

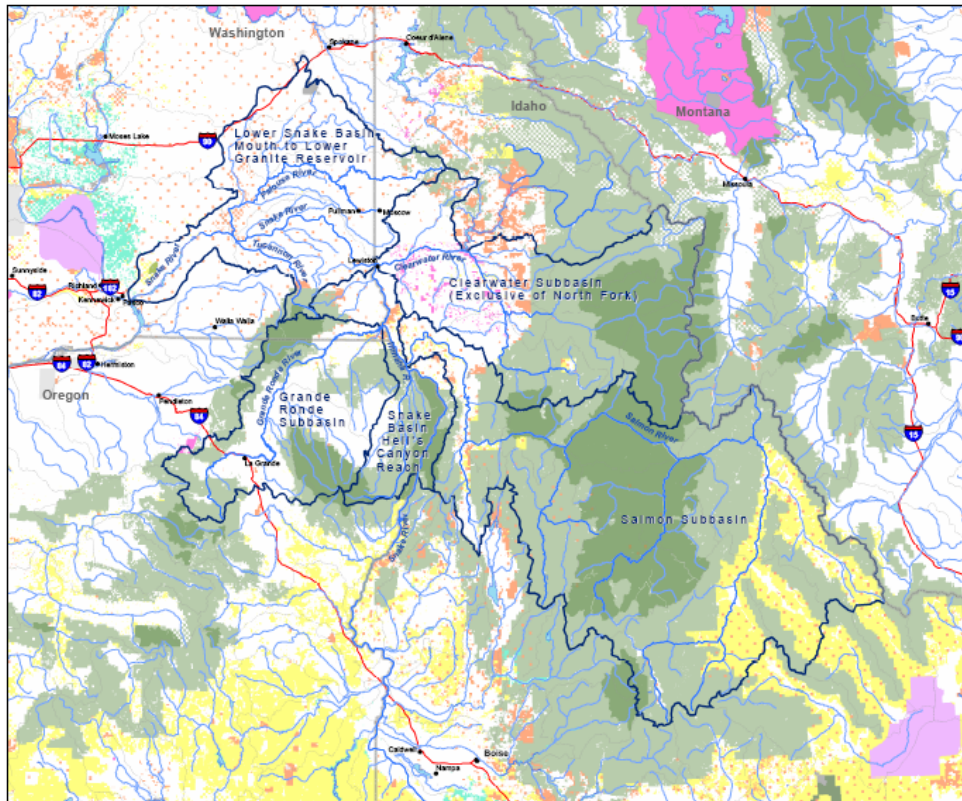


**US Army Corps
of Engineers**
Walla Walla District

Scoping Summary

Lower Snake River Programmatic Sediment Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement

August 2007



Introduction

The Walla Walla District Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a Programmatic Sediment Management Plan (PSMP/EIS) to address sediment management within the lower Snake River, including the four reservoirs managed by the Corps. The plan will identify and evaluate ways the Corps can manage sediment within these reservoirs, and examine sediment sources on a programmatic basis in the near-term, mid-term, and long-term. The study area considered includes the four lower Snake River reservoirs extending from the mouth of the Snake River upstream through the Hell's Canyon Reach of the Snake, and the Tucannon, Asotin, Palouse, Clearwater, Salmon, Imnaha, and Grande Ronde watersheds.

During the fall and winter of 2006-2007, the Corps held a series of technical workshops, public scoping meetings, and individual interviews throughout the affected region. The purpose of this report is to summarize information that was gathered during this public and government agency scoping process. The information gathered during this scoping process will assist in identifying issues to be considered in the development of the EIS.

The scoping process was divided into four components: 1) A preliminary scoping meeting held on September 26th, 2006 in Clarkston, Washington; 2) a series of pre-scoping stakeholder meetings and interviews with individuals, conducted from October 2006 through February 2007 at locations within sub-basins throughout the affected region; 3) public scoping open houses and meetings during February, 2007 at four cities within the region; and 4) written scoping comments.

