



July 1, 2020

2020-07-01 NWE-Thompson Falls – P-1869

Ms. Kimberly D. Bose
Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20426

RE: Notice of Intent to File License Application and Pre-Application Document

Dear Secretary Bose:

Pursuant to Section 15(b) of the Federal Power Act (FPA), 16 U.S.C. § 808(b), and implementing regulations of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC or Commission) at 18 CFR §§ 5.5 and 5.6, NorthWestern Corporation, a Delaware Corporation, doing business as NorthWestern Energy (NorthWestern), is pleased to file with the Commission its Notice of Intent to File a License Application (NOI) and Pre-Application Document (PAD) for the relicensing of the Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project – FERC Project No. 1869 (the Project). The Project is located on the Clark Fork River, in Sanders County, Montana. NorthWestern will use the Integrated Licensing Process (ILP) to provide the framework for its consultation with agencies, tribes, and other interested parties (collectively, Relicensing Participants) for relicensing of the Project.

NORTHWESTERN'S VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES PRIOR TO FILING

As detailed in Chapter 1 of the PAD, NorthWestern proactively initiated relicensing outreach discussions with Relicensing Participants in 2018. The first activity was a training program, "FERC 101," which was held in Missoula, Montana on September 12, 2018. This program included FERC staff who presented information on the procedures used to relicense hydropower projects under the Commission's jurisdiction. NorthWestern also presented available information on the Project. The goal of the meeting was to inform Relicensing Participants of the process and schedule for relicensing of the Project.

NorthWestern also voluntarily prepared a Baseline Environmental Document (BED), which consisted of compilation of existing resource information. The BED was released for public comment on November 1, 2018. A workshop was held in Missoula to discuss the BED and identify data gaps and resource issues on December 4, 2018. Additionally, NorthWestern received written comments on the BED from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

In October 2019, NorthWestern hosted a public meeting in Thompson Falls to further inform Relicensing Participants about the relicensing process and provide an update on resource studies NorthWestern had conducted and an operational test held earlier in October. In March 2020, NorthWestern hosted a second



public meeting in Thompson Falls to inform the Relicensing Participants of observations made during the October operational test and to describe proposed NorthWestern project operations. The meeting also included further information on the relicensing process. NorthWestern undertook all these efforts voluntarily, to engage the relicensing participants in advance of initiating the relicensing process.

In addition to the outreach efforts, NorthWestern accelerated the schedule to conduct certain resource studies so the information would be available to better inform relicensing. Specifically, the Recreation Visitor Survey was conducted during the peak recreation season of 2018 (Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day). In addition, the volume of use at five of the ten project-related recreation sites was monitored during the peak recreation season of 2019 using automatic traffic and trail counters.

The Biological Opinion (BiOp) which described the effects of the Project on threatened bull trout and its critical habitat, included a requirement for the Licensee to conduct Phase 2 fish passage evaluation studies from 2010 to 2020. At the end of the Phase 2 evaluation period it required preparation of a comprehensive report for filing with the Commission by December 31, 2020. In considering the relicensing schedule and the timing required under the BiOp for the comprehensive report, NorthWestern concluded the schedules could better align and requested the comprehensive report described in the BiOp to be submitted a year early. The Comprehensive Phase 2 Fish Passage Report, prepared with guidance from the Technical Advisory Committee, summarized the results of fish passage studies at the Project. It was filed with the Commission on December 20, 2019. The BiOp also required NorthWestern to convene a panel to conduct a structured scientific review of the Project's upstream fish passage facility. The Thompson Falls Scientific Review Panel (Panel) convened in January 2020 and its resulting scientific review was completed in April 2020. On April 1, 2020 NorthWestern filed with the Commission the Panel's Memorandum summarizing its findings. On April 16, 2020, NorthWestern received written confirmation from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that the requirement for a scientific review, as expressed in term and condition TC1-h in the BiOp, had been met with the submittal of the Panel's Memorandum. The recommendations from the Panel were considered in the development of NorthWestern's list of preliminary issues and studies, found in Section 14 of the PAD.

Additionally, in 2019 NorthWestern prepared a water quality-monitoring plan, which was implemented in 2019 to reduce data gaps that were noted during the preparation of the BED.

