

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE AND REQUEST FOR COMMENTS ON SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR THE TWIN LAKES WATER STORAGE PROJECT

The Washington State Department of Ecology's Office of Columbia River and Okanogan County are initiating preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Twin Lakes Water Storage Project. The Department of Ecology (Ecology) and the County are co-lead agencies for this EIS that is being prepared in accordance with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

Description of Proposal:

Declining surface and groundwater levels observed in the Twin Lakes area of Okanogan County since 2001 are due in part to conversion of unlined irrigation canals to pressurized pipe in the recharge area of the lakes. In 2004, the Washington State Legislature provided \$750,000 to the Department of Ecology to evaluate and issue decisions on water right applications for restoration of Twin Lakes in the Methow Valley (Section 318, 2003-2005 Capital Budget).

To address declining lake levels, Twin Lakes Aquifer Coalition (TLAC) applied for a groundwater right under application G4-34915 on October 7, 2003. Amended in August 2012, the application requests a water right appropriation within the Methow River Basin, Water Resources Inventory Area (WRIA) 48, for a maximum withdrawal of 2,000 gallons per minute (gpm) and a quantity of 800 acre-feet from wells located near the Methow River. The amendment also clarified that although 800 acre-feet is needed in the first 10 years, long-term maintenance pumping is on the order of 550 acre-feet. The proposed purpose of use identified in the amended application is summarized below:

- Restore and maintain Twin Lakes Aquifer levels.
- Restore and maintain recreational trout fishing in Big and Little Twin Lakes.
- Restore and maintain riparian habitat and lowland habitat for aquatic species and mammals that use Barnsley and Twin Lakes.
- Water storage enhancement for increasing streamflow in the mainstem Methow River during low flow periods.
- Mitigation for new out-of-stream uses through the Columbia River Program.

A copy of the amended application can be viewed at: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/images/pdf/TLWSapp.pdf>

The Twin Lakes Water Storage Project consists of two proposed wells located in hydraulic continuity with the Methow River in Section 3, T. 34 N., R. 21 E.W.M. Water withdrawn from the wells will be conveyed to Big Twin Lake via approximately 12,500 feet of pipeline up to 16-inch diameter. Lateral diversion points on the pipeline will divert water to Barnsley Lake, the Kettle, and to an infiltration gallery located between Barnsley and Big Twin Lakes. The maximum lake and aquifer storage capacity in the Twin Lakes area is approximately 1,600 acre-feet.

A groundwater model has been constructed of the lake and aquifer system. The model was used to evaluate various pumping scenarios and the fate of water withdrawn from the wells and discharged to the lake/aquifer system. TLAC proposed to pump from the Methow River only when flows are above the adopted minimum instream flows in WAC 173-548 (e.g. an interruptible withdrawal). Approximately 70% of the water withdrawn from the Methow River will return to the river through the aquifer system. That return flow has been modeled and some water returns to the river each month. Therefore, although the withdrawals are interruptible, the return flow is continuous and available for

mitigation of new downstream uses. The project is proposed to be funded by Department of Ecology's Office of the Columbia River (OCR). OCR's goal in funding storage projects is to benefit both instream and out-of-stream uses. In this case, after the primary uses of lake and aquifer stabilization, on-site habitat, recreation, and fisheries benefits are realized, secondary benefits can also be achieved. Based on 70% return flow, at steady state approximately 300 to 450 acre-feet of water will be available to be trusted to OCR. Although the pumping from the river will be interruptible, the return flow will be continuous, which is well-suited for OCR benefits.

Work completed during groundwater modeling includes an assessment of whether existing and/or future domestic wells will have a significant effect on water being used to augment lake levels. Model results indicate the sustainable yield of the aquifer appears sufficient to support future buildout with or without the TLAC project (Aspect Consulting, 2009a).

The EIS will provide an evaluation of the alternatives and significant adverse impacts associated with the proposed storage project. Alternatives have been studied at length in existing environmental documents that are available for review.

The SEPA Checklist can be found at:

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/images/pdf/SEPAcheckTL.pdf>

Additional information on this project including links to environmental documents can be found at:

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/tlws.html>

Proponent: Twin Lakes Aquifer Coalition (TLAC)

Location of Proposal: Twin Lakes area near Winthrop, Okanogan County, Washington

SEPA Lead Agencies: Department of Ecology, Office of Columbia River and Okanogan County

SEPA Responsible Officials: Derek Sandison and Perry Huston

EIS Required: The lead agencies have determined this proposal may have probable significant adverse environmental impact. An environmental impact statement (EIS) is required under RCW 43.21C.030 (2)(c) and will be prepared. The lead agencies have identified the following areas for discussion in the EIS:

- Potential impacts of withdrawals from wells on groundwater and surface water bodies
- Potential impacts of discharging water from wells to surface water bodies and to groundwater
- Possible long-term changes in water budget resulting from potential project impacts and future groundwater development.
- Potential impacts of increased water levels on jurisdictional shoreline areas
- Potential impacts of work occurring within or adjacent to jurisdictional shoreline areas

Scoping: Agencies, affected tribes, and members of the public are invited to comment on the scope of the EIS. You may comment on alternatives, mitigation measures, probable significant adverse impacts,

and licenses or other approvals that may be required. Written comments will be accepted through December 14, 2012.

Washington Department of Ecology, Office of Columbia River

Attention: Derek I. Sandison, Director

303 South Mission Street, Suite 200

Wenatchee, WA 98801

Or by email to dsan461@ecy.wa.gov

Scoping Open House. The lead agencies have elected to expand the scoping process in accordance with WAC 197-11-410 to promote interagency cooperation, public participation, and innovative ways to streamline the SEPA process. To support this, a public open house has been scheduled for Wednesday, November 7, 2012 from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Winthrop Auditorium, 51 N. Hwy 20, Winthrop (<http://winthropbarn.com/contact.html>).

Requests for sign language interpretation for the hearing impaired or other special assistance needs should be submitted by Mark Schuppe, Operations Unit Manager, Telephone (509) 454-4238.

Responsible Official: Derek I. Sandison

Position/Title: Director, Office of Columbia River

Phone Number: 509-457-7120

Address: 303 South Mission Street, Suite 200, Wenatchee, WA 98801

Date: October 11, 2012 Signature: 

Responsible Official: Perry Huston

Position/Title: Director, Okanogan County Planning and Development

Phone Number: 509-422-7160

Address: 123 5th Ave N Suite 130, Okanogan, WA 98840

Date: 10-12-12 Signature: 