Pre-Scoping Meeting for the Local Sediment Management Group (LSMG)

A preliminary scoping meeting was held in Clarkston, Washington. Invitees to this meeting included agencies or organizations that were participating members of the original lower Snake River Local Sediment Management Group (LSMG) or representatives of organizations who were identified to be an important contributor to the Corps' refocused sediment management approach. The purpose of this meeting was to provide an overview of the planning process, describe progress made to date, and begin efforts to re-establish the LSMG for the PSMP/EIS process.

The meeting consisted of presentations by Corps' and contractor staff on the history and project background; the purpose, objectives, and timeline of the PSMP and LSMG; and the project challenges. The presentations were followed by questions and a discussion on issues to be considered and data sources.

The participants noted that there are a number of data sources available, including recent aerial photography/remote sensing imagery and soil mapping. Participants said that it will be necessary to examine long-term data sets that are available from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), universities, and other organizations.

The following is a summary of the participants' identified issues and comments:

- Rather than develop all new information, there are a number of existing studies and efforts (e.g., subbasin plans) that provide good data and sediment-source evaluations. These studies can help identify “hot spots” and priorities for sediment reduction actions.
- It is necessary to stress that the PSMP is not another dredging project. This misperception among resource organizations could discourage participation.
- It was not clear how the Corps could assure implementation from other agencies.
- There were questions about the form of the final product. In addition to the EIS, will it include an action plan and funding for implementation of sediment reduction actions?
- There are “synergies” that are possible from this project – e.g., leveraging other efforts at sediment reduction.
- Consider breaking down the LSMG into smaller geographically-based subcommittees for more focused input and increased participation.

Pre-Scoping Stakeholder Meetings

A series of pre-scoping stakeholder meetings and interviews with individuals was conducted at various locations in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington. The purpose of this effort was to provide participants with an overview of the project, and to solicit advice and information from government agency or other organizations' staff on local, sub-basin-scale sediment issues, data sources, and evaluation methods.

The meetings consisted of a presentation by Corps' staff, followed by questions and a discussion on local data sources and identifying knowledgeable individuals for follow-up communication. In addition to the meetings, individuals representing key organizations were interviewed. A set of questions was provided to the participants to solicit additional information and contacts. This information request focused on identifying sources of data and other information on sediment sources and routing through the stream system; efforts to manage sediment production; gaps in implementation of sediment control actions; and a query about their ability to participate in the on-going planning effort.

Similar to the Clarkston pre-scoping meeting, the stakeholder meeting participants noted that there are a number of sediment data sources available, though nothing that would constitute a comprehensive sediment budget for any of the sub-basins. Sediment source reduction is a priority in all of the sub-basins. The participants commented that there is more information on the implementation of sediment control measures and less data on sediment sources, delivery, and routing through the stream system. Where there are data on sediment sources and patterns, it is usually confined to a sub-watershed or stream reach. The participants noted that there are numerous opportunities to leverage existing sediment-reduction programs through cooperative efforts and cost sharing.

The following is a summary of the participants' identified issues and comments:

- The USFS is employing a number of sediment models (e.g., Water Erosion Prediction - WEPP) and ongoing application and research throughout the region. For this reason, it will be important to understand these on-going efforts and possibly use these models or information that has been generated.
- There are a number of sediment related research studies that focus on particular subbasins (e.g., the Palouse).
- Government agencies, including the Conservation Districts and NRCS, and subbasin organizations, such as the Grande Ronde Model Watershed, have identified sediment source areas, particularly roads, and are actively implementing sediment control measures such as road closures and drainage improvements.
- Sediment reduction is a priority for most of the organizations, with most actions focused on a "holistic" approach, including addressing resource management (e.g., proper grazing practices) and upslope measures such as proper drainage structures.
- Many of the streams within the affected region have completed stream inventory information, which is a source of data on in-channel sedimentation.
- A number of participants noted that there are limited data sets that show the direct relationship between sediment reduction actions and reduced sedimentation in streams. Some participants commented that it would be helpful to have demonstration projects that show the relationship between land management measures and sediment control.

