

alternatives, other alternative sources of water supply will also be evaluated and compared to the use of Missouri River storage.

Scoping and agency meetings. Public concerns on issues, studies needed, alternatives to be examined, procedures and other related matters will be addressed during scoping. This process will be the key to preparing a concise EIS and clarifying the significant issues to be analyzed in depth. Public meetings are scheduled as follows:

August 20, 2012—Nebraska City, NE: Lied Lodge and Conference Center, 2700 Sylvan Road.

August 21, 2012—St. Joseph, MO: Stoney Creek Inn and Conference Center, 1201 North Woodbine Road.

August 22, 2012—St. Louis, MO: Marriott West, 660 Maryville Centre Drive.

August 23, 2012—Sioux City, IA: Holiday Inn, 701 Gordon Drive.

August 27, 2012—Pierre, SD: Best Western Ramkota, 920 W. Sioux Avenue.

August 28, 2012—Bismarck, ND: Best Western Doublewood Inn and Conference Center, 1400 E Interchange Avenue.

August 29, 2012—Glasgow, MT: Fort Peck Visitor Center, Highway 24 South 17 miles to Fort Peck.

Dated: July 11, 2012.

Gwyn Jarrett,
Project Manager.

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Department of the Army; Corps of Engineers

Intent To Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement To Reduce Avian Predation on Juvenile Salmonids Through Management of Double-Crested Cormorants in the Columbia River Estuary

AGENCY: Department of the Army, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Defense.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District (Corps), intends to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to reduce avian predation on juvenile salmonids through management of double-crested cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*; hereafter, cormorant used alone refers to double-crested cormorant) in the Columbia River Estuary (CRE). Recent increases in

the number of cormorants nesting in the CRE has led to concerns over their potential impact on the recovery of federally-listed threatened and endangered Columbia River basin salmonids (*Oncorhynchus* spp.; i.e., salmon and steelhead). In 2010 and 2011, the cormorant colony at East Sand Island (ESI) in the CRE consumed about 19.2 and 22.6 million out-migrating juvenile salmonids, which equates to about 18 percent of the entire out-migrating salmon for those years. A portion of the salmonids consumed are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Managing cormorants to reduce predation on salmonids would complement other recovery efforts to address the threats that caused these fish to be listed under the ESA and would contribute to the overall recovery of listed salmonids in the Columbia River basin.

DATES: The Corps expects to release the DEIS for public review and comment in the fall of 2013.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Sondra Ruckwardt, Project Manager, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Portland District, P.O. Box 2946, Portland, OR 97208, by phone at 503-808-4691 or by email at:

sondra.k.ruckwardt@usace.army.mil.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Corps will prepare a DEIS to reduce avian predation on juvenile salmonids through management of cormorants in the CRE.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers responsibilities for cormorant management are identified under Public Law 106-53, Section 582c “(1) NESTING AVIAN PREDATORS—In conjunction with the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of the Interior, and consistent with a management plan to be developed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Secretary [of the Army] shall carry out methods to reduce nesting populations of avian predators on dredge spoil islands in the Columbia River under the jurisdiction of the Secretary.”

The Corps is currently preparing a draft management plan that will include effective alternatives to reduce salmonid consumption by cormorants at ESI. The management plan is necessary to implement avian predation management actions provided for in the 2008 Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) Biological Opinion (BiOp) (NOAA Fisheries 2008), the Reasonable and Prudent Alternative included in the 2008 BiOp and the 2010 FCRPS Supplemental BiOp (NOAA Fisheries 2010) to facilitate achievement of adult

escapement goals identified for ESA-listed salmonids in the Columbia Basin.

The increase in consumption of juvenile salmonids by cormorants is the result of an unprecedented increase of cormorants on ESI where the number of breeding pairs increased by 1,400 percent between 1989 and 2007. Reducing cormorant predation in the CRE, in combination with other initiatives that aim to improve juvenile salmonid survival, is anticipated to increase population growth rates of ESA-listed salmonids in the Columbia River basin.

The Corps will evaluate alternatives for their ability to reduce cormorant predation on ESA-listed Columbia River salmonids in the CRE. The preliminary range of alternatives will include, but are not limited to reducing the ESI colony by 25 percent, by 50 percent and by 75 percent by a variety of methods. Some of these methods may include dissuasion techniques, habitat alterations and lethal removal. Also, per the National Environmental Policy Act regulations the Corps will also analyze a No Action alternative (status quo). Preliminary analyses of the benefits of reducing bird numbers with the preliminary action alternatives indicate increases in population growth rates for three of the thirteen ESA-listed salmonids by 0.5 to 1.5 percent. Any additional alternatives will be developed through public involvement and best available scientific information.

Scoping Process: a. The Corps invites affected Federal, State, local agencies, Native American tribes and other interested organizations and individuals to participate in the development of the DEIS. The Corps anticipates conducting public scoping meetings for the DEIS in late summer of 2012 although the exact date, time and location of these meeting have not been determined yet. Once meeting arrangements have been made, the Corps will publicize this information. The Corps will provide notice to the public of additional opportunities for public input on the EIS during review periods for the draft and final EIS.

b. Significant issues to be analyzed in the DEIS include, but are not limited to: avian predation of juvenile salmonids, management of the largest double-crested cormorant colony in the Western Region, potential impacts to fisheries outside the CRE, potential impacts to commercial and recreational fisheries and potential impacts to tribal fisheries.

c. The Corps will serve as the lead Federal agency in preparation of the DEIS. A decision will be made during the scoping process whether other

agencies and/or tribes will serve in an official role as cooperating agencies.

