

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

Potlatch, St. Maries Plywood Mill, NPDES Permit No. ID-000001-9
Public Comment Period: September 14 - November 14, 1994

During the public comment period which ended on November 14, 1994, comments were received from the permittee, the Northern Idaho Field Office of the Fish & Wildlife Service, the State of Washington Department of Ecology, and the Idaho Fish & Game Panhandle Region. No other comments were received. Review of the comments received resulted in some revisions to the proposed final permit. These revisions are reflected in the proposed permit and the response to comment document.

Idaho Fish & Game:

Comment: No objections to the permit as long as it will not impair beneficial uses and will allow water quality improvements over existing conditions.

Response: The permit is written to comply with state water quality standards. Therefore beneficial uses would not be impaired by this discharge. Compliance with the standards by all pollutant sources could allow water quality improvements over existing conditions.

Fish & Wildlife Service

Comment 1: The lower reaches of the St. Joe River were identified as water quality limited in 1988. They suggest that the lower reaches of the St. Joe River, its interconnected Lateral Lakes and the south end of Lake Coeur d'Alene may all be water quality limited. Specific information on nutrient enrichment and related dissolved oxygen depression of these waters is available. To deal with the nutrient problem, the subject discharge may ultimately be considered in a waste-load allocation process. We suggest that a reopener clause be included in this permit to allow timely revision and consistency with the Section 303(d) requirements should they be imposed.

Response: According to DEQ, the latest version of the 303(d) does not list the lower reaches of the St. Joe River as being water quality limited, and a TMDL is not planned during the term of the proposed permit. Therefore, the reopener clause that was included in Part I of the original draft permit has been deleted. The proposed final permit may be reopened at any time during the five year term for cause as outlined in section IV.F. of the permit.

Comment 2: The lower St. Joe River is believed to support fluvial bull trout at least seasonally.

This species was designated a Candidate 1 under the Endangered Species Act on June 7, 1994. Temperatures greater than 15° are believed limiting to bull trout distribution. The EPA Fact Sheet states that the Tribal standard of 19° has been exceeded. The 1992 305(b) report was an 18°C threshold for cold water biota. We recommend that EPA consider this discharge and other factors which are cumulatively impacting cold water biota in this reach of the St. Joe River. Temperature control measures should be considered with the Best Available Technology Economically Achievable (BAT) for this discharge.

Response: We have re-evaluated the need for a temperature limit in the proposed permit by determining the reasonable potential for the discharge to exceed point source temperature restrictions (no increase > 1°C) and applicable ambient temperature criteria for cold water biota (15°C; 19°C). The applicant has indicated that the discharge temperature is largely dictated by ambient weather conditions, and cooling water additions do not significantly affect discharge temperatures. The applicant has supplied data to support these assumptions which indicate that the highest discharge temperatures are associated with hot, dry weather and have not exceeded 26°C over the past two years. Measured discharge temperatures (26°C) are well below those temperatures (>100°C) necessary to violate point source discharge restrictions. Analyses also indicate that increases in ambient river temperatures resulting from wastewater additions will be negligible at applicable ambient criteria for cold water biota. Potential increases will be less than 0.1°C after mixing. Therefore, we have determined that temperature limits on the discharge are not warranted. We have, however, retained the monitoring requirement for temperature to add to the data base for this section of the river.

As required by the Endangered Species Act, we requested updated species lists from the Fish & Wildlife Service (F&WS) and from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on September 5, 1996. On September 10, 1996, the F&WS indicated that an experimental nonessential population of gray wolves were in the project area. We have determined there will be no adverse impact to this population since reissuance of the permit does not involve construction, and compliance with the permit limits will meet water quality standards in the St. Joe River. On September 11, 1996, the NMFS indicated there are no species nor any designated critical habitat under their jurisdiction in the project area.

State of Washington, Department of Ecology

Fact Sheet

Comment 1: The flow values given do not agree with the values given in the schematic of water flow.

Response: The permittee provided an updated water balance sheet with their comments on the draft permit which is included with this Response to Comments.

Comment 2: 40 CFR, Part 429.40 is listed but does not apply to this facility.

