damaged sites and armoring the base of the spillway with a steel plate. The steel plate would be anchored to the bottom of the stilling basin and would protect approximately three feet of the base of the structure and three feet of the slope of the spillway. The plate would be recessed and grouted to provide a smooth transition to the existing structure.

To stabilize the stream bed bellow the end sill a gabion structure 140 feet by 27 feet would be constructed in the shape of an extended stilling basin. The gabion structure would be covered with Shotcrete to provide a smooth surface, prevent entrapment of listed fish, and to increase structure stability. The lowest elevation of the gabion structure would drain to the fish attraction channel near the east fish ladder so fish can enter that facility as flows recede. Rip rap would be placed below the gabion structure to provide additional protection. Water would be diverted from the work site so that repairs could be done in the dry.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

Only those resources that were relevant to the project were specifically evaluated for effects. These include: water quality, aquatic resources, vegetation, wildlife, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, and cumulative impacts. It was determined that the proposed action would have less than significant effects to water quality, aquatic resources, vegetation, wildlife, cultural resources, and cumulative impacts. In addition, the Corps determined that the proposed action "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" threatened and endangered species or their critical habitats.

Effects to water quality may include increased sediment transport and turbidity at the repair site and for a limited distance downstream. These effects would be localized and short term. To minimize these effects, work would be conducted during late summer when flows are low and diverted from the project site. Minor disturbance to fish and aquatic organisms may occur at the repair site, while additional disturbance may occur downstream due to sediment transport and increased turbidity. Some habitat for aquatic invertebrates would be lost during excavation, but this loss would be minor relative to the extensive populations of the river system. Clearing and grubbing would remove limited shrub and small tree habitat and may affect small birds and mammals in the area. There may be some loss of small mammals during excavation, but larger, more mobile, species would relocate to nearby habitats. Construction is scheduled to be conducted outside nesting seasons for migratory birds and would not affect these species. Effects to soil would include the excavation of an already disturbed site and minor soil loss through increased sediment movement. However, these effects would be short-term and would be reversed when structure repairs were completed. Approximately 1,400 square feet of shrubs, small trees, and grasses would be cleared. The loss of vegetation would be minor relative to extensive shrub and grass habitats in adjacent areas. Because proposed repairs would occur within recent and re-deposited fill, and because all of the repairs would be to non-historic elements of the structure, the Corps has determined the project has no potential to affect historic/cultural resources.

The Corps determined the project "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Long-term effects to listed species include the conversion of marginal cobble/boulder habitat to a homogeneous gabion/Shotcrete structure. The new gabion structure would maintain fish passage and eliminate fish salvage concerns at the base of the current spillway. Letters requesting concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) were sent to these agencies on March 18, 2014. The Corps received a Biological Opinion (BO) from the NMFS on April 11, 2014 and is expecting a BO from the USFWS near the end of April, 2014. The Corps anticipates receiving a similar BO from the USFWS prior to signing a FONSI.

This project meets the requirements of Nationwide Permit (NWP) 3; the repair, rehabilitation, or replacement of any previously authorized, currently serviceable structure, or fill, or of any currently serviceable structure or fill authorized by 33 CFR 330.3, provided that the structure or fill is not to be put to uses differing from those uses specified or contemplated for it in the original permit or the most recently authorized modification. This NWP is water quality certified by the state of Oregon subject to all applicable NWP general conditions.

The Corps selected the Proposed Action because it would meet the purpose and need of the project and would have only minor environmental effects.

5. COORDINATION

The Corps coordinated this project with the USFWS, NMFS, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Umatilla County, the City of Milton-Freewater, the Milton-Freewater Water Control District, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and Anderson Perry & Associates.

The Corps distributed the draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for a 20 day public comment period. All comments will be addressed in the final FONSI or EA.

6. CONCLUSION

In view of the information provided by the EA, public and agency review, and coordination with Federal, State and local agencies, I find that approving the repair of the Nursery Bridge Drop Structure would not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human and natural environment. Consequently, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Date: _____

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Andrew D. Kelly
Lieutenant Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Commander