



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Pennsylvania Field Office
315 South Allen Street, Suite 322
State College, Pennsylvania 16801-4850



May 31, 2013

Heidi Shadeck
Moody and Associates, Inc.
11548 Cotton Road
Meadville, PA 16335

RE: USFWS Project #2013-0714
PNDI #20130405398507

Dear Ms. Shadeck:

This responds to your letter received by our office on April 24, 2013, requesting information about federally listed and proposed endangered and threatened species within the area affected by the proposed SWEPI, LP water withdraw project from the Allegheny River located in Conewango Township, Warren County, Pennsylvania. The project proposes to withdraw 1.5 million gallons of water per day from the Allegheny River. The following comments are provided pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (87 Stat. 884, as amended; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) to ensure the protection of endangered and threatened species.

Recent surveys identified the presence of Northern riffleshell (*Epioblasma torulosa rangiana*) a federally listed, endangered mussel species, close to your project location in the Allegheny River. This species could be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed water withdrawal. Freshwater mussels are sedentary filter-feeders, and as such, they are vulnerable to substrate disturbance, silt deposition, scouring, water quality degradation, changes in channel morphology, and alterations of river hydrology.

Because freshwater mussels often inhabit shallower areas adjacent to the shoreline, rapid reductions in water levels can dewater occupied mussel habitat and result in desiccation and potentially death of individuals, if the mussels are not able to react quickly enough to retreat with the receding water line. If a water withdrawal permit is granted, we request that the applicant implement incremental ramping rates, especially during low flow seasons, to prevent rapid mussel habitat dewatering.

Water withdrawals from this location could have a direct impact on the assimilative capacity of the Allegheny River, thus potentially affecting the ability for downstream NPDES permit holders to meet the conditions of their discharge permits, including mixing zone distances. Furthermore, the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) operates the Kinzua Dam on the Allegheny River with

flow targets to meet water quality and other water use requirements. Withdrawal of the requested quantity of water may require the Corps to change operations at the dam in order to meet downstream water quality targets. In addition to these potential water quality concerns, if dam operations change, it could inhibit the Corps' ability to meet scheduled pool elevation levels, thus affecting recreation opportunities and fishery resources at the lake. We recommend that the applicant coordinate with the Corps and Environmental Protection Agency to ensure water quality targets and discharge permit conditions continue to be met.

We recommend, at a minimum, that flow targets developed for the Allegheny River be consistent with the seasonal requirements described in the Ohio River Basin Ecosystem Flows Study Report for medium tributaries and large rivers (March 2013). Due to compounding factors, including an incomplete documentation of existing water withdrawals, significant NPDES discharges downstream of the proposed water withdrawal, and the need to coordinate the operation of Kinzua Dam to meet downstream flow targets, we caution that these flow recommendations should be used as an absolute minimum guideline.

It is not possible for us to determine the full impact, including potential impacts to federally listed species, of the proposed water withdrawal based on a single withdrawal request. In order to assess the potential impacts, more comprehensive information for the basin is needed, including cumulative water withdrawals for this reach, ramping rates for proposed withdrawals, operational targets for water delivery by the Corps at the Kinzua Dam, species occurrence and distribution, and the types and limits of permitted discharges downstream of the proposed withdrawal. We recently received multiple project applications involving requests for substantial water withdrawals that, when evaluated in a cumulative manner, we believe could result in adverse impacts to aquatic resources and water quality. We strongly encourage that the project be specifically evaluated, in coordination with resource agencies, for flow and water quality needs.

To avoid potential delays in reviewing your project, please use the above-referenced USFWS project tracking number in any future correspondence regarding this project.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact Kim Faulds of my staff at 814-234-4090.

Sincerely,

Roberta E. Hylton
Acting Field Office Supervisor

cc:

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Project file

Readers file

ES file - list request

ES:PAFO:

filename: drafts2013/2013-0714_SWEPI River Road Water Withdraw Warren Allegheny River