

LAW OFFICE OF
JOHN M. BARTH

P.O. Box 409 Hygiene, Colorado 80533 (303) 774-8868 barthlawoffice@gmail.com

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By email: sheth.gary@epa.gov and U.S.P.S. Express Mail

Gary Sheth (WTR-2-3)
Water Division
U.S. EPA Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

Re: Comments on May 1, 2019 draft renewal NPDES permit for Four Corners Power Plant, Permit NN0000019 and 401 Certification Waiver.

Dear Mr. Sheth:

On behalf of San Juan Citizens Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Dine Citizens Against Ruining the Environment, Amigos Bravos, Sierra Club, and Western Environmental Law Center (collectively referred to as the “Conservation Organizations”) I am submitting comments on EPA’s May 1, 2019 draft renewal NPDES Permit for the Four Corners Power Plant, NPDES Permit # NN0000019 to Arizona Public Service Company (“APS”).¹ The Public Notice for the proposed permit also states that EPA is also providing “notice of, and requests public comments on, EPA’s proposed waiver of certification under Clean Water Act Section 401(a)(1).” In this comment letter, we are also submitting comments on EPA’s 401 Certification waiver for the proposed permit. On July 1, 2019 a copy of the 77 exhibits to this comment letter were sent to you by overnight mail on a flash drive. Please confirm receipt of this comment letter by email and the flash drive.

EPA’s Public Notice for this draft permit states, “[i]nformation submitted by the Applicant as part of its Application is available as part of the administrative record of this proposed permit.” The Public Notice also states, “[t]he administrative record, including ... data submitted by the applicant, and other relevant documents, is available for review...”. EPA has not established a docket on regulations.gov for this action. Instead, EPA created a webpage for the proposed permit action that contained only five documents.² This is despite the fact that

¹ EPA Public Notice, p. 1.

² The five documents EPA made publicly available on the webpage for this proposed permit are: (1) Draft NPDES Permit Fact Sheet: APS Four Corners Power Plant (PDF) (14 pp, 267 K, 4/29/2019); (2) DRAFT NPDES Permit No. NN0000019: APS Four Corners Power Plant (PDF)(35 pp, 1 MB, 4/29/2019); (3) NPDES Permit Renewal Application: APS Four Corners

EPA's draft permit relies on a number of documents that were not made publicly available at the time of the issuance of the draft permit. Moreover, EPA has failed to post to its website any documents related to its proposed 401 certification waiver. This is despite the fact that EPA's Public Notice admits that, "[t]he Applicant has also submitted a request for certification of the Proposed Permit under Clean Water Act Section 401(a)(1)."

On May 2, 2019 the conservation organizations issued a Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA") request to EPA Region 9 requesting the documentation relied upon by EPA to issue the draft permit, fact sheet, and 401 Certification decision.³ As of May 30, 2019, the original comment deadline, the conservation organizations had not received a single document in response to its FOIA request. Instead, EPA agreed to respond to the FOIA request on two dates: with the first batch of responsive FOIA documents provided to the conservation organizations by June 10, 2019 and a second batch of documents by June 25, 2019. EPA also agreed to extend the comment deadline to July 1, 2019.

EPA failed to provide any documents by the June 10, 2019 deadline. Instead, the Conservation Organizations did not receive the first batch of documents until a June 12, 2019 interim release via email with a link to documents on FOIA Online, and a subsequent email with additional documents on June 13, 2019 (for a total of 177 documents). It appears that EPA posted a small set of additional responsive documents to FOIA Online on or about June 25, 2019.

I. Procedural Background

The Four Corners Power Plant ("FCPP"), a coal burning power plant, is located on the Navajo Nation. The FCPP was operated as a 5-unit coal plant, but units 1, 2, and 3 were retired from service on December 31, 2013. Units 4 and 5 continue to operate and installed selective catalytic reduction ("SCR") on or before July 31, 2018 to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions pursuant to EPA's Clean Air Act regional haze Best Available Retrofit Technology ("BART") determination for the plant.⁴

A. Litigation related to the NPDES permit.

The first NPDES permit was issued for discharges from the FCPP on July 1, 1977.⁵ The last effective NPDES renewal permit for FCPP was issued by EPA in 2001, or nearly 18 years ago. On May 16, 2014, a coalition of environmental organizations issued a 60-day notice of intention to sue letter alleging that EPA had unreasonably delayed reissuing the renewal NPDES

Power Plant (PDF)(182 pp, 21 MB, February 15, 2013); (4) NPDES Permit No. NM0000019 (NN0000019): APS Four Corners Power Plant (PDF)(13 pp, 589 K, 04/03/2001); and (5) NPDES Permit Fact Sheet (revised): APS Four Corners Power Plant (PDF)(5 pp, 297 K, 03/2001). *See* <https://www.epa.gov/npdes-permits/npdes-permit-aps-four-corners-power-plant-san-juan-county-nm>.

