

**Peer Review Plan**  
for the  
**Lower Yellowstone Project - Intake Diversion Dam Fish Passage Project**  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation

**Background:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) are assembling scientific information and preparing scientific assessments for the Lower Yellowstone Project - Intake Diversion Dam Fish Passage Project. The information and assessments are expected to be disseminated in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)(pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act) and Biological Assessment (pursuant to the Endangered Species Act). The Lower Yellowstone Project (Project) is a Reclamation irrigation project that provides water to approximately 54,000 acres along the lower Yellowstone River in Montana and North Dakota. The scientific information and assessments will evaluate the effects of pallid sturgeon fish passage alternatives on affected resources, and in particular: (1) pallid sturgeon passage effectiveness, (2) pallid sturgeon recruitment in the upper Missouri River Basin, and (3) viability of Reclamation's Lower Yellowstone Project.

**Nature of Scientific Information and Assessments:** The effectiveness of alternative pallid sturgeon passage methods and subsequent effects on pallid sturgeon recruitment has been the subject of: (1) public debate, (2) comments submitted on prior National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents, and (3) statements made in litigation related to the fish passage project. The effects of alternative passage methods on Project viability has also been the subject of public debate and comments on prior NEPA documents. Based on this, the scientific information and assessments for this fish passage project are expected to meet the definition of influential scientific information and highly influential scientific assessments requiring peer review, as defined by Office of Management and Budget Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review (70 FR 2664-2677) and Reclamation Manual Peer Review of Scientific Information and Assessments Policy (CMP P14).

**Peer Review Scope and Methodology:** The Corps is the administrative lead for this fish passage project, including peer review. In compliance with Corp Policy EC 1165-2-209, the Corps will contract for an Independent External Peer Review with an Outside Eligible Organization, who will provide a panel of 5-10 recognized experts from outside the Corps and Reclamation in appropriate disciplines, including fish biology, economics, and engineering. Panel selection will be completed by the Outside Eligible Organization and will not include Federal or public nomination of potential peer reviewers. The panel will be advised to focus on key technical areas and not to provide advice on policy or decisions. The peer review will be concurrent with public review of the EIS and, as such, public comments on scientific information and assessments contained in the EIS will not be available to panel members.

**Peer Review Timing:** Peer review will be concurrent with public review of the draft EIS scheduled for a 45-day period from May 30<sup>th</sup> to July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Dissemination of final scientific information and assessments contained in the EIS is anticipated in fall 2016.

**Point of Contact:** Inquiries to learn specifics of the peer review plan may be directed to Doug Epperly, Great Plains Regional Office, Bureau of Reclamation, 406-247-7638.