REQUEST FOR DESIGNATION AS NON-FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE

In conjunction with this filing, and as provided in 18 CFR § 5.5(e), NorthWestern is requesting that the Commission designate NorthWestern as the Commission's non-federal representative for carrying out informal consultation, pursuant to the following:

- 1) Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and the joint agency regulations thereunder at 50 CFR part 402; and
- 2) Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the implementing regulations at 36 CFR § 800.2(c)(4).



PUBLICATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF PAD AND NOI

The NOI and PAD, except for two appendices to the PAD, are being filed publicly. Appendix E contains material designated as CEII. Appendix G of the PAD contains sensitive information related to cultural, archaeological and historic resources. Pursuant to 18 CFR § 388.112(b), NorthWestern requests the Commission to designate this information as Privileged material, and to maintain this information as non-public.

In accordance with the Commission's regulations and concurrent with this filing, NorthWestern is also transmitting electronic copies of the PAD via email notification of posting on NorthWestern's relicensing website, <http://www.northwesternenergy.com/environment/thompson-falls-project/thompson-falls-relicensing>) to relevant resource agencies, Native American tribes, local governments, non-governmental organizations, and other interested parties (as identified on the attached Distribution List). In addition, NorthWestern will provide a paper copy of the PAD to Commission Staff in the Office of Energy Projects and Office of General Counsel – Energy Projects.

COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY

This NOI and PAD are being filed in accordance with a deadline that is established by statute. NorthWestern recognizes that the COVID-19 public health emergency presents significant challenges for Commission Staff, Relicensing Participants and NorthWestern to follow the typical process involved in the ILP. NorthWestern also recognizes the COVID-19 public health emergency is a fluid circumstance. Federal, tribal, state and local government offices are at different stages and have taken or are considering taking different approaches to resuming normal operations. Most immediately, due to these considerations, the Commission's public scoping meeting and site visit may need to be waived, deferred or conducted by virtual means – though that presents concerns due to bandwidth limitations in the Thompson Falls area. As the ILP process proceeds, other activities that would typically entail in person meetings may be affected. As needed NorthWestern is prepared to accommodate adjustments to the relicensing process as may be appropriate.

CONCLUSION

NorthWestern looks forward to working with the Commission and other interested parties on the relicensing of the Project. If there are any questions regarding the NOI or PAD, please contact Mary Gail Sullivan, Director of Environmental and Lands, Permitting and Compliance, by telephone at (406) 497-3382 or by email at MaryGail.Sullivan@northwestern.com.

Sincerely,


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Vice President Supply and Montana Government Affairs

cc: See attached distribution list

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**Notice of Intent to File Application for New License
Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 1869)
NorthWestern Energy**

The following information regarding the Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (Project) is provided pursuant to 18 CFR § 5.5(b):

(1) Existing licensee's name and address:

NorthWestern Corporation
A Delaware Corporation
d/b/a NorthWestern Energy
11 East Park Street
Butte, MT 59701

Project Contact:

Mary Gail Sullivan
Director, Environmental & Lands Permitting & Compliance
NorthWestern Energy
11 East Park Street
Butte, MT 59701
406-497-3382 (o)
406-490-1838 (c)

Or

John Tabaracci
Corporate Counsel
NorthWestern Energy
208 N Montana Avenue, Suite 205
Helena, MT 59601
406-443-8983 (o)
406-299-0223 (c)

(2) Project number:

Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) No. 1869

(3) License expiration date:

The license to operate the Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (Project) was issued by the Commission to the Montana Power Company in 1979. The Commission approved a transfer of the license on July 7, 1999, from the Montana Power Company to PP&L Montana, LLC. On March 25, 2014, the Commission approved transfer of the license from PP&L Montana to NorthWestern Corporation (“NorthWestern”). The license expires on December 31, 2025.

(4) Statement of intention to file application:

NorthWestern hereby states unequivocally its intent to file an application for a new license for the Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 1869).

