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STUDY 6.0 FISH SAMPLING

The Fish Sampling Study Plan does not follow the standard format applied to other study plans proposed by the District. Instead, this study plan generally describes the District's intent to cooperate with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) in fish sampling efforts independent of Project relicensing and in accordance with a future schedule to be determined by NGPC.

1. BACKGROUND

The Project is located in Nance and Platte counties, where water is diverted from the Loup River and routed through the 35-mile-long Loup Power Canal, which empties into the Platte River near Columbus. The Project includes various hydraulic structures, two powerhouses, and two regulating reservoirs. Substantial fisheries have been established at the Project, and angling is a popular recreation activity at multiple locations. The District provides for public access and encourages recreational use of Project lands and waters.

On October 1, 1998, independent of any relicensing proceeding, NGPC and the District worked cooperatively to perform fish sampling in Lake North. NGPC also has approached the District on multiple occasions prior to, and independent of, Project relicensing concerning its desire to perform fish sampling in the Loup Power Canal.

2. STUDY PLAN COORDINATION

2.1 Early Coordination

As part of Project relicensing, a multi-agency Recreation/Land Use/Aesthetics Workgroup was established to discuss issues and identify potential studies related to Project fisheries. On July 17, 2008, the Recreation/Land Use/Aesthetics Workgroup held its initial conference call, and participants included representatives of the District; its consultant, HDR Engineering, Inc. (HDR); NGPC; and the National Park Service (NPS). During the conference call, NGPC stated that it would like to perform fish sampling in the Loup Power Canal to determine species composition, abundance, and length frequency. NGPC went on to state that in order to accomplish the desired fish sampling, special boat access may be required at multiple locations along the canal. The District stated that it would support NGPC's fish sampling effort and would be agreeable to further discussions concerning access accommodations. On July 24, 2008, at the Multi-Agency Study Needs Meeting, NGPC again expressed its desire to perform fish sampling in the Loup Power Canal and its need for associated boat access.

As a result of NGPC's expressed desire to perform fish sampling in conjunction with the Project relicensing process and schedule, the District proposed Study Plan 6.0, Fish Sampling, in the Pre-Application Document (PAD) that was submitted to FERC on October 16, 2008. With regard to the methodologies of Study Plan 6.0, Fish

Sampling, the PAD states that “NGPC will conduct sampling along representative sections of the canal. The District will provide assistance regarding access to the canal” (Loup Power District, 2008).

2.2 Recent Coordination

In late 2008 and early 2009, during several discussions between HDR and NGPC that occurred following PAD submittal, NGPC stated that it has limited staff and is uncertain of its ability to sample Project fisheries in accordance with the Project relicensing schedule.

3. FUTURE FISH SAMPLING ACTIVITIES

As NGPC’s sampling schedule is uncertain, the District proposes to facilitate NGPC-performed fish sampling at NGPC’s convenience and independent of Project relicensing. When NGPC is available to perform fish sampling, the District will accommodate an effort consistent with the *Standard Survey Guidelines for Sampling Lake Fishery Resources* (NGPC, 1985) and/or *Nebraska Fish Community Assessment and Analysis Protocol* (NGPC, 1997). It is anticipated that data collected during fish sampling would be incorporated into the NGPC-administered statewide fish sampling program, the results of which are annually released to the public so that anglers can compare lakes and determine trends at specific sites (NGPC, 2009).

Although NGPC is now uncertain as to its ability to perform the fish sampling study in association with the Project’s relicensing effort, the data collected during the creel survey (see Study Plan 9.0, Creel Survey) would parallel the data collected during a fish sampling study. Both studies would provide data regarding catch rates (including length and weight measurements) and the overall quality of Project fisheries. However, the creel survey would also provide direct views and opinions of anglers that use Project fisheries. As proposed in the Creel Survey Study Plan, the creel survey will be performed with the cooperation of NGPC and in accordance with standard NGPC methodologies. The findings of the creel survey will be fully accessible to NGPC and other interested parties and could be used by the District to better serve the public’s recreation needs.

4. REFERENCES

- Loup Power District. October 16, 2008. Loup River Hydroelectric Project. FERC Project No. 1256. Pre-Application Document. Vol 1.
- NGPC. 1985. *Standard Survey Guidelines for Sampling Lake Fishery Resources*. Fisheries Division. Lincoln, Nebraska.
- NGPC. 1997. *Nebraska Fish Community Assessment and Analysis Protocol*. Lincoln, Nebraska.
- NGPC. 2009. “Fish Sampling Program.” Retrieved on January 2, 2009. <http://www.ngpc.state.ne.us/fishing/programs/sampling/>.