Finding of No Significant Impact

for the

Columbian White-tailed Deer Translocation

from Tenasillahe Island to Columbia Stock Ranch

Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the Columbian White-tailed Deer

May 2019

Introduction

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) prepared an environmental assessment (EA), in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service, USFWS), to evaluate a proposal to translocate Columbian white-tailed deer from the Tenasillahe Island Unit of Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the Columbian White-tailed Deer (JBH) in Wahkiakum County, Washington, to the Columbia Stock Ranch in Columbia County, Oregon (BPA 2018). Columbian white-tailed deer are listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) (16 U.S.C. § 1531 et seq.).

BPA is the lead federal agency and would fund the proposed translocations and follow-up monitoring. Funding the translocations assists BPA in meeting its commitments under the Northwest Power Act (16 U.S.C. § 839b(h)(10)(A)) to fund fish and wildlife protection, mitigation, and enhancement actions consistent with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Fish and Wildlife Program.

The Service, as a cooperating agency, assisted in the development of the EA and has adopted it in partial satisfaction of requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA) (42 USC 4321 et seq.).

This project is described in detail in BPA's draft EA for the Columbian White-tailed Deer Translocation from Tenasillahe Island to Columbia Stock Ranch (BPA 2018), which is incorporated by reference. BPA's final EA (BPA 2019) included numerous single-word additions and grammatical edits, which made the document easier to read. Subsections were added to effectively organize discussions of the public involvement process. Responses to public comments were added as Appendix A. A complete list of all changes to the draft EA are listed in Section 1.4.4 of the final EA. BPA's final EA (BPA 2019) is also incorporated by reference.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed translocation is to speed the recovery of Columbian white-tailed deer by establishing a new subpopulation of the deer on suitable habitat within the historic range of the Columbia River distinct population segment. The project is needed to implement recovery actions described in the Revised Columbian White-Tailed Deer Recovery Plan (USFWS 1983) and to meet JBH management objectives as described in its Comprehensive Conservation Plan (USFWS 2010). Establishing new subpopulations through capture and translocation is a recovery action described in the Recovery Plan and is a JBH management objective.

Alternatives Considered

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, the current situation would be maintained. BPA would not provide funds to the Service to translocate Columbian white-tailed deer from Tenasillahe Island to Columbia Stock Ranch, and no translocations would take place.

Proposed Action Alternative: Under the Proposed Action Alternative, BPA would provide funds to the Service to translocate, manage, and monitor up to 50 Columbian white-tailed deer from Tenasillahe Island to Columbia Stock Ranch, a 935-acre parcel owned and managed by the Columbia Land Trust for wildlife habitat and conservation. The Service would translocate about 30 deer in winter 2019/20 and about 20 deer in winter 2020/21. The specific number of deer translocated in 2020/21 would depend on the success of the 2019/20 effort. Translocations would occur between December 1 and March 31 each year, and monitoring would occur in 2019–2022.

Comparison of Effects

No Action Alternative: Because no deer would be translocated, there would be no effects on the human environment. The population of Columbian white-tailed deer on Tenasillahe Island is currently larger than the JBH management goal and would be expected to drop slightly in numbers to a population that is closer to the management goal. No additional subpopulations would be created within the range of the Columbia River distinct population segment and the recovery timeline would not be accelerated.

Proposed Action Alternative: The following discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant. Many of the effects discussed would be minimized through the application of mitigation measures identified in the mitigation actions outlined below.

Based on the results of public scoping and the reasonably foreseeable impacts, the resources considered in detail in the EA include:

- Wildlife and fish
- Land use and recreation
- Socioeconomics and environmental justice

Because the Proposed Action does not include ground-disturbing or site-modifying actions, the following resources were considered and eliminated from detailed analysis in the EA because there would be little to no impacts:

- Geology and soils
- Water (quality and quantity)
- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Vegetation
- Cultural resources
- Scenic values
- Transportation

Impacts to vegetation by browsing deer were not addressed, because browse effects by Columbian white-tailed deer (the only foreseeable effects on vegetation) are likely indistinguishable from those already created by the Columbian black-tailed deer which currently occur on Columbia Stock Ranch and adjacent lands.

