

163 FERC ¶ 62,166
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Nushagak Cooperative, Inc.

Project No. 14873-000

ORDER ISSUING PRELIMINARY PERMIT
AND GRANTING PRIORITY TO FILE LICENSE APPLICATION

(Issued June 11, 2018)

1. On March 22, 2018, Nushagak Cooperative, Inc. filed an application for a preliminary permit, pursuant to section 4(f) of the Federal Power Act (FPA),¹ to study the feasibility of the proposed Nuyakuk River Hydroelectric Project No. 14873 (Nuyakuk Project or project) to be located on the Nuyakuk River in the Dillingham Census Area near Dillingham, Alaska.

I. Project Proposal

2. The proposed project would consist of the following new facilities: (1) a 100-foot-long, 20-foot-high intake structure; (2) a 1,200-foot-long, 50-foot-wide, 15-foot-tall concrete-lined power conduit; (3) a 100-foot-wide, 100-foot-long powerhouse forebay with a surface area of 0.23 acres; (4) a 100-foot-wide, 60-foot-long concrete powerhouse containing two 5 megawatt (MW) bulb-type turbines for a total installed capacity of 10 MW; (5) a 100-foot-wide, 500-foot-long tailrace discharging to the Nuyakuk River; (6) a project substation; (7) a 135-mile-long, 25-kilovolt transmission line extending from the substation to the communities of Aleknagik, Koliganek, Stuyahok, Ekwok, and Levelock; and (8) appurtenant facilities. The estimated annual generation of the Nuyakuk River Project would be 72.8 gigawatt-hours.

II. Background

3. The Commission issued public notice of Nushagak Cooperative, Inc.'s permit application on April 6, 2018. Timely motions to intervene were filed by the National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior. Comments in support of the project were filed by Kristina Andrew, City of Dillingham, Doug Griffin, Chris Napoli, Misty Daye Savo, and the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference. Additional comments were filed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

¹ 16 U.S.C. § 797(f) (2012).

III. Discussion

A. Issues Related to Project Construction and Operation

4. FWS notes that significant alterations or diversion of flows in the Nuyakuk River may cause passage barriers to juvenile and adult resident, as well as anadromous fish migrating to spawn, rear, feed, and overwinter in project areas. They also note that project construction and operation could impact populations of bald and golden eagles. They recommend that the applicant install stream gauges and generate baseline river flow data and projections of alterations to the hydrograph associated with the project.

5. A preliminary permit does not authorize a permittee to undertake construction of the proposed project. The purpose of a preliminary permit is to study the feasibility of the project, including studying potential impacts. The concerns raised in the comments are premature at the preliminary permit stage, in that they address the potential effects of constructing and operating the proposed project. Should the permittee file a license application, these issues will be addressed in the licensing process.

B. Consultation and Study Requirements under the Permit

6. FWS notes that distribution, abundance, and habitat use by resident and anadromous fish in the Nuyakuk River have not been well studied and recommends conducting studies to assess the potential for the presence of sockeye salmon rearing in the river. FWS also recommends that the applicant carefully assess the siting and configuration of the proposed turbines through: bathymetric surveys that consider the hydrologic record of the river channel; assessment of baseline conditions of channel maintenance processes; studies for the potential temperature differential from the diverted flow releases; a wetland functional assessment and classification in the vicinity of proposed construction areas, access roads, and transmission line corridors; flight surveys of the riparian corridor to provide a baseline count of eagles that could be impacted by the loss of available fishery resources; and three years of focused study of baseline fisheries resource studies to assess annual and interannual variability of species relative abundance, distribution, and habitat use.

7. The Commission has not sought to place all relevant study requirements in preliminary permits.² Rather, the studies to be undertaken by a permittee are shaped by the Commission's filing requirements for development applications. Potential development applicants are required to consult with appropriate state and federal resource agencies and affected Indian tribes, conduct all reasonable studies requested by the

² See, e.g., *Continental Lands, Inc.*, 90 FERC ¶ 61,355, at 62,177 (2000)

agencies, and solicit comments on the application before it is filed.³ As noted above, the permit does not authorize construction: the permittee must satisfy any applicable legal requirements before conducting studies that may affect the environment.

IV. Permit Information

8. Section 4(f) of the FPA authorizes the Commission to issue preliminary permits for the purpose of enabling prospective applicants for a hydropower license to secure the data and perform the acts required by section 9 of the FPA,⁴ which in turn sets forth the material that must accompany an application for license. The purpose of a preliminary permit is to preserve the right of the permit holder to have the first priority in applying for a license for the project that is being studied.⁵ Because a permit is issued only to allow the permit holder to investigate the feasibility of a project while the permittee conducts investigations and secures necessary data to determine the feasibility of the proposed project and to prepare a license application, it grants no land-disturbing or other property rights.⁶

9. Article 4 of this permit requires the permittee to submit a progress report no later than the last day of each six-month period from the effective date of this permit. The late filing of a report or the supplementation of an earlier report in response to a notice of probable cancellation will not necessarily excuse the failure to comply with the requirements of this article.

