

MYSTIC HYDROELECTRIC FACILITY RELICENSING PROJECT

Recreation, Land Use and Aesthetics Resource Group

Final Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: January 20, 2004
Meeting Location: EconoLodge, Livingston, Montana

Note from Jon Jourdonnais: The summary discussions presented below are a work in progress and do not reflect formal decisions made by PPLM or any agency or public group.

In attendance:

PPL Montana – Jon Jourdonnais
APLE Co. – Nancy Johnson, Jeff Frost, Bruce Bugbee
Custer National Forest– Jeff Gildehaus
American Whitewater Affiliate – Ian McIntosh

Attending via conference call:

American Whitewater (AW) – John Gangemi
Forest Service Regional Hydropower Team– Gerrish Willis
Beartooth Paddlers Society – Scott Gratton

Nancy Johnson facilitated the meeting.

Review of Agenda

Nancy reviewed the Mystic Resource Group (RG) agenda as sent out to participants. Per a request from representatives of whitewater groups, the agenda was revised to move discussion of whitewater use on West Rosebud Creek to the morning.

I. Whitewater resources on West Rosebud Creek. The group identified and discussed the following questions regarding whitewater resources on West Rosebud Creek.

Question: How does the re-regulating dam at West Rosebud Lake affect flows in West Rosebud Creek? What are flows in ‘real-time’ out of West Rosebud Lake?

- Locations of existing gauges on West Rosebud Creek were noted. A USGS ‘real-time’ gauge is located upstream of the re-reg dam at the weir below the powerhouse. A second staff gauge is located at the bridge at Pine Grove Campground.
- AW affiliates noted that conflicting readings on these gauges is a problem for identifying optimum floating conditions. They also noted that the real-time gauge reports water entering West Rosebud Lake and not water flowing below the re-reg dam. As such, the real-time gauge has little value to them.
- Jon Jourdonnais noted that the fisheries resource group and PPLM would be looking at locating a ‘real-time’ gauge below the re-reg dam.

Question: What is an optimum location for an additional real-time gauge on West Rosebud Creek?

Possible locations for a gauge should be considered by USGS, PPLM Operations, whitewater groups, fisheries, and others.

Question: What are the optimum flows for whitewater use on West Rosebud Creek – when is the opportunity there for a good-quality whitewater trip?

- Ian and Scott noted that West Rosebud Creek has good whitewater runs in July and early August. Floaters would benefit from knowing the correlation between USGS gauge information (real-time) and whitewater conditions on the creek.
- John Gangemi noted that AW could gather information to help determine optimum flows based on queries of whitewater floaters. Existing information on stream hydrology can be compared with descriptions of actual floating conditions from journal notes to help document a minimum acceptable flow and an optimum range of flows.
- Jon Jourdonnais noted that information is available now for outflows from West Rosebud Lake that could be correlated with evaluations of whitewater conditions.
- Ian and Scott noted the benefit of being able to predict the quality of runs based on known outflows from West Rosebud Lake.
- Jon Jourdonnais noted that with filling of Mystic Lake (target of July 1), knowing the spill rate would help predict the quality of runs.

Question: Does a change in operations on a daily basis have any effect on whitewater flows?

- Jon Jourdonnais stated that operation of the re-reg dam has a goal of attenuating flow changes below West Rosebud Lake. He will look at fine -tuning outflow data for West Rosebud Lake for whitewater correlation.
- Ian and Scott questioned whether runs are possible on West Rosebud Creek through the second week of August.

The group discussed further steps for studying whitewater resources and use:

- John Gangemi said that a facilitated flow study provides a better analysis of whitewater conditions relative to flows than comparing journal entries with flows. AW can help on a facilitated study with recruitment of floaters.
- Jeff Frost questioned whether a facilitated flow study and its ramping rates could affect other resources such as fisheries and irrigators.
- John Gangemi said the best guess on a range of flows to be studied is currently 200 cfs minimum and 600/700 cfs maximum.

The group concluded the discussion on whitewater resources by identifying the following items for further action:

1. John Gangemi (AW) will provide dates of whitewater floats on West Rosebud Creek that were noted in diaries to PPLM.
2. PPLM will provide information on stream hydrology (stream flows) to AW for the specified float dates.
3. PPLM will look at the possibility of installing a real-time stream flow gauge below West Rosebud Lake.
4. Jeff Frost will identify steps needed to facilitate a controlled whitewater study in 2005.
5. John Gangemi (AW) will collect information this year (2004) to help determine the need for a controlled whitewater study.
6. AW will work with PPLM to develop a floater survey to collect evaluations of whitewater conditions that can be compared to documented flows in 2004.

7. PPLM will determine whether the floater survey could be made available on the Mystic Project website, with survey responses submitted electronically.

The discussion on whitewater resources ended at 11:30. The afternoon discussion covered the following topics. PPLM, APLE staff, and Forest Service staff were in attendance.