Wildlife and Fish

Impacts to wildlife and fish would be low.

Under the Proposed Action, the Service would translocate up to 50 deer. The number of Columbian white-tailed deer in the Columbia River distinct population segment would not immediately change but would be redistributed within its historic range.

- The new Columbia Stock Ranch subpopulation would be anticipated to link to the Ridgefield and Sauvie/Scappoose subpopulations (upstream) and the Cottonwood/Kalama subpopulation (downstream) through dispersing individuals. This new subpopulation and the connectivity it would provide may have a moderate long-term beneficial effect on the recovery of Columbian white-tailed deer.
- Currently, there are about 200 Columbian white-tailed deer on Tenasillahe Island, which far exceeds the management goal of approximately 125 individuals. A reduction in the Columbian white-tailed deer subpopulation on the island would decrease competition for available resources, which may improve the physical condition of the remaining animals, potentially increasing survival and fecundity. Deer numbers on the island following the translocations would remain above management goals and may rebound somewhat. There would be a low effect on the Tenasillahe Island subpopulation even if no rebound occurred.
- For deer being translocated, the stress of capture, handling, transport, and adaptation to a new location may lead to somewhat higher mortality than what is expected for a population that is not moved, though this mortality is anticipated to be low. Implementation of mitigation measures would help ensure injury and mortality rates are kept low.
- To reduce post-release mortality, predator control would be implemented prior to translocation.
- Additional risk to the translocated Columbian white-tailed deer could come from hazards at Columbia Stock Ranch not experienced at Tenasillahe Island. Motor vehicle collisions, as an example, are expected, but anticipated to be low as has been the case with prior translocations.
- Some Columbian black-tailed deer are expected to be displaced by Columbian white-tailed deer. Roosevelt Elk would likely be unaffected. Coyote numbers would likely decline in the short-term because of control measures to be implemented. No effects are expected on other small mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles.
- The Proposed Action has no ground-disturbing activities, and would take no action within aquatic habitats. No fish or fish habitats would be affected. Streaked horned lark, a species listed as threatened under the ESA that occurs near but not on Columbia Stock Ranch, would not be affected.

Land Use and Recreation

Impacts to land use and recreation would be low to moderate.

- The translocation of Columbian white-tailed deer may decrease the acreage and the number of days that grazing occurs by the one rancher that grazes cattle on Columbia Stock Ranch.
- Some Columbian white-tailed deer may establish home ranges on private lands surrounding Columbia Stock Ranch with resulting deer browse damage to commercial and private property. Prior translocations in the lower Columbia River have resulted in few such situations, and few issues are expected here. An existing ESA Section 4(d) rule, and other

financial and regulatory assistance is available to minimize impact to private landowners.

- Private landowners and ESA-listed Columbian white-tailed deer have coexisted successfully along the lower Columbia River for decades and the Service's assistance and education efforts would help reduce impacts from the translocation of Columbian white-tailed deer to Columbia Stock Ranch.
- There are currently no recreational opportunities on Columbia Stock Ranch (it is closed to public use) and translocation of Columbian white-tailed deer would not provide public access or open the area for recreation.
- Private landowners around Columbia Stock Ranch may allow hunting, and Columbian white-tailed deer, which cannot legally be hunted, would now be seen in areas where hunters previously expected to see only Columbian black-tailed deer. State-sponsored hunter education has been successful in the past to reduce potential effects on Columbian black-tailed deer hunting, resulting in no changes to local hunting regulations, and the same is anticipated here.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Impacts to socioeconomics would be low.

- The Proposed Action would not create income opportunities for local populations. No jobs would be created, no tourist attractions would be developed, and there would be no increase in wildlife viewing and hunting opportunities. The translocation efforts may generate a few dollars in spending at nearby services while the translocation is being conducted, but this impact is low.
- Translocations of Columbian white-tailed deer to Columbia Stock Ranch would not result in displacements of human activity or land uses and would not generate any human health or environmental effects to minority or low-income populations or others.

