

ODESSA SUBAREA SPECIAL STUDY

Columbia Basin Project

STUDY UPDATE

July 2012

An overview of Reclamation's Columbia Basin Project

The Bureau of Reclamation's Columbia Basin Project (CBP) is located in central Washington and is authorized for the irrigation of 1,029,000 acres. Currently, the Project serves about 671,000 acres in Grant, Adams, Walla Walla, and Franklin Counties. The multipurpose project provides irrigation, power production, flood control, municipal water supply, recreation, and fish and wildlife benefits. Irrigated acreage was developed primarily in the 1950s and 1960s, with some acreage added until 1985.

Background of the Odessa Subarea Special Study

The Odessa Subarea Special Study (Study) is examining the feasibility, acceptability, and environmental consequences of alternatives to replace groundwater currently used for irrigation on approximately 102,600 acres in the State-designated Odessa Ground Water Management Subarea with CBP surface water. The Study area is within the CBP boundary and is generally defined by the area bounded on the west by the East Low Canal, on the east by the City of Lind and extending north to Wilson Creek and south to the Connell area. The Study area includes portions of Lincoln, Adams, Grant, and Franklin Counties.

The original 1945 feasibility report for the CBP anticipated a 70-year period of incremental development. In the 1960s and 1970s, the State permitted irrigation wells in the Odessa Subarea as a temporary measure, anticipating that Project water would eventually be delivered to these lands. However, water levels in the aquifer have declined significantly since then, requiring irrigators to pump at depths as great as 750 feet, with wells as deep as 2,400 feet.

In December 2004, The State of Washington, represented by the Department of Ecology, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the CBP irrigation districts signed a Memorandum of Understanding to explore options for delivering surface water to existing groundwater-irrigated lands in that portion of the Odessa Subarea located within CBP boundaries. In February 2006, the Washington State Legislature passed the Columbia River Water Resource Management Act, directing Ecology to aggressively pursue development of water supplies benefiting both instream and out-of-stream uses through storage, conservation, and voluntary regional water management agreements. The Odessa Subarea Special Study is one of several activities identified in that legislation.

In response to the public's concern about the declining aquifer and associated socio-economic effects, Congress and the State

Legislature authorized funding for Reclamation and Ecology to investigate the problem. Reclamation and Ecology are co-leads and cost-share partners in the Odessa Subarea Special Study. (This Study does not address the full development of the Columbia Basin Project.)

What has been accomplished so far?

Reclamation and Ecology jointly published the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in October 2010. A No Action Alternative, four partial-replacement alternatives, and four full-replacement alternatives were evaluated in the Draft EIS. Water supply options included an additional drawdown of Banks Lake, construction of a Rocky Coulee reservoir (117,900 acre-feet active storage), use of additional water from Lake Roosevelt, or a combination of sources.

Reclamation also completed feasibility-level designs, cost estimates, economic analyses and a Draft Special Study Report describing the alternatives considered as required by Federal law and policy.

A draft Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report (CAR) and a final Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Wildlife Survey were also prepared and are available online.

What is the current status of the Study?

Reclamation and Ecology have carefully considered all comments received on the Draft EIS during the public comment period. Substantive comments will be addressed in the Final EIS by modifying alternatives,

supplementing the analyses, or making factual corrections as appropriate.

Based on feedback from the public on the Draft EIS and, in consultation with study partners, Reclamation and Ecology developed and are currently evaluating Modified Partial-Replacement Alternatives to include in the Final EIS that are derived from Partial Replacement Alternatives 2A and 2B.

These Modified Partial-Replacement Alternatives (4A and 4B) include an additional 13,000 acres for groundwater replacement, for a total of 70,000 acres located both north and south of I-90 and utilizes the same water supply options as Alternatives 2A and 2B. One of these modified alternatives is anticipated to become the Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS and Special Study Report.

Reclamation and Ecology are currently preparing a Final EIS in compliance with both National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements. A No Action Alternative, two partial-replacement alternatives, two full-replacement alternatives, and two modified partial-replacement alternatives are being evaluated. Water supply options include an additional drawdown of Banks Lake or a combination of Banks Lake and Lake Roosevelt. The construction of a Rocky Coulee reservoir will not be considered in the Final EIS due to cost and other considerations. Alternatives utilizing the proposed Rocky Coulee reservoir as a water supply are not being further considered in the FEIS for the same reasons.

Reclamation and Ecology expect to release the Final EIS in late summer 2012. In

addition to the Final EIS (which includes Volume 2, Comments and Responses), the final Special Study Report and pertinent technical reports will be prepared and made available to the public.

The NEPA process will be concluded with a Record of Decision. The Record of Decision will identify Reclamation's decision on the proposed action and will describe the basis for that decision.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

We will continue to provide updates about study progress and the availability of reports and other study documents. If you have any comments or questions, please contact:

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Visit Reclamation's website at http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/ucao_misc/odessa/index.html and Washington State Department of Ecology Office of Columbia River at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/cwp/crwmp.html> for more information.

You may also sign up with Ecology's list serve at <http://listserv.wa.gov/archives/cwp.html> to receive updates and information.