Response: The application indicates the facility is a plywood manufacturing facility. Section 429 deals with the Timber Products Processing Point Source Category. Subpart C covers the Plywood Subcategory, and sections 429.40 through 429.46 contain the effluent guidelines for these facilities. Part 429.43 requires no discharge of process wastewaters to waters of the U.S.

Comment 3: Should Part 429.120 (Sawmills) be listed as an applicable federal guideline since, I assume, this activity is done at this facility. Referencing this Part would also justify the discharge limitation of “no discharge of process wastewater.”

Response: Since the primary activity at the mill is plywood manufacturing, we chose to reference 40 CFR, part 429.40. The effluent limitations are the same for process wastewater: no discharge.

Comment 4: The fact Sheet gives no requirement for the permittee to investigate or implement pollution prevention or water conservation practices to reduce the amount of water discharged from the log yard; why not?

Response: The permittee’s response to the draft permit indicates that they do recycle some log spray water. We understand that the permittee is currently evaluating options to reduce this discharge. While we encourage and support pollution prevention and water conservation practices, it is beyond our authority to tell permittees how to operate their facilities.

Permit

Comment 1: Section IA: Why are there no flow limitations?

Response: At the low flow, the receiving stream provides a 671:1 dilution. There is no reasonable potential for this discharge to cause a water quality standard violation. In addition ground water and storm water contribute to the discharge, and these contributions are largely beyond the permittee’s control. Therefore, we have not included a flow limit on this discharge. Flow monitoring and reporting are required in the proposed final permit.

Comment 2: Section IA: No definition is given in the permit for debris or process wastewater.

Response: We have added the definition from the effluent guidelines for debris. Since the discharge does not constitute process wastewater, we have not included a definition for process wastewater in Section IA.

Comment 3: Section IA: Are grab samples from a continuous discharging waste stream representative of the wastewater being discharged, as required by permit Section IIA?

Response: Grab samples are widely used in the NPDES program and are generally viewed as being adequate to determine compliance with permit limits. Since the permit was public noticed, flow monitoring equipment has been installed for this discharge. Therefore, the proposed final permit has been revised to reflect the change in equipment.

Comment 4: Section ID: Should the "Purpose" of any permit condition be contained in the permit or should it be confined to the Fact Sheet?

Response: Comment is unclear; unable to respond.

Potlatch Corporation

Comment: On October 11, 1994, the permittee requested a 60-day extension on the comment period for the permit.

Response: On October 14, 1994, a revised Public Notice was issued extending the comment period for 30 days to November 14, 1994.

On November 9, 1994, the permittee submitted comments on the proposed permit.

Comment 1: The reopener is not authorized under the CWA.

Response: According to DEQ, the latest version of the 303(d) does not list the lower reaches of the St. Joe River as being water quality limited, and a TMDL is not planned during the term of the proposed permit. Therefore, the reopener clause that was included in Part I of the original draft permit has been deleted. The proposed final permit may be reopened at any time during the five year term for cause as outlined in section IV.F. of the permit.

Comment 2: BMP Program Provisions

Response: We agree with the permittee's position. The BMP provisions are in place through the storm water program and should not have been included again in the proposed

permit. We have eliminated this section of the permit.

Comment 3: Requirement to obtain approvals from two agencies is often ambiguous, unnecessarily burdensome, and unwarranted.

A. Part 1.B.8. - Toxicity identification evaluation; Part III.G.3.a. - Bypass prohibited; and Parts IV.A.,B,C,F,H, and H3 - Dual Notification

Response: These plans/notifications are submitted to both agencies because the NPDES program is a tool to maintain compliance with the state's water quality standards. The two agencies work together with the permittee to ensure that the state's waters are protected. Because the discharge is located on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation, the Tribe has been added as an additional point of contact.

B & C - BMP Issues

Response: BMP section has been removed from the permit, so these are nonissues.

D. Part 1.E.3 - QA Plan Submittal

Response: In order to ensure that quality data are collected and submitted by permittees, review and approval of the QA/QC plan by EPA lab experts is typically required in NPDES permits. This allows weaknesses or deficiencies in plans to be identified and corrected so the permittee does not waste resources collecting data that may not be valid.

E. Part II.G - Reporting noncompliance - no direction as to whether notice is to EPA, DEQ or both. Does not state if oral or written.

Response: Paragraph 1 says, "...by telephone within 24 hours..." Phone number is provided in item #3.