³ *See*, Exhibit 1 (FOIA request) hereto.

⁴ 77 Fed. Reg. 51620 (August 24, 2012).

⁵ Exhibit 2, p. 3 hereto (September 2006 EPA Inspection Report).

permit. In 2018, the coalition filed a mandamus action in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which remains pending.

Approximately 2 weeks after the coalition filed their mandamus action, EPA issued a final NPDES permit for the facility. A coalition of environmental organizations then challenged the final NPDES permit before the EPA Environmental Appeals Board (“EAB”). Over the course of the next several months, and in direct response to the EAB appeal, EPA first withdrew portions of the final permit and then eventually withdrew the entire permit. The EAB then dismissed the appeal as moot. According to EPA, the 2001 NPDES permit for the facility remains the effective permit.

The parties to the mandamus litigation recently filed a Joint Motion to Stay in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals action with EPA agreeing to issue a final permit by August 31, 2019.

B. Litigation related to the FCPP EIS/BO.

FCPP currently disposes of its coal combustion residuals (“CCR’s”) in on-site ponds. FCPP historically disposed of CCRs in mine pits at the adjacent and related Navajo coal mine. The federal government finalized a comprehensive environmental impact statement (“EIS”) and Biological Opinion (“BO”) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) and Endangered Species Act (“ESA”) that focused largely on the proposed expansion of CCR disposal facilities to allow FCPP to continue operating for up to 30 more years. EPA was a cooperating agency in this EIS process. In 2015, as required by section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Biological Opinion analyzing the effects of continued operation of the Four Corners Power Plant and related coal mine on endangered species as part of the lease extension allowing operation of the plant from 2016-2041.⁶ The Biological Opinion acknowledged the already dire state of the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker populations in the San Juan River and cataloged substantial adverse impacts to these populations and their critical habitat from the continued operation of the FCPP and Navajo Mine, including impacts from water pollution and the FCPP cooling water intake.⁷ The Biological Opinion found that impingement and/or entrainment of fish in the coal plant’s water intake system, as well as other impacts, would decrease the population viability of Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker in the San Juan River basin.⁸ A coalition of environmental organizations submitted written comments on the draft EIS for the FCPP/Navajo Mine, a copy of which is attached hereto and incorporated herein by reference.⁹ A coalition of environmental organizations also challenged the issuance of the Final EIS and BO in federal district court in Arizona and 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which remains pending.

⁶ Exhibit 3 hereto (Biological Opinion).

⁷ *Id.* at pp. 109-114.

⁸ *Id.* at p. 134.

⁹ Exhibit 4 hereto (FCPP/Navajo Mine DEIS comment letter). A copy of the conservation organization’s exhibits to the DEIS comment letter were included on a CD/DVD sent to Gary Sheth at EPA Region 9 by overnight mail on February 17, 2015 and are incorporated herein by reference.

II. Legal Background

According to EPA, coal-fired power plants are the second largest discharger of toxic pollutants in the United States. The toxicity of these discharges is primarily due to metals associated with coal combustion waste handling.¹⁰ Toxic metal discharges from steam electric power can pose a serious threat to public health and the environment.¹¹ EPA has acknowledged that even relatively small amounts of coal ash pollutants can pose a threat to aquatic organisms, wildlife and human health due to the persistent and bioaccumulative nature of these pollutants.¹²

Under the Clean Water Act, an NPDES permit must contain effluent limits that “restore” and “maintain” the quality of the receiving water body.¹³ At a minimum, EPA must set technology based effluent limits (“TBELs”) that reflect the ability of available technologies to reduce or eliminate pollution discharges.¹⁴ If a discharge could cause or contribute to a violation of water quality standards in the receiving water, EPA must include water quality-based effluent limitation (“WQBELs”) in the NPDES permit to prevent the exceedence.¹⁵

On November 3, 2015, EPA issued new effluent limitation guidelines for coal fired power plants. These new ELGs state, “there shall be no discharge of pollutants in bottom ash transport water” beginning as soon as November 1, 2018. *See*, 40 C.F.R. §423.13(k)(1)(i), 80 Fed. Reg. 67896 (November 3, 2015). EPA previously found that settlement ponds are ineffective for removing toxic pollutants such as dissolved metals and nutrients.¹⁶