(5) *Principal Project works:*

The principal project works consist of (a) a main dam, a concrete gravity structure about 1,016 feet long and 54 feet high with an overflow section about 913 feet long, surmounted by 8-foot-high fixed wheel panels atop 8-foot high flashboards and four radial gates; (b) a smaller dam of the same type about 449 feet long and 45 feet high with an overflow section about 289 feet long surmounted by 8-foot high fixed wheel panels atop 4-foot flashboards, and located west of the main dam in a dry channel of the river; (c) a reservoir extending 12 miles upstream having a usable storage capacity of 15,000 acre-feet at a drawdown of 16 feet below normal full pond elevation 2396.5 feet U.S.G.S.; (d) a rock cut canal about 450 feet long and 80 feet wide; (e) the original powerhouse with six main steel penstocks 14 feet in diameter; a steel frame and masonry powerhouse containing six generating units, two rated at 7,000 kW each and the other four rated at 6,000 kW; (f) a secondary development including (1) a 78-foot-wide, 300-foot-long intake channel; (2) a 10-foot-wide, 145-foot-long sluiceway; (3) an 78-foot-wide, 200-foot-long powerhouse containing a single turbine with a rated capacity of 52,600 kW connected to a generator with a nameplate capacity of 57,060 kW; (4) a 100-foot-wide, 1,000-foot-long tailrace channel; (5) an access road with a 135-foot-long bridge along the primary plant’s intake canal; (g) an upstream fish passage facility and (h) appurtenant facilities.

Project generation is interconnected to NorthWestern’s transmission system by the 115 kV Burke A and B lines and the 115 kV Kerr A and B lines on the roof of the original powerhouse. Short generator lead lines connect the plant to the point of interconnection. The lead line connecting Units 1-6 is approximately 50 feet long and the Unit 7 line is approximately 300 feet long.

(6) *Project location:*

The Project is located on the Clark Fork River in Sanders County, Montana. The project boundary totals 2,001 acres.

Approximately 103.78 acres of federal lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service are located within the project boundary.

(7) *Installed plant capacity:*

The Project has a total authorized installed capacity of 92.6 MW.

(8) *Names and mailing addresses:*

- i. *Every county in which any part of the Project is located, and in which any Federal facility that is used or to be used by the Project is located:*

Sanders County
1111 Main St.
PO Box 519
Thompson Falls, MT 59873

- ii. *Every city, town, or similar political subdivision:*

- (A) *In which any part of the Project is or is to be located and any Federal facility that is used or to be used by the Project is located:*

City of Thompson Falls
PO Box 99
Thompson Falls, MT 59873

- (B) *That has a population of 5,000 or more people and is located within 15 miles of the existing project dam:*

There are no cities, towns or similar political subdivision within 15 miles of the Project with a population of 5,000 or more people.

- iii. *Every irrigation district, drainage district, or similar special purpose political subdivision:*

- (A) *In which any part of the Project is or is proposed to be located and any Federal facility that is or is proposed to be used by the Project is located:*

Green Mountain Conservation District
PO Box 1329
Trout Creek, MT 59874

- (B) *That owns, operates, maintains, or uses any Project facility or any Federal facility that is or is proposed to be used by the Project:*

There is no irrigation district, drainage district, or similar special purpose political subdivision that owns, operates, maintains, or uses any Project facility.

- iv. *Every other political subdivision in the general area of the Project that there is reason to believe would be likely to be interested in, or affected by, the notification:*

City of Thompson Falls
PO Box 99
Thompson Falls, MT 59873

Town of Plains
P.O. Box 567
Plains, MT 59859

v. *Affected Indian Tribes:*

The following are Native American Tribes and First Nations that may be interested in the Project area:

Confederated Salish and Kootenai
Tribes of the Flathead Reservation
P.O. Box 278
Pablo, Montana 59855

Chippewa Cree Tribe of Rocky Boy's
Indian Reservation
P.O. Box 544
Box Elder, Montana 59521

Blackfeet Nation
P.O. Box 850
Browning, Montana 59417

Kootenai Tribe of Idaho
P.O. Box 1269
Bonners Ferry, Idaho 83805

Coeur d'Alene Tribe
850 A. Street
Plummer, Id 83851

Kalispel Tribe of Indians
P.O. Box 39
Usk, Washington 99180