US Army Corps
of Engineers®
Seattle District

Notice of Preparation April 2010

Planning Branch
Environmental Resources Section
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ATTN: Jeffrey C. Laufle (PM-PL-ER)

Name: Albeni Falls Dam, Flexible Winter Pool Operation

Interested parties are hereby notified that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District (Corps) plans to prepare, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluating operation of Albeni Falls Dam, Idaho, to provide for increased flexibility in power generation to meet winter power needs. This proposal is made by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), which markets power in the northwestern US. Albeni Falls Dam is operated by the Corps for multiple purposes, including flood damage reduction, hydropower generation, navigation, recreation, and fish and wildlife conservation. The Corps, as operator of Albeni Falls Dam, is the lead agency for evaluation of this proposal under NEPA, and will make the decision whether to implement the proposal.

AUTHORITY
The Corps is addressing the proposal under its Operation and Maintenance authority. Construction of a multipurpose project on the Pend Oreille River was authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1950 (Public Law 81-516, 81st Congress, 2nd Session with reference to Senate Doc 9, 81st Congress, 1st Session).

BACKGROUND
Albeni Falls Dam (AFD) is located 26 river miles west of Sandpoint, Idaho, and 4 miles east of Newport, Washington, near the Washington/Idaho state line, on the Pend Oreille River in Bonner County, Idaho. AFD regulates the top 11.5 feet of fluctuation of Lake Pend Oreille, a large, deep, natural lake in Idaho. Providing responsive flood risk management and hydropower generation are major components of AFD operations over the course of the year. In addition, Lake Pend Oreille is home to kokanee, a small landlocked variety of sockeye salmon that is an important food source for the ESA-listed bull trout. The Corps manages winter lake elevations to provide for successful kokanee spawning and egg incubation on gravel beaches around the lake.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE IN CONSIDERATION OF THE PROPOSED FEDERAL ACTION
To prepare for potential modification to future winter operations at AFD that would allow a flexible winter operation, the Corps has determined that an Environmental Assessment (EA) is appropriate under the NEPA. Along with NEPA, the Corps will ensure compliance with the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and other laws, regulations and Executive Orders that apply.

Alternatives To Be Considered: Alternatives considered in the EA will include at least the following:

Proposed Action: This alternative would involve storage of water in winter between the end of kokanee spawning and March 31. Stored water would be used to provide power generation during “cold snaps” and other times of high power demand in winter.

No-Action Alternative: No change from the current operation of Albeni Falls Dam.

Final selection of the preferred alternative and finalization of the design, including mitigation, will occur during the NEPA process and before any decision on whether to implement the proposal.

Issues: A number of issues have been raised by the public and interested parties concerning this proposed operation. They include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Possibility of increasing the spread of invasive aquatic plant species (milfoil, flowering rush).
- Possible damage to kokanee redds (kokanee are forage for threatened bull trout).
- Possible spill from Albeni Falls Dam and downstream dams, creating elevated concentrations of total dissolved gas (TDG), which is a water quality issue affecting fish.
- Possibility of power generation opportunity losses as a result of spill.
- Possible shoreline erosion due to ice movement, or from sloughing of saturated soils.
- Possible suspension of sediments, with domestic water supply filtration impacts
- Possible damage to cultural resources sites from erosion.
- Possible ice damage to docks.
- Possible ice impacts to water supply infrastructure.
- Possible impacts to operation of downriver businesses.
- Possibility of reservoir being higher than desired for flood risk management, approaching the onset of the spring refill.

These potential environmental effects, as well as others, as needed, will be evaluated in the EA. If our analysis of the proposed action indicates it would significantly affect resources, an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared.

Public Review: Interested parties will be afforded a chance to review the draft EA, and to provide comments to the Corps. If you would like to be on our mailing list, please contact Mr. Jeff Laufle at the address above, or by phone or email (see below).

Requests for additional information should be directed to Ms. Leah Wickstrom, Project Manager, at (206) 764-3652, or leah.j.wickstrom@usace.army.mil; or Jeff Laufle, Environmental Coordinator, at (206) 764-6578, or jeffrey.c.laufle@usace.army.mil.