



**US Army Corps
of Engineers®**

Seattle District

30 Day Notice of Availability – Draft Integrated Detailed Project Report and Environmental Assessment

Environmental & Cultural Resources Branch
P.O. Box 3755
Seattle, WA 98124-3755
ATTN: Melissa Leslie

Public Notice Date: March 27, 2017
Expiration Date: April 26, 2017
Reference: PM-ER-17-03
Name: Yakima River Gap to Gap
Ecosystem Restoration Project

Interested parties are hereby notified that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District (Corps) has prepared, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, a draft Integrated Detailed Project Report and Environmental Assessment (DPR/EA) for the Yakima River Gap to Gap Ecosystem Restoration Project. Located east of the Cascade Mountain Range in central Washington State, the Yakima River ecosystem between the cities of Yakima and Union Gap has been degraded and reduced over time as a result of infrastructure and urban development. Environmental impacts and degradation can be tied directly to the Congressionally Authorized Yakima Levee System built by the Corps beginning in 1947. The federal levee system includes approximately five miles of levee along the right bank and two miles of levee along the left bank of the Yakima River. In addition, local and federal entities over time have extended the original Corps system to include several additional miles of levee both upstream and downstream of the original authorized project. The purpose of this Public Notice is to solicit comments from interested persons, groups, and agencies. A copy of the draft DPR/EA is available on the Seattle District Corps website under the project title Yakima River Gap to Gap Ecosystem Restoration Project:

<http://www.nws.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/Environmental-Documents/>

AUTHORITY

The proposed project falls under the Authority of Section 1135 of the Water Resources and Development Act of 1986, as amended (Section 1135). Section 1135 provides the Corps the authority to evaluate potential modifications to existing Corps' projects for the purpose of improving the environment in the public interest. Measures at off-project locations that have been affected by the construction or operation of the project can be undertaken, if such measures do not conflict with the authorized project purpose.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the project is to restore ecosystem process, structure, and function in the Gap to Gap Reach of the Yakima River. The need for the proposed federal action arises from the degradation of natural ecosystem processes stemming from the disconnection of the river with its historic floodplain.

US Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District
Notice of Availability – Yakima River Gap to Gap Ecosystem Restoration

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action includes levee removals, levee realignment, spur dike removals, floodplain topographic restoration, side channel construction, hydrologic enhancement of a disconnected floodplain channel, replacement of barrier culverts, and wetland reconnection. Work would be completed in four areas: the Diking District #1 (DID#1) floodplain area, Sportsman Island, Blue Slough, and Spring Creek. The proposed action would reconnect and restore natural riverine processes beneficial to native fish to over 320 acres of floodplain through the realignment of the existing DID#1 levee.

Realignment of the DID#1 levee would improve fish habitat by giving the river channel the opportunity to migrate and promote bar, island, and side channel formation. Pools, riffles, boulders, logjams, side channels, wetlands and other features would be reconnected with the floodplain and the river. This proposed action would also create and restore approximately 20 acres of side channel habitat at the Sportsman's Park Island. Restoration of flow to Blue Slough would restore surface water hydrology to 2 miles/12 acres of relic channel that currently is only wet seasonally when ground water elevations are high. Additionally, replacement of all undersized Blue Slough culverts less than 6 feet wide would improve fish passage for all native salmonids and life stages. The reconnection of Spring Creek would restore fish access to rare cold water off-channel habitat.

Unavoidable adverse effects of the proposed project actions include: (1) noise disturbance to wildlife and home owners in the vicinity of operating heavy machinery; (2) exhaust emissions from heavy machinery; (3) disruption of local traffic in the project vicinity during construction; and (4) the potential for initial turbidity during the connection of the newly constructed Sportsman's Island channel to the Yakima River.

Given the temporary, localized, and minor nature of the anticipated effects, the Corps has determined that the proposed project would not result in significant adverse environmental impacts.

EVALUATION

The Corps has made a preliminary determination that the environmental impacts of the proposal can be adequately evaluated under the National Environmental Policy Act through preparation of an environmental assessment (EA).

The Corps is coordinating with federal agencies to ensure careful consideration of fish and wildlife resources. The Corps has determined that this project is "not likely to adversely affect" federally listed species under the Endangered Species Act.

Coordination is underway with the National Marine Fisheries Service and United States Fish and Wildlife Service for concurrence with this determination. The Corps has prepared a draft 404(b)(1) analysis and will coordinate with the Washington Department of Ecology during the final design phase to receive a 401 water quality certification prior to project implementation. To comply with the National Historic Preservation Act, the Corps is consulting with the State Historic Preservation Office and all recognized Native American Tribes in the project vicinity.

US Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District
Notice of Availability – Yakima River Gap to Gap Ecosystem Restoration

Avoidance measures and reduction of impacts would take the form of on-site biological and cultural resources monitoring, the implementation of best management practices during construction, and scheduling to avoid potential impacts to fish and wildlife species.

PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

Any person who has an interest in or that may be affected by the restoration project may request a public hearing. The request must be submitted in writing to the District Engineer within the comment period of this notice, and must clearly set forth the following: the interest that may be affected, the manner in which the interest may be affected by this activity, and the particular reason for holding a public hearing regarding this activity.

The decision whether to conduct the project will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefit, which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal, must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors which may be relevant to the proposal will be considered; among these are: conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, flood plain values, land use, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production, mineral needs, consideration of property ownership and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people.

The Corps invites submission of factual comments on the environmental impact of the proposal. Comments will also be considered in determining whether it would be in the best public interest to proceed with the proposed project. The Corps will consider all submissions received before the expiration date of this notice. The nature or scope of the proposal may be changed upon consideration of the comments received. The Corps will initiate an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and afford public participation opportunities attendant to an EIS, if significant effects on the quality of the human environment are identified and cannot be mitigated.

Submit comments to this office, Attn: Environmental and Cultural Resources Branch, no later than April 26, 2017 to ensure consideration. In addition to sending comments via mail, comments may be e-mailed to melissa.l.leslie@usace.army.mil. Requests for additional information should be directed to Ms. Melissa Leslie at 206-764-6587, or the above e-mail address.