

FINAL MEETING MINUTES

US FOREST SERVICE-CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA ELECTRIC DEPARTMENT

BLUE LAKE PROJECT (FERC. No. 2230) EXPANSION

August 15, 2008

The subject meeting was held in the Sitka Ranger District office and began about 10:30 AM. In attendance were:

Carol Goularte, US Forest Service (USFS)
Melissa Dinsmore, USFS
Perry Edwards, USFS
Dean Orbison, City of Sitka Electric Department (City)
Karl Wolfe, City fisheries contractor
Mike Prewitt, City FERC licensing contractor

Mike opened the meeting and said that it's purpose was to discuss USFS comments dated July 23, 2008, on the City's Initial Consultation Document (ICD). Mike and Dean expressed concern that that the comments and study requests did not reflect the study planning process, particularly for fisheries and wildlife studies which had occurred during spring, 2008. Mike said that differences between the comment letter's study requests and elements of the ongoing studies would need to be reconciled to avoid the appearance of study disputes which would require resolution by FERC.

Dean mentioned that the comment letter had been signed by Forest Cole and that the City hadn't seen any previous correspondence from him. There was some discussion about how written coordination should take place. Mike said that it would be best if USFS could assign a single point of contact who would coordinate distribution to and response from all USFS reviewers. Carol said she would establish that system.

The meeting then turned to the comment letter, on a point-by-point basis. The following discussions reference items in the comment letter. Page numbers are those in the ICD:

Part 1, Related Plans and Forest Service Involvement.

1. Applicable Comprehensive Plans, Laws and Orders

There were no problems with comments in this section. Dean said that the City might request some of the documents from USFS.

Action: None.

Part 2, Comments to Initial Consultation Document.

There were no problems with these comments up to the point of the next item.

Action: None, to this point in the comments.

Project Operation Changes: page 24

The City noted that the requested actions would be addressed as monitoring studies which would be developed late in the amendment application process.

Action: None at this time.

Water Resources, Blue Lake p 28 and 29

There was some discussion about the items under this main heading. Mike asked about the source of the comments and Melissa said that they were written by Margaret Beilharz. Dean asked if the City could contact Margaret about some of the water resources comments, and Melissa said the City will contact Melissa, e-mail is fine, with any questions about Forest Service water resources comments. Melissa will funnel to Margaret Beilharz and respond back to the City. Dean said that the City could prepare a draft study plan for how sedimentation might be addressed. Final action in this section was deferred pending the communication with Margaret.

Action: City to contact Margaret Beilharz through Melissa with questions about Water Resources comments. This action will lead to development of a draft sedimentation study plan.

Water Resources, Sawmill Creek, page 34

Dean said that items in this comment were being addressed by ongoing temperature studies and that the monitoring elements would be addressed late in the amendment application process.

Action: None.

Water Resources, Blue Lake Creek, page 35

There was some discussion about how the streamflow estimates for Blue Lake Creek and the Blue Lake tributaries would be obtained. Dean said that the City was using watershed area proportionation for the tributaries. Mike added that monthly variation could be estimated using calculations of reservoir outflow plus watershed area proportionation.

Action: The City will prepare an estimate of Blue Lake tributary stream flows as part of the sedimentation study and include the information in the final report.

Cultural Resources, page 47

Mike said that a detailed evaluation of the Blue Lake-Glacier lake mining road was a major element of the existing Cultural Resources study plan. He said he would check to be sure the study plan language was clear about determination of eligibility of listing on the National Historic Register.

Dean said that the City would add an evaluation of the dam's eligibility for listing to the current study plan.

Action: Revise study plan to reflect these determinations.

Threatened and Endangered Species, page 48.

There was some discussion about who would write the BE. Mike said that the City would prepare a draft BE for USFS and US Fish and Wildlife Service review. Perry said he could provide an example document from the Iyouktug timber sale.

