



## United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
333 Bush Street, Suite 500  
San Francisco, CA 94104-2828



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DEPT OF ECOLOGY  
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

D18(SF-FM)

June 4, 2021

Washington Department of Ecology  
3190 160th Ave SE, Bellevue, WA 98008

Re: Notification of Natural Resource Trustees for the Newhalem Penstock in North Cascades  
National Park Complex, Washington

This letter serves to notify Washington Department of Ecology of potential damages to natural resources resulting from the release of hazardous substances at the Newhalem Penstock, North Cascades National Park Complex, Washington (hereinafter "Site") as required by Section 104(b)(2) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (hereinafter "CERCLA"). 42 U.S.C. § 9604(b)(2). The National Park Service (hereinafter "NPS") is the lead agency in charge of cleaning up hazardous substances at the Site pursuant to the authorities of Section 104 of the CERCLA, which have been delegated by Executive Order to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior and re-delegated to the NPS. Seattle City Light (hereinafter "SCL") performed the time-critical removal action (hereinafter "TCRA") under NPS oversight. The TCRA was completed in September 2017.

### Background and Site Location

North Cascades National Park Complex was established in 1968 when administration of the land shifted from the United States Forest Service to the NPS. That land included the Site, which provides visitors an opportunity to learn the history of the dams. The Newhalem Penstock and associated structures are located on approximately 2.5 acres of land that is owned by the United States and managed by the NPS, but the infrastructure is owned, operated, and maintained by SCL.

The Newhalem Penstock site is located within Ross Lake National Recreation Area directly across the Skagit River (on the south side) from the unincorporated community of Newhalem, Washington. Newhalem is located along a small stretch of land between the Skagit River and Washington State Highway 20. The Site is accessible via a one lane bridge and campground road network that traverses through the NPS Newhalem Campground, approximately a quarter mile from the Site. The Site is also accessible via the Trail of Cedars that starts in the town of Newhalem. The Site is approximately one-third mile upstream of Newhalem Creek's confluence with the Skagit River.

SCL operates the project, comprising a powerhouse, penstock, bedrock power tunnel, and creek diversion structure, under a Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license. The 30-inch diameter penstock is 1,122 feet long and conveys water to the Newhalem powerhouse. Approximately 904 feet of the penstock is above ground and historically rested on wood frame supports, or pedestals, with bases of wood, concrete, or stone. Built in the 1920s, the penstock is now over 75 years old and the wooden supports became no longer capable of safely supporting the penstock. Several of these saddles were burned in the August 2015 wildland fire and temporary supports were installed at four saddle locations as an emergency project to prevent the penstock from being damaged by buckling.

### Site Investigation Results

SCL has conducted two investigations in the project area to date. Soil sampling was conducted in August 2014 in the immediate vicinity of the penstock, and additional sampling was conducted in October 2015 to further evaluate the extent of soil contamination. Samples were also collected in April 2016 from the wood saddles to determine the specific type of preservatives in the wood. Results from the soil sampling indicated that soil in the vicinity of the penstock contained levels of lead and arsenic above Washington State's Model Toxics Control Act (hereinafter "MTCA") cleanup levels. Wood sample analysis results indicated the wood was preserved with coal-tar creosote. In some locations, soil within approximately 2-3 inches of the wood saddles contained levels of carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (hereinafter "PAHs") above MTCA cleanup levels. The reports from the investigations are available in the Administrative Record, which can be found on the Site's website. The link to the website is as follows:

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=56286>

These initial investigations only compared Site contaminants to cleanup levels protective of human health for unrestricted land use. These investigations did not include a site-specific terrestrial ecological evaluation to determine chemicals of ecological concern, exposure pathways, terrestrial ecological receptors of concern, and ecological-based cleanup levels.

### Time-Critical Removal Action

In order to comply with FERC dam safety guidelines, SCL replaced the badly deteriorated wooden saddles, the majority of which (52) are made from treated wood. Several of these saddles were burned in the August 2015 wildland fire and temporary supports were installed at four saddle locations as an emergency project to prevent the penstock from being damaged by buckling. SCL has replaced the 52 wooden saddles, including the five temporary supports, with permanent cast-in-place concrete saddles. Soils around the penstock are known to contain elevated levels of lead, arsenic, and PAHs. The lead is from old paint on the penstock; the arsenic and PAHs are from the treated timbers used for the saddles. Contaminated soils were excavated as part of removing the wooden saddles and constructing formwork for cast-in-place concrete footings and saddles. The approval of the TCRA authorized the removal and disposal of contaminated soil that had to be excavated to complete the scope of work during the penstock saddle replacement project.

The NPS has completed the TCRA in accordance with the CERLA to mitigate potential risks to public health, welfare, and the environment from the release or threat of release of hazardous substances along the Newhalem Penstock within Ross Lake National Recreation Area.

This letter is being sent to all potential natural resource trustees. If your agency has affected resources, or if you have any questions about the Site, please contact Stephen Mitchell by email at [Steve\\_Mitchell@nps.gov](mailto:Steve_Mitchell@nps.gov).

Sincerely,

**STEPHEN  
MITCHELL**

Digitally signed by  
STEPHEN MITCHELL  
Date: 2021.06.08 04:15:17  
-07'00'

Stephen J Mitchell, P.E.  
Chief, Operations/Environmental Programs Branch

cc: Travis Kraft, North Cascades National Park