Mitigation Measures

The following measures are proposed to reduce the potential adverse effects of the Proposed Action on Columbian white-tailed deer:

- Restrict translocations to the period December 1 to March 31.
- Comply with the Special Terms and Conditions of permits issued for deer capture and translocation.
- Move entire family groups of Columbian white-tailed deer together. Do not separate does from fawns by translocation actions if at all possible.
- Follow trapping guidelines in the capture plan (EA Section 1.2.3) to minimize stress and reduce time spent handling and transporting deer.
- Release family groups into small shelters where they can calm down, regroup, and then exit at a time of their choosing.
- Monitor translocations as described in Section 2.1 of the EA.
- Apply predator control through contract with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, to ensure it is conducted in an effective manner that minimizes harm to non-target species.
- Continue outreach actions to inform local communities of the newly present Columbian white-tailed deer.

Public Involvement

To help determine issues to be addressed in the EA, BPA conducted public scoping outreach. BPA mailed letters on August 27, 2018, to landowners, tribes, government agencies, and other potentially affected or concerned citizens and interest groups. The public letter provided information about the Proposed Action and EA scoping period, requested comments on issues to be addressed in the EA, and described how to comment (mail, fax, telephone, the BPA website, and at scoping meetings). The public letter was posted on a project website established by BPA to provide information about the proposed translocations and the EA process (www.bpa.gov/goto/Columbian white-tailed deertranslocation).

A draft of the EA was released for a 30-day public comment period that began on October 23, 2018, and ended on November 23, 2018. BPA posted the EA on its website and the Service posted it on the JBH website. Public comments were accepted either by mail, phone, or through BPA's public comment website (www.bpa.gov/comment). Four responsive letters were received[1], with comments emphasizing the impact translocated CWTD might have on adjacent landowners' use of their property. A public meeting was held on March 21, 2019, to meet with landowners and others to discuss the translocation proposal and their concerns. Responses to these comments are provided in Appendix A of the final EA (BPA 2019). The Proposed Action Alternative was not changed based on the comments received. Outreach to landowners surrounding Columbia Stock Ranch has occurred and will continue. BPA has also contacted elected officials at the county and federal levels.

Decision

Based on review and evaluation of the information contained in the supporting references, I have determined that translocating Columbian white-tailed deer from Tenasillahe Island, Washington, to Columbia Stock Ranch in Columbia County, Oregon, is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA (42 USC 4321 et seq.). The proposed action is not without precedent and is not similar to actions that would normally require preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. Accordingly, the Service is not required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement. The Service will translocate approximately 50 Columbian white-tailed deer from Tenasillahe Island to the Columbia Stock Ranch over a two-year period. Interested parties are being notified of our decision.

Robyn Thorson

Regional Director, Pacific Region
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

August 2, 2019
Date

[1] A fifth letter was also received which was provided as Exhibit A for one of the four comment letters received. This exhibit is a copy of a comment letter sent in response to a separate project previously proposed on Columbia Stock Ranch.

Supporting References

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). 2018. DRAFT Environmental Assessment for the Columbian White-tailed Deer Translocation from Tenasillahe Island to Columbia Stock Ranch. 43pp.

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). 2019. FINAL Environmental Assessment for the Columbian White-tailed Deer Translocation from Tenasillahe Island to Columbia Stock Ranch. 43pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 1983. Revised Columbian white-tailed deer recovery plan. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Department of the Interior, Portland, Oregon. 86 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2010. Lewis and Clark National Wildlife Refuge and Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the Columbian White-tailed Deer Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Willapa National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Ilwaco, WA. 505 pp.

Note: This Finding of No Significant Impact and supporting references are on file at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Julia Butler Hansen Refuge for the Columbian White-tailed Deer, 46 Steamboat Slough Road, Cathlamet, WA 98612 (phone 360-795-3915) and on the Refuge's website at https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Julia_Butler_Hansen/. These documents are available to the public and can also be found on the internet and the EA and FONSI will be posted on BPA's project website at www.bpa.gov/goto/CWTDtranslocation.