Public Scoping Meetings

Public scoping open houses and meetings were held at four locations in the region: Clarkston; Washington on February 15; Boise, Idaho on February 21; La Grande, Oregon on February 22; and Portland, Oregon on February 27. The scoping meetings consisted of an afternoon and an evening session. The afternoon session was an open house format, during which display boards of the project area and project issues were set up in the conference room and Corps personnel and consultants were available to discuss the project and answer questions informally. The evening session included an introduction and a presentation by Corps' staff, followed by opening of the floor for comments and questions from attendees.

The following is a summary of the participants' identified issues and comments:

- There are concerns about the possible relationship between dredged sediment deposition in the Lower Snake River and habitat/fisheries impacts in the shallow water areas, including water temperature increases.
- Participants commented that it is necessary to capture all of the benefits of sediment reduction and not just benefits (environmental and related to commercial interests) in the Lower Snake River. There is a need to understand the economic benefits of sediment reduction in tributary systems.
- There were a number of questions about the funding mechanism for implementation of the final plan.
- There are concerns that sediment deposition in the river channel is increasing the risk of flooding within Lewiston. Will the EIS cover flood risks from sediment deposition?
- Participants had a number of questions about sediment management (including costs) and deposition patterns within the Lower Snake, in particular related to the dams and the port facilities, and relative contributions of sediment from the tributaries (e.g., the Clearwater).
- There were questions about how the Corps will evaluate sediment budgets, including movement through the tributaries and the dam complex.
- Many of the participants acknowledged that successful implementation of a sediment plan will require unprecedented cooperation from land management agencies and other organizations.

Written Scoping Comments

The public and agencies were encouraged to submit written scoping comments via comment cards, U.S. Mail, fax, or e-mail through the Corps' website. The Corps received twenty-one written comments from the following:

1 Federal agency
1 state agency
2 conservation districts
1 county advisory committee
1 city
2 ports
2 organizations
11 private citizens.

The written comments were separated into several general themes. These themes are listed below from those mentioned most frequently to those mentioned less frequently.

- Do not raise the levees at Lewiston. The existing levees cut off the city from the river.
- Support using measures to reduce sediment from upland sources. Instead of conducting more studies, provide funding to implement the measures already identified in subbasin plans.
- Support using a watershed approach and managing sediment as a resource in the river. Need to include more forest management and agricultural practices in the alternative measures.
- Use sediment modeling to answer several questions – determining source of sediment, forecasting sediment delivery into the Snake River, predicting future maintenance dredging needs.
- The Corps needs to coordinate this plan with Federal, State, and Tribal land management agencies and invite them to participate as cooperating agencies.
- Provide better flood protection for Lewiston. Do this through more dredging, providing free flood insurance, or buying out downtown.
- Do more dredging. Use dredging to maintain the authorized navigation and to provide flood protection for Lewiston.
- Future sediment evaluation needs to follow the Regional Sediment Evaluation Framework.

- The PSMP needs to look at a longer timeframe than 20 years. Seventy to 100 years would be more realistic and would address the time it may take to see results as well as addressing the end of the life of the dams.
- The PSMP needs to address impacts on water quality, Endangered Species Act-listed species, Tribes, and low income or people of color communities.
- Assess cumulative impacts across the various land ownership jurisdictions and consider appropriate mitigation strategies.
- Include a monitoring program to assess impacts and effectiveness of the measures and explain how the results will be used to modify future actions.
- Breach the four lower Snake River dams and improve railroads and highways to provide transportation of goods.
- Sediment management approaches should be looked at from a cost-effectiveness aspect.
- Do not relocate commercial navigation, recreation or water intake facilities.
- Draw down the reservoir in the spring to move sediment.