

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 68 FERC ¶ 62, 244
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Montana Power Company

Project No. 1869-019
Montana

ORDER APPROVING REVISED REPORT ON RECREATION RESOURCES
(ISSUED SEPTEMBER 14, 1994)

Thompson
resources
Relocation
On March 28, 1994, Montana Power Company, licensee for the Falls Project, FERC No. 1869, filed a revised report on recreation pursuant to amended Article 404 of the Order Approving Access Road Plan and Amending License, issued by the Commission on May 21, 1993.1

recreational
development
documentation of
Thompson
Sanders
National
Amended Article 404 requires the licensee to file, for Commission approval, a revised report on recreation resources that details development(s) to be completed in lieu of the previous Island Park proposal. Article 404 further requires the filing to include consultation with the United States Forest Service (FS), the City of Falls, the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP), County, the Sanders County Economic Development Corporation, and the Park Service.

The Proposal

three
Main dam
The
The material filed on March 28, 1994, states that the consensus of public meetings regarding the development of the island, between the and the Dry Channel dam, was to emphasize the island's natural setting.

revised report on recreation resources proposes to construct foot trails and walkways on the island in place of the access road, eliminating public motorized travel on the island. The revised recreation report further proposes parking areas near the island's two bridges, with travel onto the island being by foot or bicycle. Provisions for recreators with disabilities are addressed. Handicapped users will have access to parking directly abutting the Gallatin Street Bridge, and on the island will have access to 1350 linear feet of concrete walkways (5 feet wide), a vault toilet, picnic area, and an overlook site with interpretive displays.

In developing the revised recreation plan there was also a consensus to contribute funds to the rehabilitation of the abandoned High Bridge. The licensee proposes a \$20,000 contribution toward the rehabilitation of the structure, but in

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the instance that the rehabilitation is not begun by December 31, 1998 (by the local governments), the licensee proposes to

1 See 63 FERC ¶ 62,185 (1993).

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allocate said funds to the development of the South Shore area. Rehabilitation of the High Bridge would provide additional access to the island and would also allow access to the south side of the Clark Fork River. Development of the South Shore area would further increase access to the south side of the river, and would consist of a designated parking area, picnic tables, and a restroom.

Agency Comments

The filed material includes comments from all agencies designated in amended Article 404. The FS supplied comments on design aesthetics that may further improve the quality of the plan, as well as a disagreement to the annual operations and maintenance costs designated in the report. The FS states a higher annual operations and maintenance cost for the island of development would be more appropriate, benches would improve the level of enjoyment at the overlook sites, and non-handicap parking areas near the Gallatin Street bridge should be more clearly identified. The MDFWP recommended the use of steel fencing, rather than wood fencing, around the overlook sites, as steel fencing is more vandal-resistant, durable, and cost-effective. MDFWP also recommended that interpretive signs for tree and plant species be installed on the island. No comments were supplied by the other agencies.

Discussion

The FS recommendations to include benches at the overlook sites and increase operating and maintenance costs for island development have been incorporated into the revised report on recreation resources and are reasonable. In addition, the report states that parking for the general public at the Gallatin Street bridge entrance will be identified by directional signs and located two blocks to the northeast of the Gallatin Street bridge.

With regard to interpretive signs, the revised report does not specify the exact material to be included on interpretive displays, but acknowledges the installation of approximately nine such displays on the island. The Commission staff finds that the specification of the type of information to be provided on the interpretive signs is unnecessary, as the interpretive material being presented could, and should, change over time. Therefore, interpretive material that references tree and plant information could be

implemented in the future.

fencing The comments supplied by the MDFWP regarding the use of steel are valid, but the choice by the licensee to use

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the wood instead of steel is also valid. The Commission staff agrees with licensee that the aesthetic/naturalistic qualities of wood may be more appropriate for the site, and further acknowledges that, for development purposes, wood will provide an equal level of safety when properly maintained. The licensee is responsible for selecting

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is wood materials that properly meet the structural, strength, and design requirements of the areas in which such fences are to be installed, and responsible for the proper maintenance of such fences.

involve In addition to the above, the Commission staff recognizes that implementation of the revised report on recreation resources will boundary. land-clearing and/or land-disturbing activities within the project activity An environmental assessment will not be required for the proposed construction, as the implementation of the revised report on recreation resources will involve a significantly less amount of land-disturbing Order on the island than the spoils and access road previously approved by the Amending License (Major) would have involved.²

island Because there are a number of cultural/historic resources on the the and within the project boundary the licensee, pursuant to Article 409 of Montana Thompson Falls Project license, is still required to consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer in the development of a cultural

resources
with the

management plan. On June 30, 1994, the licensee did file such a plan
Commission, but it is reminded that, also pursuant to Article 409,
construction of the facilities proposed in the revised recreation report
should not begin until such a time that the cultural resources plan is
approved by the Commission.

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After review of the revised report on recreation resources, the
Commission staff concludes that the island is a unique feature of the
Falls Project and minimal development of the island should make for a
enjoyable recreation experience. As such, the recreational development
proposed in lieu of the previously approved Island Park development is
appropriate for the area and should be approved.

The Director orders:

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Relocation

(A) The revised report on recreation resources filed on March
1994, pursuant to Article 404 of the Order Approving Access Road
Plan and Amending License issued on
May 21, 1993, is approved.

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

J. Mark Robinson
Director, Division of Project
Compliance and Administration

2 See 51 FERC § 62,089 (1990).



OHL/DPCA:PAKKALA:nm:9/9/94:PC:K01
cc: DPCA D2SI

