

ODESSA SUBAREA SPECIAL STUDY

Columbia Basin Project

STUDY UPDATE

November 2010

An overview of Reclamation's Columbia Basin Project

The Bureau of Reclamation's Columbia Basin Project (CBP), located in central Washington, was 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 sporadically 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 (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 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 economic and other effects, Congress and the

Washington State Legislature authorized funding for Reclamation and Ecology to investigate the problem. Reclamation and Ecology's Office of Columbia River 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 is the current status of the Odessa Subarea Special Study?

Reclamation and Ecology have jointly prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) which complies with both National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements. A No Action Alternative, four partial-replacement alternatives, and four full-replacement alternatives are evaluated in the DEIS. Water supply options include 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 all three.

Reclamation has 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. The economic portion of the report consists of a benefit-cost analysis and regional and national economic impacts analyses.

The DEIS was released to the public on October 26, 2010, with a 60-day comment period ending December 31, 2010. The DEIS does not specify a preferred alternative;

however, two of the eight action alternatives approach a benefit-cost ratio of 1:1.

A draft Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report (CAR) and a final Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Wildlife Survey are available online. A final CAR along with a Biological Assessment will be available with the FEIS.

When will this study be completed?

Reclamation and Ecology will carefully consider all comments received on the DEIS during the public comment period. Substantive comments will be addressed in the FEIS by modifying alternatives, supplementing the analyses, or making factual corrections as appropriate. Based on feedback from the public on the DEIS and in consultation with study partners, Reclamation and Ecology will choose a preferred alternative for inclusion in the FEIS and Special Study Report.

Reclamation and Ecology expect to release the FEIS in the summer of 2011. In addition to the FEIS, 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 (ROD) issued no sooner than 30 days after the FEIS is completed. The ROD will identify Reclamation's and Ecology'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.