



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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Portland, Oregon 97232-4181



In Reply Refer to:
FWS/IR9/12/MBHP

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Decision to Issue an Eagle Take Permit to Portland General Electric
for the Biglow Canyon Wind Project
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Portland, OR
May 2020

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 U.S.C 4321 et seq.), the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (hereafter, Service) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), tiered to the Service's Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS; USFWS 2016) for the Eagle Rule Revision issued in December 2016. This EA was written because the Service needs to make a decision on an eagle incidental take permit application (pursuant to 50 CFR 22.26), submitted by Portland General Electric (PGE), for the take (i.e. incidental killing) of golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) at the Biglow Canyon Wind Facility (Biglow Canyon or Project) in Sherman County, Oregon. The decision by the Service to issue a permit is a federal action.

Should the Service decide to issue a permit under one of the Action Alternatives, we need to ensure that our decision to issue the permit meets the Service's preservation standard for eagles; is otherwise consistent with the Eagle Act (16 United States Code [U.S.C.] 668-668d) and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 22.26); is consistent with general permit issuance criteria (50 CFR Part 13); and is consistent with our legal authorities, ensuring the incidental take permit, if issued, and implementation of the permit conditions would further long-term conservation of bald and golden eagles.

The EA considered three alternatives:

- Alternative 1, deny the permit (the No Action Alternative);
- Alternative 2, issue a 30-year eagle take permit based on their permit application and with negotiated conditions (our Preferred Alternative);
- Alternative 3, issue a 5-year eagle take permit to the applicant.

Other alternatives were considered but rejected as not meeting our purpose and need as described in Section 3.3.4 of the EA.

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COLUMBIA-PACIFIC NORTHWEST

IDAHO, MONTANA*, OREGON*, WASHINGTON

*PARTIAL

INTERIOR REGION 12
PACIFIC ISLANDS

AMERICAN SAMOA, GUAM, HAWAII, NORTHERN
MARIANA ISLANDS

BACKGROUND

PGE submitted an application for a 30-year Eagle Take Permit in 2015, requesting authorization under the Eagle Act of non-purposeful or "incidental" take of bald eagles and golden eagles from Project operation. The original Biglow Canyon Wind Farm was proposed under Orion Sherman County Wind Farm LLC (a wholly owned subsidiary of Orion Energy LLC) and then purchased by PGE in November 2006. Construction of Phase I of the project began in April 2007, with operations commencing December 21, 2007. Phase II construction began in August 2008, with operations commencing on August 17, 2009. Phase III construction began in August 2009, with operations commencing on August 20, 2010. The project consists of 217 turbines across all three phases and is described in greater detail in the Eagle Conservation Plan (Appendix A in the EA), which is the foundation of the permit application.

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT PRACTICES PROPOSED UNDER THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Compensatory Mitigation Measures

PGE will be required to provide compensatory mitigation to offset predicted take of golden eagles at a ratio of 1.2:1. This offset will be achieved by retrofitting high-risk electrical distribution poles. The number of poles that will be retrofitted or rebuilt is derived using our Resource Equivalency Analysis (REA), which is based on the predicted number of annual eagle fatalities (Appendix C in the EA) and published values for how many eagles are killed at high-risk power poles. When running the REAs used to determine the range of required compensatory mitigation for this Project, we assumed that power pole retrofits would be effective at preventing eagle deaths for 10 or 30 years, depending on the longevity of the retrofit. We also assumed that the retrofits needed to offset the first five years of predicted take would be completed before Jan 31, 2022.

PGE's compensatory mitigation commitment under the Preferred Alternative is summarized in Table 1.

	Golden Eagle	Bald Eagle
Predicted take for 30-year permit term (Annual)	1.28	0.64
Take that needs to be offset ¹ (Annual rate)	0.49	0
Number of poles to be retrofitted (based on longevity of pole retrofit effectiveness of 30 years / 10 years)	172 / 555	N/A
¹ Compensatory Mitigation is only required for Golden Eagle take estimated at the 76 turbines built after the publication of the 2009 rule (Phase 3) at the Biglow Canyon Wind Project.		

PGE will retrofit high risk poles to meet their compensatory mitigation requirement. As described in the EA, high risk poles will be identified by selecting circuits for retrofitting based on the presence of golden eagles and golden eagle habitat and by selecting individual poles based on a risk index as described in Dwyer *et al.* (2014), which considers the equipment on, and configuration of the poles in question. To count as compensatory mitigation, the power poles to be retrofitted must be in addition to whatever the power company already had plans to complete; that is, poles retrofitted under this compensatory mitigation plan must be an entirely new set of poles, not already scheduled for retrofitting or replacement by the power company in the foreseeable future. Additionally, the permittee has agreed to prepare and submit a cultural resource survey report for the power poles they select for retrofitting. The Service will evaluate this information and consult with the interested Tribes and the State Historic Preservation Officer at that time as appropriate.

