

**FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION
Washington D.C. 20426**

Office of Energy Projects

Project No. 2301-040—Montana
Mystic Lake Hydroelectric Project
Northwestern Corporation

June 17, 2016

John Tabaracci, Corporate Counsel
Northwestern Corporation
208 North Montana Avenue, Suite 205
Helena, MT 59601

Subject: Fisheries Monitoring Six-Year Summary & Updated Fisheries Monitoring Plan

Dear Mr. Tabaracci:

This letter acknowledges your Fisheries Monitoring Six-Year Summary and updated Fisheries Monitoring Plan, filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (Commission) on May 12, 2016 for the Mystic Lake Hydroelectric Project, FERC No. 2301. Ordering paragraph (E) of the project license¹ requires you to monitor fish populations and aquatic habitat conditions to ensure that project operations do not adversely impact aquatic resources. Monitoring must occur in Mystic Lake and in West Rosebud Creek between Mystic and Emerald lakes. You are required to report your monitoring results to the Commission every six years, beginning in 2016.

Your filing reports your monitoring results from 2010 through 2015, and provides a summary of your intended monitoring for 2016 through 2021. In your 2012 Mystic Lake survey, you observed a new species, the Utah chub (*Gila atraria*), which you do not believe will impact trout populations due to limited chub spawning habitat in the lake. You also report that the age-growth relationships you calculated each year demonstrated stable, reproducing trout populations.

In West Rosebud Creek, you report consistent numbers of rainbow trout between sampling years; however, you noted a trend toward smaller individual fish. You report that water temperatures in Rosebud Creek are appropriate for the target salmonid species,

¹ Order Issuing New License (121 FERC ¶ 62,198), issued December 17, 2007.

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so you theorize that food availability may be a limiting factor. Also, you elected to conduct four extra redd counts over the six-year period (six spring and four fall) as opposed to the six times (three spring and three fall) proposed in your August 2, 2010 update of the plan to better assess reproductive efforts.

For 2016 through 2021, you intend to conduct similar monitoring as in 2010 through 2015. Your plan update includes a schedule for your various monitoring efforts (i.e. redd counts, water temperature sampling) by year and by location. Pursuant to your updated plan, you will report your results to the Commission by December 31, 2022.

During the past six years of monitoring, you provided annual reports to the Water Quality Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Pursuant to your proposed plan update, you will continue to provide annual reports to the TAC to continue to allow for adaptive management. The TAC approved your Fisheries Monitoring Six-Year Summary and updated Fisheries Monitoring Plan at the January 2016 TAC meeting.

Review of your filing indicates that it fulfills the requirements of the ordering paragraph (E). We look forward to your next report and updated six-year plan, **due December 31, 2022**.

Thank you for your cooperation. If you have any questions concerning this letter please contact me at (202) 502-8038 or alicia.burtner@ferc.gov.

Sincerely,

Alicia Burtner
Fish Biologist
Division of Hydropower Administration
and Compliance

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