

140 FERC ¶ 62,241
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Yegua Mesa Hydro, LLC

Project No. 13315-001

ORDER ISSUING SUCCESSIVE PRELIMINARY PERMIT
AND GRANTING PRIORITY TO FILE LICENSE APPLICATION

(September 28, 2012)

1. On May 2, 2012, Yegua Mesa Hydro, LLC (Yegua Mesa), filed an application for a successive preliminary permit, pursuant to section 4(f) of the Federal Power Act (FPA), proposing to continue studying the feasibility of the Yegua Mesa Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Project (Yegua Mesa Project or project) to be located near the city of Las Vegas, in San Miguel County, New Mexico. The proposed project would affect approximately 515 acres of land administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

I. Project Proposal

2. The proposed project would be closed loop and would not be built on an existing body of water. The proposed project would consist of: (1) an upper earthen dam with a height of 94 feet and a length of 11,088 feet; (2) an upper reservoir with a surface area of 380 acres, a capacity of 9,868 acre-feet, and a maximum pool elevation of 6,800 feet above mean sea level (msl); (3) a lower earthen dam with a height of 99 feet and a length of 5,597 feet; (4) a lower reservoir with a surface area of 380 acres, a capacity of 9,365 acre-feet, and a maximum pool elevation of 5,380 feet msl; (5) a 27-foot-diameter, 9,690-foot-long steel penstock; (6) a powerhouse containing 4 pump/turbine units with a total installed capacity of 1,100 megawatts; (7) a 14-mile-long, 500-kilovolt transmission line; and (8) appurtenant facilities. The proposed project would have an annual production of 3,993 gigawatthours that would be sold to a local utility.

II. Background

3. The Commission issued public notice of Yegua Mesa's permit application on June 13, 2012. Comments were filed by Mr. Curtis Sollohub on July 21, 2012 and by San Miguel County, Planning and Zoning Division (San Miguel County) on July 27, 2012. On August 7, 2012, the U.S. Department of the Interior stated they reviewed the public notice and have no comments.

III. Discussion

A. Availability of Water Resources

4. Mr. Curtis Sollohub commented that, presently, San Miguel County is experiencing drought-like conditions and noted that water resources in the area are already overtaxed. Mr. Sollohub is concerned that, given the already existing shortage of water in the region, the proposed Yegua Mesa Project would not have enough water to operate and provide enhanced value to the region's water resources.

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 Mr. Sollohub's 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. Tribal Consultation

6. San Miguel County provided a list of Indian tribes that may be affected by the project from a historical, archaeological, and cultural perspective. San Miguel County requested that these Indian tribes be consulted regarding the proposed project going forward. Should Yegua Mesa decide to file a Notice of Intent (NOI) and Pre-Application Document (PAD) for the Yegua Mesa Project, they would be required to provide a consultation record documenting all entities, including Indian tribes, with whom they consulted regarding the proposed Yegua Mesa Project. The Commission would also consult with the appropriate Indian tribes consistent with its Tribal Policy Statement.¹

IV. Permit Information

7. 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,² 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

¹ 104 FERC ¶ 61,108.

² 16 U.S.C. § 802 (2006).

a license for the project that is being studied.³ 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.⁴

8. The applicant has previously held a preliminary permit for this site under Project No. 13315-000. The Commission will grant successive permits if it concludes that the applicant has diligently pursued the requirements of its prior permits in good faith. Yegua Mesa has provided information to Commission staff demonstrating that it is currently making progress with the analysis of the project's feasibility, and towards the development of its proposed project. It is expected that during this permit term, agency consultation will be conducted and a development application will be prepared pursuant to sections 4.38 and 4.41 of the Commission's regulations.

9. The Commission usually does not prescribe in great detail what a permittee must accomplish under a permit. However, a successive permit can warrant a greater degree of Commission oversight. Therefore, we will monitor the progress of the permittee's activities. If the permittee fails to make significant progress toward developing a development application, the permit may be subject to cancellation.

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 NOI and PAD pursuant to sections 5.5 and 5.6 of the Commission's regulations.⁵ 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

³ 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.").

⁴ 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).

⁵ 18 C.F.R. §§ 5.5 and 5.6 (2012).

a request must accompany the NOI and PAD and set forth specific information justifying the request.⁶ 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. 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. A progress report must describe the nature and timing of what the permittee has done under the pre-filing requirements of section 4.38 and Part 5 of the Commission's regulations for the specific reporting period. A permit may be cancelled if a permittee fails to file a timely progress report or if the report does not demonstrate that progress is being made by the permittee. 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.

12. 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.⁷

The Director orders:

(A) A preliminary permit is issued for the Yegua Mesa Pumped Storage Hydroelectric Project No. 13315 to Yegua Mesa Hydro, LLC, 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.

⁶ See 18 C.F.R. § 5.3 (2012).

⁷ See *City of Fayetteville*, 16 FERC ¶ 61,209 (1981).

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(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.

(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. § 8251 (2006), and section 385.713 of the Commission's regulations, 18 C.F.R. § 385.713 (2012).

Timothy J. Welch, Chief
West 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.

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