As part of its annual report, PGE will provide an accounting of the poles retrofitted in the previous year, including photos to ensure retrofits were completed correctly. Compensatory mitigation outlined in Table 1 will be implemented by January 31, 2022 to offset take over the first five years of the permit tenure, as described above. The Service will have periodic administrative permit reviews at intervals not greater than every 5 years. Each review will include, among other things, a re-evaluation of authorized eagle take at the Project site, a calculation of a new required compensatory mitigation amount (considering any excess or shortage of compensatory mitigation provided during previous administrative periods), the effectiveness of adaptive management measures implemented, the status and trends of eagle populations, and the continued accuracy of the potential effects analyzed in the EA and PEIS.

PGE may request approval by the Service to offset predicted take through another compensatory mitigation method. The permittee may request the amendment by submitting a full written justification and supporting information (see Section 3.3.2.3 in the EA).

Fatality Monitoring

PGE will be required to conduct a fatality monitoring program that achieves a minimum site-wide g-value (probability of detection) of 0.30 over every 5-year review period throughout the permit tenure, as described in the EA. This monitoring program will include formalized eagle remains searches, as well as searcher efficiency and carcass persistence trials.

In all of the 30 permit years, PGE will be required to perform some level of eagle remains searches, but will not be required to conduct formal searches in all years. During years when formal fatality monitoring is not conducted, PGE will use trained Project staff in identifying and reporting discoveries of eagle remains during routine maintenance activities. Thus, in all 30 permit years, PGE will be performing some level of eagle remains searches and monitoring. Searcher efficiency trials will be conducted for one full year during each 5-year review period for each unique carcass search method employed, stratified by each of four seasons, and carcass persistence trials will be conducted for one full year during each 5-year review period, stratified by each of four seasons. More rigorous fatality monitoring (Enhanced Fatality Monitoring) may be warranted, if triggered by Adaptive Management (as described in the EA).

Additionally, at least one year of searches for eagle remains and all bias trials will be conducted in each 5-year administrative permit period by a qualified, independent third party. This third party will be required to provide all data from monitoring efforts, including an annual summary report, directly to the Migratory Bird Permit Office prior to, or at the same time as, providing it to the permittee.

Adaptive Management

PGE will be required to implement the adaptive management plan described in the EA. This plan, coupled with post-construction fatality monitoring, will help ensure that authorized take is not exceeded during the permit term. If observed take at the project reaches predetermined levels that would cause the Service to be concerned, an additional conservation measure will be implemented at the project with the goal of reducing take rates.

Reporting

Take Reports

PGE must report all eagle fatalities to the Migratory Bird Permit Office via email, within 48 hours of discovery, whether observed during post-construction fatality monitoring or incidentally by Project personnel. Reports of eagle fatalities must be documented using a standardized form and include the date of discovery, the species and estimated age of the eagle, the location, the suspected cause and date/time of death or injury, and any other pertinent details (e.g., turbine location, wind conditions, etc.).

Annual Reports

PGE must submit written reports each year during the 30-year permit term. Reports will be submitted to us by January 31 of each year. A summary of some of the key components of each annual report is provided below.

- Observed incidents of eagle take and how each was discovered.
- Disposition of eagle remains (alive/dead), location, species, sex, age, and dates of each observed fatality.
- Maps or graphical representations illustrating the geographic distribution and location of all observed fatalities (relative to turbine locations).

EFFECTS AND FINDINGS

The three alternatives considered in the EA provide a reasonable range to assess differing potential environmental effects associated with issuance of an Eagle Permit. Alternative 1 does not achieve a net conservation benefit to eagles whereas the other alternatives do. Alternatives 2 and 3 have similar but slightly differing environmental effects. Both require fatality monitoring, adaptive management, and compensatory mitigation that meet our population management objective. However, Alternative 2 is our Preferred Alternative because the issuance of a 30-year permit is commensurate with the amount of time that risk of incidental take will be present on the landscape and provides for an increased quantity of guaranteed compensatory mitigation. Additionally, the applicant requested a 30-year permit and the Service finds no grounds to deny

this request (see Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 of the EA) and issue a 5-year permit instead (Alternative 3). As such, a 30-year permit may provide the greatest potential value, certainty, and adaptive capacity of the three alternatives. We have determined that it is more beneficial to eagles to permit the Project for thirty years.

Rigorous analyses of eagle population data and models in the PEIS allowed the Service to determine allowable take thresholds for both species. Using those national thresholds, we have determined that implementing the Preferred Alternative will not result in direct, indirect, or cumulative permitted take that exceeds the 1- and 5-percent thresholds of the Local Area Population (LAP, described in the EA and PEIS) for golden eagles. Further, we do not have evidence to suggest that unauthorized take is presently exceeding 10 percent of the LAP for golden eagles. For bald eagles, the Preferred Alternative will not result in direct or cumulative permitted take that exceeds the 5-percent thresholds of the LAP. In addition, we do not have evidence to suggest that unauthorized take is presently exceeding 10 percent of the LAP for bald eagles. Authorizing take at this facility is, therefore, compatible with the preservation of bald eagles and golden eagles.