10. During the course of the permit, the Commission expects that the permittee will carry out pre-filing consultation and study development leading to the possible development of a license application. The pre-filing process begins with preparation of a Notice of Intent (NOI) and Pre-Application Document (PAD) pursuant to sections 5.5

³ See 18 C.F.R. § 4.38 (2017).

⁴ 16 U.S.C. § 802 (2012).

⁵ See, e.g., *Mt. Hope Waterpower Project LLP*, 116 FERC ¶ 61,232 at P 4 (2006) (“The purpose of a preliminary permit is to encourage hydroelectric development by affording its holder priority of application (i.e., guaranteed first-to-file status) with respect to the filing of development applications for the affected site.”).

⁶ Issuance of this preliminary permit is thus not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. A permit holder can only enter lands it does not own with the permission of the landholder, and is required to obtain whatever environmental permits federal, state, and local authorities may require before conducting any studies. See, e.g., *Three Mile Falls Hydro, LLC*, 102 FERC ¶ 61,301 at P 6 (2003); see also *Town of Summersville, W.Va. v. FERC*, 780 F.2d 1034 (D.C. Cir. 1986) (discussing the nature of preliminary permits).

and 5.6 of the Commission's regulations.⁷ The permittee must use the Integrated Licensing Process unless the Commission grants a request to use an alternative process (Alternative or Traditional Licensing Process). Such a request must accompany the NOI and PAD and set forth specific information justifying the request.⁸ Should the permittee file a development application, notice of the application will be published, and interested persons and agencies will have an opportunity to intervene and to present their views concerning the project and the effects of its construction and operation.

11. A preliminary permit is not transferable. The named permittee is the only party entitled to the priority of the application for license afforded by this preliminary permit. In order to invoke permit-based priority in any subsequent licensing competition, the named permittee must file an application for license as the sole applicant, thereby evidencing its intent to be the sole licensee and to hold all proprietary rights necessary to construct, operate, and maintain the proposed project. Should any other parties intend to hold during the term of any license issued any of these proprietary rights necessary for project purposes, they must be included as joint applicants in any application for license filed. In such an instance, where parties other than the permittee are added as joint applicants for license, the joint application will not be eligible for any permit-based priority.⁹

The Director orders:

(A) A preliminary permit is issued for the Nuyakuk River Hydroelectric Project No. 14873 to Nushagak Cooperative, Inc. for a period effective the first day of the month in which this permit is issued, and ending either 36 months from the effective date or on the date that a development application submitted by the permittee has been accepted for filing, whichever occurs first.

(B) This preliminary permit is subject to the terms and conditions of Part I of the Federal Power Act and related regulations. The permit is also subject to Articles 1 through 4, set forth in the attached standard form P-1.

⁷ See 18 C.F.R. §§ 5.5 and 5.6 (2017).

⁸ See 18 C.F.R. § 5.3 (2017).

⁹ See *City of Fayetteville*, 16 FERC ¶ 61,209 (1981).

Project No. 14873-000

- 5 -

(C) This order constitutes final agency action. Any party may file a request for rehearing of this order within 30 days of the date of its issuance, as provided in section 313(a) of the Federal Power Act, 16 U.S.C. § 825*l* (2012), and section 385.713 of the Commission's regulations, 18 C.F.R. § 385.713 (2017).

David Turner, Chief
Northwest Branch
Division of Hydropower Licensing

Form P-1 (Revised April 2011)**FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION****TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF
PRELIMINARY PERMIT**

Article 1. The purpose of the permit is to maintain priority of application for a license during the term of the permit while the permittee conducts investigations and secures data necessary to determine the feasibility of the proposed project and, if the project is found to be feasible, prepares an acceptable application for license. In the course of whatever field studies the permittee undertakes, the permittee shall at all times exercise appropriate measures to prevent irreparable damage to the environment of the proposed project. This permit does not authorize the permittee to conduct any ground-disturbing activities or grant a right of entry onto any lands. The permittee must obtain any necessary authorizations and comply with any applicable laws and regulations to conduct any field studies.

Article 2. The permit is not transferable and may, after notice and opportunity for hearing, be canceled by order of the Commission upon failure of the permittee to prosecute diligently the activities for which a permit is issued, or for any other good cause shown.

Article 3. The priority granted under the permit shall be lost if the permit is canceled pursuant to Article 2 of this permit, or if the permittee fails, on or before the expiration date of the permit, to file with the Commission an application for license for the proposed project in conformity with the Commission's rules and regulations then in effect.

Article 4. No later than the last day of each six-month period from the effective date of this permit, the permittee shall file a progress report. Each progress report must describe, for that reporting period, the nature and timing of what the permittee has done under the pre-filing requirements of 18 C.F.R. sections 4.38 and 5.1-5.31 and other applicable regulations; and, where studies require access to and use of land not owned by the permittee, the status of the permittee's efforts to obtain permission to access and use the land. Progress reports may be filed electronically via the Internet, and the Commission strongly encourages e-filing. Instructions for e-filing are on the Commission's website at <http://www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/efiling.asp>. To paper-file instead, mail four copies of the progress report to the Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20426.

Document Content(s)

P-14873 Permit Order-61118.DOCX.....1-6