Where EPA has not promulgated ELGs for a particular category of discharger, or where the existing ELGs do not address all waste streams or pollutants discharged by a facility, EPA must use Best Professional Judgment (“BPJ”) and set TBELs based on Best Available Technology (“BAT”) for each pollutant.¹⁷ Some of these best available technologies are described in the attached comment letter on EPA’s proposed revision to the ELGs.¹⁸ EPA has made clear that “state(s) must include technology-based effluent limitations in its permits for pollutants not addressed by the effluent guidelines” for the Stream Electric category, noting that the “CWA requires permitting authorities to conduct the ‘BPJ’ analysis...on a case-by-case basis for those pollutants in each permit.”¹⁹

¹⁰ Notice of Availability of Preliminary 2008 Effluent Guidelines Program Plan, 72 Fed. Reg. 61,335- 61,342 (Oct. 30, 2007).

¹¹ *See*, U.S. Env’tl. Prot. Agency, Steam Electric Power Generating Point Source Category: Final Detailed Study <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/guide/stream/finalreport.pdf>. U.S.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ 33 U.S.C. §1251(a)(2011).

¹⁴ 33 U.S.C. §§1311, 1342(a).

¹⁵ 33 U.S.C. §1312(a); 40 C.F.R. §122.44(d)(i)(2010).

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.* at 183. 33 U.S.C. §1311(b)(2)(A); 40 C.F.R. §122.44.

¹⁸ *See*, Exhibit 69 hereto.

¹⁹ *See*, Memorandum from the Director of the Office of Wastewater Mgmt., U.S. Env’tl. Prot.

III. Comments

The Conservation Organizations submit these comments on EPA's May 1, 2019 draft renewal NPDES Permit for the FCPP and request that EPA amend the draft permit to incorporate these comments.

A. EPA's reliance on the Navajo Nation water quality standards for the draft permit and proposed 401 certification decision is unsupported.

EPA's draft permit arbitrarily applies the Navajo Nation Water Quality Standards despite the fact that such standards cannot be used to regulate the discharge of pollutants from the FCPP. On December 1, 1960, the Navajo Nation and the developers of the FCPP entered into an "Indenture of Lease" governing the construction and operation of the FCPP on the Navajo Nation.²⁰ The lease was subsequently revised.²¹ The currently effective lease between the FCPP owners and the Navajo Nation includes the following provision:

The Tribe covenants that, other than as expressly set out in the New Lease or in the Amended Original Lease, respectively, it will not directly or indirectly regulate or attempt to regulate the Lessees under the New Lease or Arizona under the Amended Original Lease or the construction, maintenance or operation of the Enlarged Four Corners Generating Station and the transmission systems of the Lessees and Arizona, or their rates, charges, operating practices, procedures, safety rules, or other policies or practices, or their sales of power...²²

In 2000-2001, EPA issued a final NPDES permit for the FCPP that relied on the Navajo Nation Water Quality Standards. The permit was appealed by APS, which argued that EPA could not rely on such water quality standards.²³ APS relied on the court decision in *Arizona Public Service Company v. Aspaas*, 77 F.3d 1128 (9th Cir. 1995) for the proposition that the Navajo Nation could not directly or indirectly regulate operations of the FCPP.²⁴ In light of this appeal, EPA amended its final NPDES permit for the FCPP removing certain provisions applying the Navajo Nation Water Quality Standards.²⁵

In 2006 EPA approved Navajo Nation's CWA Section 518 "treatment as State" application to adopt tribal water quality standards, but this approval did not include Morgan

Agency on NPDES Permitting of Wastewater Discharges from Flue Gas Desulfurization and Coal Combustion Residuals Impoundments at Steam Electric Power Plants 2 (June 7, 2010)(emphasis added) attached hereto as Exhibit 5 hereto.

²⁰ Exhibit 6 hereto (Indenture of Lease excerpt).

²¹ Exhibit 7 (September 1978 Lease Amendment) and Exhibit 8 (1985 Lease Amendment).

²² Exhibit 7, p. 41, ¶ 22.

