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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

River Falls Municipal Utilities) Project No. 10489-008

ORDER MODIFYING AND APPROVING OPERATION PROTOCOL

OCT 27 1997

On September 2, 1997, River Falls Municipal Utilities (licensee) filed an operation protocol plan to minimize downstream water level fluctuations at the River Falls Project located on the Kinnickinnic River in Pierce County, Wisconsin. The licensee was required to develop the plan, after consultation with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), to be implemented each time the turbine is removed from service and put back on-line for trashrack cleaning operations and other maintenance activities.

BACKGROUND

In 1995 the Commission received a report indicating that the licensee may not have operated the project in compliance with the run-of-river requirement of its license, ^{1/} specifically, during trashrack cleaning operations. In September 1995, the Commission's environmental contractor, with representatives of the WDNR, performed a technical inspection of the project. After review of the project's operating protocol, the Commission required the licensee to submit a plan ensuring that the project would be operated in a run-of-river mode at all times. In May 1996, the licensee developed several alternatives to reduce downstream flow fluctuations caused by cleaning the trashracks. The licensee consulted with the WDNR and received comments agreeing with structural changes, but the WDNR recommended an alternative procedure for installing the new facilities.

Upon reevaluation of the alternative with the proposed modifications, the licensee stated in a February 1997 filing that modifying the waste gate and installing a waste gate trashrack (the preferred alternative) would have a direct impact on sediment loading. The licensee requested additional time to review other alternatives.

In May 1997 the Commission proposed an on-site meeting between the licensee, the WDNR and other concerned parties to

^{1/} Order Issuing License, 44 FERC ¶ 62,298 (1988). Article 401 requires the licensee to operate the project in an instantaneous run-of-river mode for the protection of fish and wildlife resources.

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review project operations and discuss operational changes or modifications that would ensure compliance with article 401. The meeting was held on June 30, 1997 and was attended by representatives from the licensee, WDNR, Kinnickinnic River Land Trust and Trout Unlimited.

THE LICENSEE'S PROPOSED PLAN

In order to minimize downstream flow fluctuations, the licensee proposed to implement ramping procedures. The licensee stated that the gate would be ramped (in either direction) at 5 KW (3 cfs) increments. After cleaning the trashracks, the licensee proposed to place the unit on line at minimum output under all flow conditions and ramp up in 5 KW increments. Based on inflow, the time allotted for upramping or downramping is estimated to be 1-4 hours during high flow conditions and 10-24 hours during low flow conditions.

The licensee also proposed to reduce the number of times the trash racks are cleaned and to clean them only when the debris causes a reduction in generator output. The licensee proposed a weekly schedule and added that different flow conditions and seasons will effect the number of times the trashracks are cleaned. The licensee further proposed to operate the project with the reservoir level above the crest of the dam during the fall months when trashrack cleaning is needed more frequently, thereby passing floating leaves downstream. Additionally, the licensee proposed to shut down the unit when the leaf liter is extremely heavy and not to resume operation until it subsides.

Lastly, the licensee proposed to purchase continuous water level gaging and communications equipment to improve monitoring and recording of project operations. Upon receipt of the equipment, the licensee proposed to install it by the end of September 1997.

RESOURCE AGENCY COMMENTS

At the June 30 meeting, the licensee agreed to consult with the WDNR and develop a ramping plan. The licensee also agreed to a testing period and to make the data available for review. In July 1997, the licensee submitted a draft operating plan to the WDNR. The plan also included installation of gaging equipment. On August 8 the licensee and WDNR met to discuss the operating protocol and gaging plan. Based on discussions at the August 8 meeting, the licensee revised the draft plan. By letter dated August 15, 1997, the WDNR stated that they had no objections to the revised operating plan including the trash rack cleaning protocol and the increased level of the reservoir to pass leaves downstream, provided the reservoir level stays within the operating range.

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The WDNR recommended that the operating protocol be implemented for a one-year trial period through October 1, 1998. The WDNR suggested a monitoring frequency and schedule for submitting specific data. The WDNR also recommended meeting with the licensee quarterly to evaluate the performance of the operating protocol and any changes needed.

The WDNR stated that the temporary, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) streamflow gaging station, located below the project, is due to be removed around November 1, 1997. The WDNR added, there would be approximately 40 days of overlapping gaging data (between the licensee's and the USGS's provided the licensee installed the equipment on the schedule proposed) for comparison and calibration. The WDNR stated that if the gaging data is inconclusive (in terms of verifying compliance) alternative gaging strategies may be needed.

Lastly, the WDNR recommended that, following the one-year trial, the licensee should draft a report describing the results of the testing period. The WDNR suggested that they and other interested parties be provided the opportunity to review and comment on it, and file a final report with the Commission.

DISCUSSION

At the June 30 meeting, the parties reviewed the specific concerns of each group and discussed various alternatives for ensuring compliance with the license requirements. An agreement, in principle, was reached concerning modifications in project operations. The licensee's proposed operating plan is in fulfillment of that agreement.

The WDNR's recommendation for a trial period to assess the effectiveness of the new operating protocol and equipment appears reasonable and should be beneficial to improving project operations. If any of the quarterly meetings result in a substantial change to the approved operating protocol, the licensee should file a report, along with WDNR comments, concerning the proposed modification(s). Otherwise, a final report, filed with the Commission by December 31, 1998, with comment letters and any recommendations regarding the project's performance over the test period, would be sufficient to review the results of the new operating protocol.

The licensee's proposal incorporated the WDNR's comments and recommendations and should ensure compliance with article 401. The licensee's proposed operating protocol and installation of the monitoring equipment, as modified above, should minimize downstream flow fluctuations and should be approved.

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The Director orders:

(A) River Falls Municipal Utilities' (licensee) operating protocol, filed on September 2, 1997, for the River Falls Project located on the Kinnickinnic River in Pierce County, Wisconsin, as modified in paragraphs (B) and (C), is approved.

(B) The licensee shall file with the Commission any recommendations for modifying the operating protocol based on review of the data and quarterly meetings between the licensee and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

(C) If there are no significant changes in the operating protocol during the one-year trial period, then the licensee shall file, with the Commission by December 31, 1998, a final report containing any comment letters and recommendations regarding the project's performance during the trial period.

(D) 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 C.F.R. § 385.713.



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Acting Director
Office of Hydropower Licensing