Action: City to gather information to prepare a BE.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND STUDIES

Geology and Soils, Issue G1

There was some discussion of the requested Mineral Potential Report. Dean said the City would review the example report from the comments letter, and would, if necessary, employ the services of a geologist to research the Blue Lake inundation area based on USGS information.

Geology and Soils Studies, page 50

Mike said that Issue GS1 involved geotechnical surveys to determine rock competency of the dam raise and powerhouse areas. He said that such studies were usually of subsurface rock conditions, and would be required by FERC prior to approval of construction.

He said that the comment on Issue GS2 and lakeshore slope stability would be evaluated by the city.

Part 3-Forest Service Study Requests.

FISH AND AQUATIC RESOURCE STUDIES

A. Blue Lake and Blue Lake Tributary Fisheries

STUDY: Summarize reports of fish occurrence.....

There were no concerns with comments in this section.

STUDY: Document spawning and juvenile rearing.....

There was considerable discussion of the requested mythology, particularly the requests for “minnow trap depletion and/or electro shocking”. Karl said that depletion studies were not possible in the fast waters of Blue Lake Creek for several reasons. He added that electro shocking is not normally permitted by ADF&G except under certain circumstances.

Mike asked who had prepared these study requests and Melissa said that it had been Ken Coffin. Perry offered to ask Ken about them and clarify the phrase “such as”, It was the City’s preference that the requests for depletion studies and electro shocking be deleted. Mike said that the City wished to retain all sampling methods, without additions, in the current fisheries survey study plans.

Action: Contact Ken Coffin to request modification of the study request language.

STUDY: Monitor flow and temperature for Blue Lake tributaries.....

There was some discussion about whether the City has been conducting streamflow measurement. Dean said that there has been no actual discharge measurement on Blue Lake Creek.

Perry requested that spot measurements be made during the upcoming habitat measurements, on the days when researchers are in the field. Dean and Karl agreed.

Action: Measure discharge at good cross-sections on the days of habitat measurement. Modify habitat study plan to show discharge measurement.

STUDY: Modeling of Seasonal Blue Lake Reservoir Levels

It was agreed that current plans to use the Blue Lake Operations Model, as was done during relicensing, would serve this study request.

Action: None.

B. Entrainment Analysis

STUDY: Determine the quantity of Blue Lake rainbow trout annually entrained.....

There was considerable discussion about how the situation at Blue Lake differs from that at Cooper Lake, including depth of the intake, proximity of fish to the intake, etc. Dean

and Karl said that, during the relicensing abundance analysis, fish traps were set at depth near the Blue Lake dam, and no fish were caught there. Karl added that most young fish, those at most risk of entrainment, remained in the upper end of the reservoir and would never be found at the depth of the intake during the relevant yearly time periods. Other factors, including evidence from the strainer baskets and lack of direct observations, were also discussed.

Generally the City asserted that the entrainment issue had been addressed for the existing situation in relicensing, and that conditions after the dam raise would only increase the depth of the intake.

It was agreed that the City would prepare a paper stating why it would be unnecessary to conduct studies at the level of those done for the Cooper Lake project.

Action: City to prepare a position paper to be reviewed by USFS (Ken Coffin, Margaret, etc.).

TERRESTRIAL RESOURCE STUDIES

A. Terrestrial Wildlife-Blue Lake and Sawmill Creek

STUDY: Conduct a Biological Evaluation (BE)....

The City had agreed to prepare the BE. Further discussions centered on the language in “Study Methodology” and how Kent Bovee’s ongoing studies related to that language. Generally, Perry said that the USFS was not looking for exact documentation of nests or dens, but for general habitat suitability, i.e. is the habitat suitable for such occurrences? He said that he wasn’t looking for a “den map” or a “nest map” but a more general habitat evaluation, and documentation of evidence that Kent saw in his periodic surveys. Mike said that the City wished to continue with Kent’s ongoing work without major modification of the existing study plan. Perry discussed the Forest Plan requirements for looking at Management Indicator Species (MIS) and preparing a MIS report. The City agreed to include MIS reporting in the appropriate report.