²³ Exhibit 9 hereto.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

Lake.²⁶ As discussed more fully below, Morgan Lake is a “water of the United States”, “navigable water”, “water of the State of New Mexico”, and “water of the Navajo Nation” and thus discharges into Morgan Lake must be regulated in this NPDES permit. In approving the “treatment as State” application, EPA stated:

“In approving the Tribe’s Application, EPA is not making any findings about the Tribe’s authority over Morgan Lake or the Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Generating Station or their owners and operators. EPA is also deferring the issue of whether the Tribe’s water quality standards, if and when approved by EPA, would apply to any CWA-permitted discharges from these facilities to Tribal waters. To the extent necessary, EPA will consider these issues, and how they relate to the lease provisions, in the context of future permitting or other relevant action taken by EPA.”²⁷

EPA subsequently approved the Navajo Nation’s Water Quality Standards, including those for Morgan Lake.²⁸ The Navajo Nation’s promulgation of water quality standards (approved by EPA) for Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, Chaco River, and/or the San Juan River appears to constitute a direct and/or indirect regulation of the FCPP owners, operation of the FCPP, its operating practices, and/or procedures because these water quality standards could restrict the water pollution being emitted from the plant. Under the terms of the current lease, the Navajo Nation’s Water Quality Standards for these watersheds appear unenforceable against the owners of the FCPP. Accordingly, EPA’s reliance on the 2007 Navajo Nation Water Quality standards appears to be arbitrary and capricious because such standards may not be applied to the operations of the FCPP. Further, the operator APS also takes the position that EPA may not rely on the Navajo Nation Water Quality Standards for discharges from the FCPP or for the EPA’s 401 Certification decision.²⁹

EPA may not further defer “whether the Tribe’s water quality standards... would apply to any CWA-permitted discharges from these facilities to Tribal waters.” As part of the administrative record for this permitting action, EPA must produce a written rationale for its application of the Navajo Nation’s water quality standards to this permitting action and 401 Certification decision. EPA acknowledged this issue in a September 15, 2006 Inspection Report and concluded that “U.S. EPA may opt to use either Navajo Nation or New Mexico standards.”³⁰ EPA needs to explain in this permitting action why it chose to apply Navajo Nation water quality standards instead of New Mexico standards. EPA must also explain why it did not apply New Mexico water quality standards to Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, and the Chaco River. After EPA provides this written explanation, we request that EPA re-issue its draft permit, fact sheet, and reasonable potential analysis for a new public comment period. In the event EPA determines

²⁶ Exhibit 10 hereto, page 2 (TAS Decision Document).

²⁷ Exhibit 10, p. 11, footnote 4 of Decision Document.

²⁸ Exhibits 11 and 12 hereto (Navajo Nation 2007 and 2004 water quality standards, respectively).

²⁹ Exhibit 13 hereto, pp. 2-4 (APS 2015 draft permit comment letter on NN WQS).

³⁰ Exhibit 2 hereto, p. 3.

that it may not apply the Navajo Nation water quality standards due to the contractual prohibition or otherwise, the EPA must state whether it is applying the State New Mexico water quality standards and the legal basis for applying those standards. If EPA reaches the conclusion that neither Navajo Nation nor State of New Mexico water quality standards can be legally applied to Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, and the Chaco River, then EPA must promulgate federal water quality standards for these waterbodies prior to issuing a draft NPDES permit and 401 Certification decision.

The Conservation Organizations issued a FOIA request to EPA on May 2, 2019 requesting, inter alia, the administrative record supporting the draft permit and 401 Certification decision.³¹ EPA's administrative record for both the draft permit and the proposed 401 Certification are devoid of any rationale for EPA's application of the Navajo Nation water quality standards to these agency decisions.

In light of the contractual prohibition and EPA's silence on the legal impact of the contractual prohibition upheld by the federal courts, EPA's application of Navajo Nation Water Quality Standards to its 401 certification decision and draft NPDES permit is arbitrary, capricious, and contrary to law. EPA must reissue the its proposed 401 Certification decision and draft permit and provide a legal analysis explaining which water quality standards apply and why.

B. The Proposed Date for Complying with the ELG Rule's Bottom Ash BAT Requirements Violates the Clean Water Act, Its Implementing Regulations, and Is Arbitrary and Capricious.

The proposed permit selects December 31, 2023 as the date by which APS must comply with the best available technology economically achievable ("BAT") effluent limit for bottom ash transport water. This compliance date has no support in the record and violates applicable Clean Water Act requirements, as explained below.