Paragraph 2 says written submission shall also be provided.

Paragraph 3 says the Director may waive written report on a case-by-case basis.

Paragraph 4 says to submit a written report to the addresses in Part II.C (EPA, DEQ, and the Tribe). While the permit does not specifically state that DEQ and the Tribe must be notified by phone within 24 hours, it is to the permittee's benefit to do so since DEQ or the Tribe are the ones who receives complaints/questions from the public if problems are observed.

Comment 4: Proposed new testing requirements are unnecessary and overly burdensome.

Response: We agree with the permittee's position that the monitoring in the proposed permit is substantially increased over the old permit. The additional monitoring was based on study results that indicate logyard runoff can adversely effect water quality. While the situation at the Potlatch St. Maries facility does not exactly replicate the scenarios presented in the studies, we believe it is in the company's best interest to do some monitoring to help build a data base on the water quality status of the St. Joe River and to identify potential contributions from this facility.

The Coeur d'Alene Tribe is currently doing some monitoring work in the area and has expressed an interest in coordinating with the permittee in this effort.

We have discussed the monitoring requirements in the draft permit with the DEQ, the Tribe, and the permittee and have adjusted the requirements as follows: For the year 1997(8???), the following sampling will be required in the months of April, July, August, September and November:

BOD, Total Phosphorus, Total Nitrogen, Kjeldahl Nitrogen, Turbidity, Temperature, Dissolved Oxygen, Total Suspended Solids, and Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons (TPH)

Samples will be collected in the effluent, upstream, and downstream of the Potlatch discharge. This sampling is in addition to the regular effluent sampling for flow, pH, and temperature.

One-time toxicity testing toward the end of the permit period would confirm that the discharge from the facility has not changed over time. This requirement is routinely included in NPDES permits. The data collected are also used by the permittee when completing the renewal application for this permit.

Comment 5: Water temperature limit may not be feasible.

Response: We have re-evaluated the need for a temperature limit in the proposed permit by determining the reasonable potential for the discharge to exceed point source temperature restrictions (no increase > 1°C) and applicable ambient temperature criteria for cold water biota (15°C; 19°C). The applicant has indicated that the discharge temperature is largely dictated by ambient weather conditions, and cooling water additions do not significantly affect discharge temperatures. The applicant has supplied data to support these assumptions which indicate that the highest discharge temperatures are associated with hot, dry weather and have not exceeded 26°C over the past two years. Measured discharge temperatures (26°C) are well below those temperatures (>100°C.) necessary to violate point source discharge restrictions. Analyses also indicate that increases in ambient river

temperatures resulting from wastewater additions will be negligible at applicable ambient criteria for cold water biota. Potential increases will be less than 0.1 °C after mixing. Therefore, we have determined that temperature limits on the discharge are not warranted. We have, however, retained the monitoring requirement for temperature to add to the data base for this section of the river.

Comment 6: Miscellaneous comments and corrections to the Fact Sheet

a. More accurate analysis of water balances for the plant has been completed. A new diagram is included. Calculations of water flow represent a best estimate of average flows for the year. Actual flows at any given time will depend upon many variables, including rainfall, river level, groundwater level, and the amount of water being used for log spraying.

Also, company is installing more accurate methods of tracking water-use in the near future.

Response: The revised diagram has been attached to this document. Monitoring requirements in the proposed final permit reflect the installation of a flow meter.

b. Change in contact person.

Response: Contact is Bernie Wilmarth.

c. Page 1 of the Technical Information Section does not indicate there is a lumber mill on site. There is one, and this should be noted.

Response: Done.

d. The Fact Sheet indicates on pages 2 that the log spray water is not recycled. This is not correct. The log spray water is recycled, but because more water is withdrawn from the river than is used in log spraying, there is a net discharge into the river through outfall 001.

Response: Noted.

e. The monitoring requirements described on page 5 of the Fact Sheet include total phosphorous, but that test is not listed on the draft permit. Also oil and grease are listed on the draft permit, but not in the Fact Sheet.

Response: Monitoring for total phosphorous has been included in the proposed final permit per the discussion above. Oil and grease (Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons - TPH) are retained in the proposed final permit to comply with the water quality standard

for oil and grease (i.e., no sheen or visible oil and grease).