Action: Perry said he would read the City’s wildlife study plan and communicate with Kent and Ken Coffin on the adequacy of his ongoing studies.

B. Migratory Waterfowl and Sea Birds

STUDY: Identify migratory waterfowl species and sea birds.....

As in the previous comments, Perry said that USFS wasn’t looking for actual nest counts, nesting success, etc., or exhaustive location documentation. He said he would again read the existing study plan and discuss it with Kent and Ken Coffin. Mike again said that the City wished to continue with the existing study plan without modification.

Action: As above, Perry said he would read the City's wildlife study plan and communicate with Kent and Ken Coffin on the adequacy of his ongoing studies.

SUBSISTENCE STUDIES

A. Subsistence Uses of the Blue Lake Watershed.

STUDY: Identify traditional and existing subsistence uses of fish, wildlife....

The primary question in this discussion was whether and how to conduct subsistence interviews with individuals in the Sitka area. Dean said that there had been considerable documentation of subsistence uses on an area-wide basis in the relicensing application. He said that most of that data had come from ADF&G sources on subsistence harvest. The group discussed whether there was any real subsistence use of fish and game in the Blue Lake area, other than tribal taking of goats. It was agreed that there was some use of berries and vegetation, but not much use of fish and wildlife. There was discussion about how a survey could be taken in the specific Blue Lake area.

Action: Perry said he would contact the USFS subsistence specialist to determine if and how a survey might be taken.

PLANT STUDIES

A. Sensitive and Rare Plants.

STUDY: Conduct a biological evaluation.....

Dean said that City contractor Kitty Labounty and Mary Stensvold of USFS are consulting on a Level 5 Intensive Controlled Survey which would lead to Kitty's development of a draft Sensitive Plants Study Plan. Mike said that the City considered this consultation to speak for the City's position on these studies.

As with other T and E species discussed earlier, the City or its contractor will prepare the BE in this area.

Action: Kitty to continue consultation and prepare a draft Sensitive Plant Study Plan for agency review.

TIMBER RESOURCES

STUDY: Timber within the inundation zone must be cruised.....

The City agreed to conduct a timber cruise of potentially-inundated areas.

Action: Dean said he would contact Ken Hammond to arrange for a way of having this done. The City should prepare a timber cruise study plan to propose the extent of the area to be evaluated.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCE STUDIES

A. Archaeological Studies within the Area of Potential Effect (APE)

STUDY: Identify and record historical and archaeological resources.....

The attendees agreed that the current City study plan for these resources was acceptable to the USFS. Mike said that the City had not received comments from SHPO or Sitka Tribe. He said that the selected contractor would have to be approved by all parties.

Action: None at this time.

RECREATION RESOURCES STUDIES

A. Recreation Uses of the Sawmill Creek Corridor and Blue Lake

STUDY: Identify existing recreation uses.....

Attendees agreed that the current recreation study plan is adequate to meet USFS requests.

Action: None at this time.

SCENIC RESOURCE STUDIES

STUDY: Determination of ongoing and proposed Project effects on existing scenery.

Attendees agreed that there needs to be a Scenic and Aesthetic Resources study plan based on USFS assessment guidelines (“Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management”). Dean said he would contact the USFS landscape architect Barth Hamberg to start development of such a study plan.

Action: Dean and City to consult with USFS specialist on study plan.

TRANSPORTATION STUDIES

STUDY: Evaluate the existing Blue Lake Road.....

Dean said that the studies requested would be done as part of the final design and permitting activities, prior to construction.

Action: None at this time.

The group agreed to proceed swiftly on the above action items. Mike asked Carol and Melissa to check their staff's schedules to recognize the need for several upcoming review actions on the amendment application.

The meeting adjourned at about 12:10 PM.