



Natural Resources
Conservation Service

April 2, 2019

Montana State Office

To Whom it May Concern:

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This letter is an update on planning activities in the Lake Seventeen and Little Suction Creek Watersheds. Planning activities are being conducted by the Fort Belknap Indian Community (FBIC) in coordination with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and their contractor, Northern Engineering and Consulting, Inc. (NECI). The work is being funded under the NRCS-Watershed Flood Prevention Operations Program.

The NRCS requested your agency's assistance in preparing a Watershed Project Plan-Environmental Assessment (PLAN-EA) for enhancement of the Lake Seventeen Reservoir. A Stakeholders' Orientation Meeting was held on November 14, 2018, and a Public Scoping Meeting was held on March 14, 2019, at the Fort Belknap Reservation.

Three alternatives are currently under consideration: (1) rehabilitation of the Lake Seventeen Dam; (2) rehabilitation of the Lake Seventeen Dam and Little Suction Creek Diversion; and (3) no action, which assumes a dam and diversion breach.

Each alternative is aligned with benefits for fish and wildlife, irrigation, stock water, public recreation, and cultural activities. NECI is in the process of defining benefits and environmental and socio-economic impacts. They are working closely with the FBIC Council to eliminate from detailed study those ideas or enhancements which are not significant or feasible and including the reasoning for elimination in the administrative record.

NECI will complete the PLAN-EA by October 10, 2019. The planning schedule is as follows:

- April 24 - NECI will present the FBIC Council with a final set of alternatives and a comparative analysis of associated benefits and environmental and socio-economic impacts. The comparative analysis will provide a clear and objective basis for selecting a "preferred alternative."
- April 30 - The FBIC Council will select a "preferred alternative" and direct NECI to provide a detailed analysis of selected enhancements.
- May 30 - NECI will present the FBIC Council and NRCS with a preliminary DRAFT PLAN-EA.

NECI will work closely with NRCS on a hydrologic method to estimate annual watershed runoff to Lake Seventeen. Most of the project benefits will be tied to an estimation of water availability in Lake Seventeen on an average annual basis (and perhaps at the 80 percent level of occurrence for ag management uses). The estimation of watershed runoff and delivery to Lake Seventeen will largely drive decision-making and modifications in the final project design.

A cost-benefit analysis is imperative in taking action on the “preferred alternative.” NECI will refine the cost-benefit analysis after the Council selects the “preferred alternative.” NECI will include a discussion of unquantified environmental impacts, values, and amenities.

Planning documents are available on the NECI website at: <http://www.neciusa.com/>.

If you have questions or comments, please contact Jay Springer, NECI Project Manager:

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Watson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

TOM WATSON
State Conservationist

cc:

Andrew Werk, FBIC President, Fort Belknap, Montana
Lisa Gladstone, President, Northern Engineering and Consulting, Inc., Billings, Montana
Wally Gladstone, Vice President, Northern Engineering and Consulting, Inc., Billings, Montana
Jay Springer, Project Manager, Northern Engineering and Consulting, Inc, Havre, Montana
Kale Gullett, State Resource Conservationist, NRCS, Bozeman, Montana
Jeff Combs, Biologist, NRCS, Bozeman, Montana
Paul Smidansky, State Design Engineer, NRCS, Bozeman, Montana