

Mystic Lake Hydroelectric Project
Whitewater Resource Group
Conference Call – Review of Updated Whitewater Plan
September 18, 2014

All participated via conference line:

PPL Montana – Jon Jourdonnais	USFS
PPL Montana – Brent Mabbott	MFWP – Ken Frazer
PPL Montana – Andy Welch	MDEQ – Eric Urban
PPL Montana – Joe Bullis	DNRC – Joel Harris
American Lands – Nancy Johnson	Beartooth Paddlers – Burgess Norrgard
American Lands – Bruce Bugbee	Beartooth Paddlers – Ian McIntosh
REC Resources – Jeff Frost	American Whitewater – Kevin Colburn

The call began at 10:00 AM. Nancy Johnson confirmed those participating and the purpose of the call to review proposed changes and additions to the Mystic Lake Hydroelectric Project Whitewater Flow Plan (plan). Nancy stated that initial comments on the updated plan and proposed changes would be discussed today, with written comments due by September 30th. Nancy identified the two changes being proposed for the plan by PPL Montana: 1) deletion of a Friday trigger for a whitewater flow enhancement when streamflow on West Rosebud Creek is between 286 and 400 cfs, and 2) a notification strategy executed by the Beartooth Paddlers to inform the paddling community of pending flow enhancements as specified in the Protocol for West Rosebud Creek Whitewater Flow Enhancement (protocol) to increase paddler participation.

Jon Jourdonnais identified an additional modification to the plan that would change the filing of plan updates with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) from every 5 years to every 10 years. Jon clarified that annual consultation with the Mystic Whitewater Resource Group would still proceed as in the past, but an updated plan would only be filed for FERC review and approval every 10 years.

Ian McIntosh, Beartooth Paddlers, agreed with the proposed 10-year interval for filing plan updates, and questioned the rationale for dropping a Friday release trigger for stream flows of 286-400 cfs. Jon and Joe Bullis, Mystic operations staff, explained that over the past five years, few boaters have participated in flow enhancements with a Friday only trigger. They identified the company resources needed to execute these releases although few paddlers participated.

Ian questioned whether specific dates could be established for whitewater flow enhancements each year. Brent Mabbott explained the difficulty of predicting stream flow for West Rosebud Creek due to high variability and flashy conditions. Although considered initially, PPLM determined predicting dates for releases would not be feasible.

Ian noted a need for better predictability of pending releases and the difficulty of achieving it. Burgess Norrgard, Beartooth Paddlers, asked for clarification of protocol changes with deletion of this Friday trigger. Nancy explained that with removal of the Friday release trigger for stream flow of 286-400 cfs in West Rosebud Creek, Wednesday gauge readings would be used to inform everyone of planned releases. Nancy noted that Friday gauge readings would continue to potentially modify a planned release as specified in the protocol.

Burgess noted the difficulty of getting paddlers to a weekend whitewater release on West Rosebud Creek based solely on Friday notification. Burgess also explained that whitewater flows present in the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone sometimes provide an alternative boating opportunity for area paddlers.

Nancy asked for group concurrence on dropping a Friday release trigger for flow enhancements. Ian indicated his disappointment with potentially reducing the number of whitewater releases at the Mystic Project, but he would not disagree with deletion of the Friday trigger. Kevin Colburn, American Whitewater, stated his reluctance to see fewer releases but agreed that a Friday trigger did not produce many participating paddlers and could be dropped. Ken Frazer MFWP noted that releases did result in unnatural flow manipulation for West Rosebud Creek with little benefit from a Friday only trigger.

Nancy asked next for group discussion on a notification strategy for pending whitewater flow enhancements. Jon Jourdonnais indicated that specific details for a strategy were not needed in the updated plan. The intent was to ensure the Beartooth Paddlers and AW had a notification process in place. Kevin, Burgess and Ian explained the current methods for communicating with the paddling community, which include postings on Facebook, AW broadcast emails, posts on a bulletin board for the paddling community in Cody WY and other methods. Burgess noted that changing technology would make it difficult to commit to a specific method for communication in the future, but that the Beartooth Paddlers were committed to future notifications for pending releases on West Rosebud Creek.

Nancy indicated that based on group discussion, the three proposed changes to the plan would be carried forward: 1) deletion of a Friday trigger for stream flow between 286 and 400 cfs on West Rosebud Creek, 2) continued notification from the Beartooth Paddlers to the boating community of planned flow enhancements, and 3) a 10-year interval for filing an updated whitewater flow plan with FERC.

Jon asked whether agency review of an updated plan with these changes could be expedited. With no USFS representative present for the call, the group agreed to accept comments on the proposed changes until September 30th. Agency review of an updated plan with these changes could be expedited. Jon indicated PPLM would request regulatory approvals of the updated plan from the USFS, MDEQ and MFWP and a consulting approval from American Whitewater.

With no further comments or discussion, the call adjourned at 10:40 AM.