



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 10

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WATER DIVISION

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

To all interested government agencies, public groups, and individuals:

In accordance with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) procedures for complying with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) at 40 CFR Part 6, EPA has completed an environmental review of the following proposed action:

**Coverage of the Colville Tribal Federal Corporation's Recirculating Aquaculture System Demonstration Project at Cassimer Bar under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System General Permit for Federal Aquaculture Facilities and Aquaculture Facilities Located in Indian Country Within the boundaries of the State of Washington
[WAG130000]**

EPA ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Section 301(a) of the Clean Water Act (CWA) provides that the discharge of pollutants to surface waters of the United States is prohibited except in accordance with a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit. The Colville Tribal Federal Corporation (CTFC) will apply for coverage under the reissued NPDES general permit for Federal Aquaculture Facilities and Aquaculture Facilities Located in Indian Country Within the boundaries of the State of Washington (Washington Aquaculture GP) for discharges associated with the operation of a land-based recirculating aquaculture system. Discharges into waters of the United States associated with the operation of land-based aquaculture facilities are regulated under the Flow-Through and Recirculating Systems Subcategory of the Concentrated Aquatic Animal Production (CAAP) Point Source Category [40 CFR Part 451, Subpart A]. Due to the location of the proposed project within the boundaries of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, EPA is the NPDES permitting authority.

New Effluent Limitation Guidelines (ELG) and new source performance standards (NSPS) for the CAAP Point Source Category were promulgated on September 7, 2004 and became effective on September 22, 2004. Aquaculture facilities constructed after promulgation of these NSPS, that also have an annual production weight above 100,000 pounds, are considered *new sources* under 40 CFR 122.29. In accordance with Section 511(c)(1) of the CWA and EPA's regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) at 40 CFR Part 6, issuance of NPDES permits for *new sources* is considered a major Federal action subject to NEPA review. The proposed new aquaculture facility at Cassimer Bar meets the production threshold to be considered a new source. As a new source, coverage of the facility under the Washington Aquaculture GP is subject to NEPA review.

BACKGROUND AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A complete description of the proposed project and background can be found in Chapters 1 and 3 of the Environmental Assessment for the CTFC Recirculating Aquaculture System (RAS) Demonstration Project at Cassimer Bar. A summary of the background and project description is provided below.

The CTFC proposes to construct, operate, and maintain a demonstration-sized recirculating aquaculture facility at Cassimer Bar, the site of a mothballed sockeye salmon hatchery facility owned by the CTFC. The demonstration project would operate for approximately 2 years for “proof of concept.” The Cassimer Bar Hatchery site is located at elevation 790 feet, near the confluence of the Okanogan River with the Columbia River. The proposed project will be a demonstration project designed to confirm the feasibility and actual costs of a full-scale project capable of raising salmonids for the commercial fish market and human consumption. The demonstration project will raise Rainbow Trout only.

The basic design elements of a recirculating aquaculture facility include a fish culture tank, mechanical filter (to remove particles), biomedica (a medium in which bacteria are cultured to feed on the ammonia produced in fish waste), degasser (to remove carbon dioxide and other undesirable gases), pumps (to return water to the fish tank), oxygenation (for the survival of the fish), and miscellaneous control systems for monitoring, feeding, temperature, light, and pH control. The predominant feature of the CTFC RAS demonstration project will be a newly constructed 600 cubic meter concrete tank equipped with a biofilter and associated water treatment facilities. The biofilter would remove water soluble constituents such as ammonia and nitrite. The culture tank will be 45 feet in diameter, and 15 feet deep. Other components of the demonstration project include construction of a 1,500 sf office (30 ft x 50 ft), a 6,000 sf steel building (60 ft by 100 ft), and the 600 cubic meter concrete tank and associated biofilter inside the steel building.

Overall, construction of the CTFC RAS demonstration project is estimated to take approximately 12 months, with a target date to begin in early 2023 (pending confirmation of funding and receipt of all required permits and approvals). If a decision is made to proceed with the full-scale project at some future time, construction would be phased and could take several years. Additional property acquisition would be required for the full-scale facility. The rate of expansion would depend on the success of the project and available financing.

Construction materials would be brought to the Cassimer Bar Hatchery site in containers transported by trucks. The containers would be off-loaded within a designated construction staging area. Primary construction equipment would include an excavator and a Skid Steer.

In-water discharges to the Okanogan River would include uneaten or regurgitated feed, fish feces, fish oil, and possibly other constituents associated with the Rainbow Trout recirculating aquaculture system. Maximum daily discharge from the outfall would be 55 to 110 gallons per minute (gpm), or 79,200 to 158,400 gallons per day (gpd). The maximum average monthly discharge is estimated to be 2.376 to 4.752 million gallons per month. Outfall discharges of process water would occur year-around. Solids screened from the process water discharge would be trucked to area orchards for land application as fertilizer during the growing season (approximately April 1 through September 30).

EPA’s proposed action is to provide NPDES permit coverage to the CTFC Recirculating Aquaculture System Demonstration Project.

PURPOSE AND NEED OF ACTION

The purpose of EPA’s proposed action is to provide NPDES permit coverage for the proposed CTFC Recirculating Aquaculture System Demonstration Project under the reissued Washington Aquaculture GP. NPDES permit coverage is needed for any discharge of pollutants into waters of the U.S., including those associated with operation of aquaculture facilities. The permit would authorize discharges from the

facility into the Okanogan River in accordance with the discharge limitations and monitoring requirements set forth in the permit.

The purpose of the proposed project is to test a cost-effective recirculating aquaculture system that can be used to grow a variety of fin fish for food production. The need for the project is to increase and diversify revenue-generating enterprises and employment opportunities for the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation that are consistent with cultural beliefs. One of those opportunities is growing and processing trout or salmon for human consumption. The demonstration project would temporarily provide employment and food source benefits on a smaller scale (less than 2 percent of the full-scale project).

ALTERNATIVES

Several alternative sites were considered for the location of the proposed project, including the Colville Tribal Trout Hatchery, the Chief Joseph Hatchery, and the Omak Acclimation Pond Site. After an analysis of the purpose and need of the project, site characteristics, and permitting requirements, the CTFC determined the only viable site for the project was the Cassimer Bar location. A complete description of alternatives can be found in Chapter 3 of the EA.

The alternative actions available to EPA include the proposed action and a No Action alternative. Under the proposed action, EPA would provide NPDES permit coverage to the project under the reissued Washington Aquaculture GP. Under the No Action alternative EPA would not provide NPDES permit coverage to the facility and the CTFC would have to find alternative means to dispose of the wastewater associated with the proposed project.

SUMMARY

Based on the analysis in the EA and consideration of the NPDES permit conditions, and in accordance with the guidelines for determining the significance of proposed federal actions (40 C.F.R. 1508.27), EPA has concluded that coverage of the CTFC RAS Demonstration Project at Cassimer Bar under the reissued Washington Aquaculture GP will not result in any significant impacts on the human environment.

Providing NPDES coverage to the project will not significantly affect land use patterns or population, wetlands or flood plains, threatened or endangered species, farmlands, ecologically critical areas, historic resources, air quality, water quality, noise levels, fish and wildlife resources, nor will it conflict with approved local, regional, or state land use plans or policies. The permit also conforms to all applicable federal statutes and executive orders. EPA is seeking public comment on this determination.

Comments supporting or disagreeing with this FONSI may be submitted, within 60 days of the release of this FONSI, to epar10wd-mpdes@epa.gov with the subject line: Public Comments on WAG130000.

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Director