Dated: July 5, 2012.

John W. Eisenhauer,
Colonel, Corps of Engineers, District
Commander.

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Department of the Army, Corps of Engineers

Intent To Prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Panoche Valley Solar Farm in San Benito County, CA, Corps Permit Application Number SPN-2009- 00443S

AGENCY: Department of the Army, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, DoD.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, San Francisco District (Corps) received a Department of the Army permit application to construct a solar photovoltaic energy plant in San Benito County, CA. The original permit application was received in April 2010 and an updated application was received in August 2010. The application was submitted by Solargen Energy, Incorporated and has since been assumed by Panoche Valley Solar LLC (Applicant). The Corps, as the lead agency responsible for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), determined that the proposed project may result in significant impacts on the environment, and that the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a cooperating agency for this action. The Corps may invite other Federal, State, local agencies, and tribes to be cooperating agencies.

ADDRESSES: Comments may be submitted electronically or by U.S. Mail. Written comments should be addressed to: Ms. Katerina Galacatos, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, San Francisco District, Attn: Regulatory Division; 1455 Market Street, 16th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94103-1398. Comments may also be submitted electronically via email to:

spn.eis.panoche@usace.army.mil. Please refer to identification number SPN-2009-00443S in all correspondence.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: To obtain additional information about this EIS, the public scoping process, or to receive a copy of the draft EIS when it is issued, please contact Ms. Katerina

Galacatos by telephone: 415-503-6778; or electronic mail:

spn.eis.panoche@usace.army.mil.

Requests to be placed on the project mailing list may also be submitted by these means.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The applicant has submitted an application for a Department of Army permit pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act to construct and operate a 399-Megawatt^{AC} (MWAC) solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generating facility known as the Panoche Valley Solar Farm (the Project). The Project would be located on private lands in San Benito County, CA. The 4,885-acre (7.6-square-mile) project site is approximately three-quarters of a mile north of the intersection of Panoche Road and Little Panoche Road, approximately 30 miles south of Los Banos and 60 miles west of Fresno. The project site is bordered by rangeland to the north and south, by the Gabilan Range to the west, and by the Panoche Hills to the east. The site elevation ranges from approximately 1,250 feet above mean sea level near the southeast end of the project to approximately 1,400 feet above mean sea level near the west end. Panoche Creek and Las Aguilas Creek flow through the project site. In addition, there are several stock ponds and stream segments in the northern portion of the project site. During the past forty years the project site has been used for grazing. Previously, crop production occurred over much of the project site.

The proposed project would be constructed in five phases and would include a substation, on-site access roads, and buried electrical collection conduit. The construction of three of the road crossings would result in 427 cubic yards of fill into Panoche Creek and Las Aguilas Creek, jurisdictional waters of the U.S. Electricity generated from the project would be transmitted on-site to the state's electrical grid through two existing Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) transmission lines.

Approximately 2,203 acres would be permanently disturbed by on-site facilities, and an additional 100 acres would be temporarily disturbed during construction. The proposed project would include development of the following components: Installation of approximately 3 million to 4 million photovoltaic panels; photovoltaic module steel support structures; electrical inverters and transformers; an electrical substation with switchyard; buried electrical collection conduit; an operations and maintenance (O&M) building; a septic system and leach

field; a wastewater treatment facility and demineralization pond; on-site access roads; security fencing; and transmission support towers and line(s) to interconnect with the PG&E transmission lines that pass through the project site.

The EIS will include an evaluation of a reasonable range of alternatives. Currently, the following alternatives are expected to be analyzed in detail: The no action alternative (no permit issued), and the Applicant's proposed project (proposed action). In addition to the proposed action, the Corps may consider additional alternatives for potential detailed analysis.

Potentially significant issues to be analyzed in the EIS include, but are not limited to, impacts on biological resources (including threatened and endangered species), water resources (including wetlands), cultural resources, traffic and transportation, and air quality.

Other environmental review and consultation requirements for the proposed action include water quality certification pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act from the California Regional Water Quality Control Board; Section 7 consultation pursuant to the Endangered Species Act; and Section 106 consultation pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act.

Scoping and Public Comment: All interested members of the public, including native communities and federally recognized Native American Tribes; federal, state, and local agencies; interest groups; and interested individuals, are invited to participate in the scoping process for the preparation of this EIS. Written comments identifying environmental issues, concerns, and opportunities to be analyzed in the EIS will be accepted for 30 days following publication of this Notice of Intent in the **Federal Register**.

The Corps will hold two public scoping meetings for the EIS. Notice of these meetings will be provided in local news media and on the project Web site (<http://www.spn.usace.army.mil/regulatory/actionsofinterest.html>) at least 15 days prior to the date of the meeting. Members of the public and representatives of organizations and Federal, state, local, and tribal agencies are invited to attend. Interested parties may provide oral and written comments at the meetings.

Jane M. Hicks,
Chief, Regulatory Division, San Francisco
District.

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