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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Consolidated Water Power) Project No. 2590-008

ORDER MODIFYING AND APPROVING PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE MONITORING PLAN

JUL 24 1997

On December 20, 1996, the Consolidated Water Power Company (CWP), Licensee for the Wisconsin River Division Project filed a Purple Loosestrife Monitoring Plan, pursuant to license Article 407 for the Wisconsin River Division Project issued July 18, 1996. 1/ The Wisconsin River Division Project is located on the Wisconsin River in Portage County, Wisconsin.

BACKGROUND

Article 407 requires the Licensee to develop a plan, to monitor purple loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria) in project waters in order to protect wetlands.

CWP's Plan proposes monitoring for purple loosestrife every two years (biennially), using the data collected during relicense as baseline information. Plant populations will then be tracked on a map based on three different criteria for density. CWP proposes to conduct the initial survey by August 15, 1997, when the plants are in bloom then file their final report with the Commission by October 31, 1997. CWP proposes the first follow-up survey to be in 1999 with all subsequent biennial filings filed by October 31 of each monitoring year. CWP is currently cooperating with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) in releasing insects for biocontrol of a colony of purple loosestrife in the Stevens Point Flowage. As the population base of the insect increases, and this biocontrol approach to purple loosestrife is demonstrated to be effective, CWP will work with WDNR in introducing insects to other dense colonies on their flowages.

AGENCY COMMENTS AND LICENSEE'S RESPONSES

By letters dated December 3, 1996, and December 6, 1996, the WDNR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) respectively, recommend that the Plan include annual plant monitoring instead of biennial monitoring as proposed by CWP, and biennial reporting. WDNR recommends that all small stands (1-5 plants) should be eradicated while monitoring by immediately pulling as much of the root system up as possible. FWS also recommends that during annual surveys CWP dig-out of the river-bed all small colonies and the roots to help control the spread of this plant.

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In addition, FWS recommends that purple loosestrife pamphlets be available at each public access area to increase public awareness of the purple loosestrife problem. FWS suggests using WDNR's pamphlet "PUBL-WM-250-95" (entitled: "Purple Loosestrife, An Attractive but Deadly threat to Wisconsin's Wetlands and Waterways"). FWS recommends this pamphlet because it contains a picture, and information on purple loosestrife identification and on the prevention of further spread of this plant species.

In response to the agencies, by letter dated December 11, 1996, CWP disagrees with the agencies' recommendations. First, CWP disagrees with monitoring on an annual basis. CWP says land management personnel routinely travel around the project during the conduct of other activities and will casually observe new concentrations of purple loosestrife at that time. In addition to these casual observations, CWP says biennial monitoring is sufficient.

Secondly, CWP disagrees with FWS's recommendation to distribute WDNR's pamphlet on purple loosestrife saying that the pamphlets are likely to be littered by vandals, or subject to destruction from the weather. CWP says the recommended pamphlet is currently out-of-print and the state is not sure of when the pamphlet will become available again due to funding. CWP compromises by proposing to distribute a shorter "Fact Sheet", which is currently available to the public, along with a copy of a project map only upon request and not at all access points as FWS recommends.

Thirdly, CWP disagrees with FWS's and WDNR's request to remove small colonies of purple loosestrife. CWP states that this removal is beyond the scope of the intention of this monitoring plan.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding monitoring frequency, staff agrees with the agencies. Annual monitoring for invasive species is routine and expected because purple loosestrife produces an abundance of seeds annually which is the main way in which this plant prolifically spreads through wetlands. Annual monitoring offers greater opportunity in preventing the spread of purple loosestrife than does biennial monitoring. Infrequent casual observations may result in overlooking isolated and or new purple loosestrife strands.

Staff agrees with CWP regarding issuing a Fact Sheet instead of WDNR's pamphlet. The Fact Sheet will provide useful information which will increase public awareness to the problem of purple loosestrife and wetlands. Likewise, we agree with CWP that the Fact Sheets only needs to be supplied as requested to avoid unnecessary litter.

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Staff disagrees with CWP's statement on removing small stands of purple loosestrife. This monitoring plan was determined to be needed during the licensing process because of the potential prolific spread of this noxious plant out-competing natural wetland species. It is primarily for this reason that Article 407 requires CWP to cooperate with FWS and WDNR should the agencies deem it necessary to control purple loosestrife. If CWP were to wait until the existing purple loosestrife populations become invasive then control would become even more difficult. Removing small stands is a basic preventive measure to help offset the potential invasion and adverse effects of this noxious species. The Licensee is responsible for maintaining environmental resources and values of project lands and waters to include the project wetlands. To help maintain the quality of the existing wetlands the Licensee is expected to find, and, if necessary, remove purple loosestrife. Therefore, CWP should proactively remove small strands of purple loosestrife by their root whenever found along project waters.


The Purple Loosestrife Monitoring Plan satisfies the requirements of license Article 407. Implementation of this plan, with staff's recommended modifications, should adequately monitor the purple loosestrife populations in Wisconsin River Project waters. Therefore, this Plan, with our modifications, should be approved.

The Director orders:

(A) The Purple loosestrife Monitoring Plan filed by the Consolidated Water Power Company on December 20, 1996, pursuant to license Article 407 for the Wisconsin River Division Project, as modified by paragraph (B), is approved.

(B) The Licensee shall monitor purple loosestrife in project waters annually, starting August 1997, and file the annual monitoring results with the Commission by October 31 every other year. The Licensee shall remove small stands (1-5 plants) of purple loosestrife and as much of the root system as possible when visible during annual monitoring, as preventive maintenance of this noxious species.

(C) This order constitutes final agency action. Requests for rehearing by the Commission may be filed within 30 days of the date of this order, pursuant to 18 C.F.R. §385.713.


Kevin P. Madden
Acting Director
Office of Hydropower Licensing