Direct and indirect effects to other species of birds and bats are similar under all alternatives because the project is operational now and will continue so regardless of this permit decision. However, the intensity of mortality and injury impacts will likely be reduced under the Preferred Alternative due to the implementation of avoidance/minimization measures, monitoring, and compensatory mitigation for eagles. Adverse impacts to migratory birds and bats could be further reduced if conservation measures were implemented under the required adaptive management framework. Specifically, if adaptive management triggered the application of a monitoring and curtailment program for eagles, this action could also potentially reduce the potential for migratory bird and bat fatalities and injuries associated with collisions with turbine blades. Additionally, compensatory mitigation required under the Preferred Alternative to offset eagle take could benefit raptors and other birds with large wingspans by reducing the risk of electrocution elsewhere.

The Service must also find that, upon receipt of a complete application, the criteria in 50 CFR 13.21 "Issuance of Permits" are met, the issuance criteria are met under 50 CFR 22.26, and required determination are made in 50 CFR 22.26 (prior to 2016 revision). Based on the EA, the Service finds that the issuance of this permit under the Preferred Alternative meets all of the criteria required and required determinations of 50 CFR 22.26 and 50 CFR 13.21.

FINDINGS RELATED TO OTHER RESOURCES

The proposed action will not have significant impacts on public health or safety; natural resources and unique geographic, park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; national monuments; migratory birds; or other ecologically significant or critical areas. No known historic places have been identified in the area where the activity will be taking place, nor are the offsite pole retrofits required for mitigation expected to have the potential to affect cultural resources. Nonetheless, the permittee has agreed to prepare a cultural resources

assessment of the poles selected for retrofitting, and the Service will consult with interested tribes and State Historic Preservation Officer at that time as appropriate. The proposed action will not significantly impact structures or properties, and does not conflict with proposed or adopted local, regional, State, interstate, or Federal land use plans or policies, that may result in adverse environmental effects. The proposed action will not authorize the take of species listed or proposed under the Endangered Species Act. No designated Critical Habitat will be affected by the proposed action as it does not authorize a change in the habitat conditions for which such areas would be designated.

The proposed action is unlikely to result in significant cumulative effects given current knowledge. If future actions arise that might result in significant cumulative effects, they will be considered and taken into account for future eagle take permit analyses and during each 5-year review of the permit. Precedent already exists for permits of this nature, so this action does not represent a new precedent or decision in principle. The proposed action will not have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.

PUBLIC SCOPING AND TRIBAL CONSULTATION

The Draft EA (USFWS 2020) was made available to the public for a 30-day comment period, allowing the public opportunity to provide comments on the content and scope of the document. We received no comments during this 30-day comment period.

Additionally, twenty-four federally recognized Indian Tribes (as described in the EA) could have special interests that may be affected in the area surrounding the Project based on their proximity to the Project and previous communication. Letters were sent to these Tribes on 18 January 2017 to inform them about the Eagle Permit application and to provide them the opportunity to review the application and consult on the potential issuance of an Eagle Permit. We received no responses from the tribes requesting formal government-to-government consultation. Letters were also sent to these Tribes on 8 October 2019 and 3 March 2020, to inform them of the public comment period for the Draft EA. No responses were received.

DETERMINATION

The Service has selected the Preferred Alternative as described in the EA and will issue a 30-year Eagle Incidental Take permit (50 CFR 22.26) for the incidental take of bald eagles and golden eagles associated with the operation of the Biglow Canyon Wind Farm. We have found the application submitted for the permit under 50 CFR 22.26, and the conditions negotiated with the applicant, meet the issuance criteria.

We considered impacts to eagles and other resources from the Project at the eagle management unit and local area scales in this EA, incorporating the PEIS by reference. The eagle take that we predict will occur at this facility is conservative, within allowable thresholds, and for golden eagles, will be offset by PGE through mitigation approved by the Service. Additionally, under this alternative, PGE will be required to perform fatality monitoring and implement adaptive

management that reduces eagle mortalities further if take rates appear to be higher than expected, and to continue operational measures that avoid and minimize eagle mortality. Because of this, and considering the population analysis in the PEIS for both species, we conclude that any direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the action under the Preferred Alternative are not significant.

The Service has determined that issuance of a permit under 50 CFR 22.26 for the take of 39 golden eagles and 20 bald eagles over the 30-year duration of the permit does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the meaning of section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). As such, an EIS is not required.

PUBLIC NOTICE

An electronic copy of this FONSI has been posted on the Service's website:
<https://www.fws.gov/pacific/migratorybirds/library/wpanalyses.html>.

REFERENCES


Dwyer, J.F., R.E. Harness, K. Donohue. 2014. Predictive Model of Avian Electrocution Risk on Overhead Power Lines. *Conservation Biology* 28(1): 159-168.

USFWS 2016. Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Eagle Rule Revision. United States Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. 272pp.
<https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/management/FINAL-PEIS-Permits-to-Incidentally-Take-Eagles.pdf>

USFWS 2020. Draft Biglow Canyon Wind Farm Eagle Permit Environmental Assessment. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Migratory Birds and Habitat Program, Portland, Oregon.
https://www.fws.gov/pacific/migratorybirds/PDF/Biglow_docs/Biglow%20Canyon%20Draft%200EA.pdf

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Chief
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