II. Resource goals for the Mystic Project area: Nancy reviewed the Forest management goals for Management Areas F, H, and I that surround the Mystic project.

- A. Management Area I is the Absaroka-Beartooth (A-B) Wilderness.
 - Jeff Gildehaus noted that the uppermost part of Mystic Lake is located in the A-B Wilderness and is managed as wilderness. This part of the lake is not inundated most of the time.
 - Gerrish Willis stated the importance of describing resource-specific management goals for the A-B wilderness in the PAD and any direct or indirect effects on wilderness resulting from project operation. Gerrish noted potential effects such as aesthetic impacts resulting from lake drawdown or effects on wildlife habitat or aquatic habitat from project operation.
 - Nancy identified a VQO for the A-B Wilderness of Preservation.
- B. Management Area H surrounds Mystic Lake and part of trail corridor.
 - Preserve wilderness characteristics for possible future designation as wilderness
 - Closed to motorized use except those uses authorized under special use permit including use of boat, helicopter, and chainsaws for project operation
- C. Management Area F covers remaining NFS lands in the West Rosebud drainage.
 - Provides a spectrum of recreation opportunities in and around developed sites and access corridors to the National Forest.
 - Aesthetics – proposed projects evaluated for VQO compatibility. Jeff G clarified that selection of a Retention VQO or Partial Retention VQO for project implementation is done on a case-by-case evaluation of the project, and that public comment is used to guide VQO selection and implementation.
 - Grazing permits in West Rosebud drainage. Permits are short-term and rotational, and are located from one mile north of Emerald Lake out to Forest boundary
 - Boating on Emerald and West Rosebud Lakes – Nancy will contact FWP regarding possible boating regulations on Emerald Lake and West Rosebud Lake.
 - Jeff G noted that campground capacity at Emerald Lake and Pine Grove would be maintained at current levels, with no planned expansion but with reconstruction/heavy maintenance planned beyond 2008.
- D. The group discussed preparation of a map or exhibit showing management areas for the upper West Rosebud drainage. APLE staff would work with Custer NF staff to complete this.

III. Review of existing recreation baseline information

- A. The group reviewed existing recreation facilities in the upper West Rosebud drainage, design capacity of campgrounds and parking areas and fishing access sites along Emerald Lake and West Rosebud Lake and at trailhead facilities.
- B. The group reviewed utilization rates for recreation facilities.
 - Jeff G passed out campground utilization rates for Pine Grove and Emerald Lake for 2001, 2002 and 2003. Jeff G noted that utilization rates are in a steady state, with the

Emerald Lake CG rate higher than that for Pine Grove. Emerald Lake CG averages 23 percent occupancy on weekdays and 71 percent occupancy on weekends. Pine Grove CG averages 8 percent occupancy on weekdays and 40 percent occupancy on weekends.

- Jeff G distributed reports from wilderness rangers and trail crews for 2003 and 2002.
- C. The group discussed management goals for the Mystic Lake trail and wilderness area, and current use of the Mystic Lake trail and area surrounding Mystic Lake. The group discussed what amount of use is appropriate for these goals.
- Jeff G noted the over-use of shoreline at the upper end of Mystic Lake and the need to rehab over-used campsites. Overuse is gauged by evaluating the impact to the resource.
 - The group discussed the degree to which day use of Mystic Lake could trigger the need for campground expansion, and how costs could be shared between the Custer NF and PPL Montana. Bruce B noted a shared responsibility for management of recreation facilities in the upper drainage.
 - Jeff G listed possible options for managing increasing wilderness use: a permit system for overnight use, increased patrols and enforcement presence, and aggressive rehab of over-used campsites on the lake.

IV. Potential PM&E measures for Mystic Project resources

- The group discussed possible PM&E measures that could be developed to help address project-related impacts. Options included continuation of recreation visitor surveys on a specified interval, a PPLM contribution to O&M, a PPLM contribution to improved recreation facilities, use of I&E (information and education) for recreation visitors, re-directing visitors to adjacent sites and drainages at peak use times, improving management of existing facilities, possible use of MCC crews (Montana Conservation Corps) to assist with site maintenance or rehab, and others.
- The need for adaptive management of resources within Forest Service planning timeframes was discussed. Jeff G noted the planning timeframe and cycle of 4 years for capital improvement projects, and that Forest Plan revision would likely be completed in 2008 or 2009.
- Jeff G to provide group with list of capital improvement projects planned for 2005 through 2008, and list of annual O&M expenses for recreation facilities in the upper West Rosebud drainage.

V. Next meeting dates and agenda for Resource Group

- Conference call on **Wednesday, February 18th at 9:30 AM** to discuss recreation measures specified in the 1970 MOU between Custer NF and Montana Power Company, and any remaining questions on resource baseline information.
- Next meeting: **Monday, March 15th** either via conference call or group meeting. To be determined in February during the conference call or via email. Location to be determined. Agenda – 2004 and 2005 study needs; continue discussion on PM&E options.