1. The compliance date violates the Clean Water Act and its implementing regulations.

The Clean Water Act requires each NPDES permit renewal to include "all applicable requirements," including effluent limitations issued under section 1311 of the Act. 33 U.S.C. § 1342(a)(1); *see also* 80 Fed. Reg. 67,838, 67,882 (Nov. 3, 2015) ("Under the CWA, the permitting authority must incorporate these ELGs into NPDES permits as a floor or a minimum level of control."). Given that the Four Corners plant discharges bottom ash transport water to a water of the United States, the Four Corners plant is subject to the BAT limits for bottom ash transport water that EPA promulgated in 2015, 80 Fed. Reg. 67,838, codified at 40 C.F.R. pt. 423. EPA established BAT limits for bottom ash transport water equal to zero discharge, meaning that "there shall be no discharge of pollutants in bottom ash transport water." 40 C.F.R. § 423.13(k)(1)(i).

³¹ Exhibit 1 hereto (FOIA request).

The 2015 ELG Rule provided that the compliance date for the bottom ash BAT limit would be “as soon as possible beginning November 1, 2018, but no later than December 31, 2023.” 40 C.F.R. §§ 423.11(t), 423.13(k)(1)(i) (2015). In 2017, EPA postponed the earliest compliance date by two years,³² but did not alter either the substantive BAT limit (*i.e.*, the zero discharge standard) or the latest permissible compliance date. *See* 82 Fed. Reg. 43,494 (Sept. 18, 2017). Thus, at present, the date for complying with the bottom ash BAT limit must be “as soon as possible beginning November 1, 2020, but no later than December 31, 2023.” 40 C.F.R. §§ 423.11(t), 423.13(k)(1)(i).

The ELG Rule establishes the earliest compliance date, November 1, 2020, as the presumptive compliance date. *See* 40 C.F.R. §§ 423.13(k)(1)(i) (requiring that compliance with the bottom ash BAT limit be achieved “as soon as possible beginning November 1, 2020”), 423.11(t) (“as soon as possible” means November 1, 2020 . . . unless the permitting authority establishes a later date”). A permitting authority can establish a compliance date later than November 1, 2020 only if it documents that it has considered the factors listed in 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t). Moreover, the ELG Rule requires a permitting authority that selects a compliance date later than November 1, 2020 to explain why a later date is appropriate and why the discharger cannot meet the earliest compliance date:

EPA recommends that the permitting authority provide a well-documented justification of how it determined the “as soon as possible” date in the fact sheet or administrative record for the permit. If the permitting authority determines a date later than November 1, 2018, the justification should explain why allowing additional time to meet the limitations is appropriate, and why the discharger cannot meet the final effluent limitations as of November 1, 2018.

80 Fed. Reg. at 67,883.

In issuing the draft NPDES permit for Four Corners, EPA has not even attempted to satisfy the legal requirements for a permitting authority to select compliance date later than November 1, 2020. Specifically, the proposed compliance date violates at least three separate legal requirements.

First, EPA has not made publicly available any document in which EPA considers the factors listed in 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t). The fact sheet for the proposed permit recites the factors in 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t), and claims that the Applicant submitted information to EPA addressing these factors. However, the ELG Rule requires the permitting authority—not the Applicant—to select the compliance date and consider the factors in 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t). *See, e.g.*, 80 Fed. Reg. at 67,883 (“Assuming that the permitting authority receives relevant information from the

³² Sierra Club, along with other environmental organizations, has challenged EPA’s postponement of the ELG Rule, and the challenge remains pending in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. *See Clean Water Action v. EPA*, No. 18-60079 (5th Cir. petition filed Oct. 11, 2017). The Conservation Organizations continue to maintain that the 2017 rule postponing the ELG Rule’s compliance deadlines is unlawful.

discharger, in order to determine what date is ‘as soon as possible’ within the implementation period, *the permitting authority must then consider the following factors . . .*”) (emphasis added); *id.* at 67,854 (“The final rule specifies the factors that *the permitting authority must consider* in determining the ‘as soon as possible’ date”) (emphasis added). Indeed, in the preamble to the 2015 ELG Rule, EPA explains in detail what “the permitting authority” must evaluate for each of the factors listed in 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t). *Id.* at 67,883. EPA’s abdication of its responsibility to consider the factors in 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t) renders the bottom ash BAT compliance date in the proposed permit unlawful.

Second, EPA fails to explain why a date later than November 1, 2020 is appropriate, as required by the ELG Rule, 80 Fed. Reg. at 67,883. The draft fact sheet merely notes that the Applicant requested a compliance date of December 31, 2023. But EPA’s mere reference to the Applicant’s requested compliance date does not satisfy the agency’s obligation to explain why a date later than November 1, 2020 is appropriate.

Third, EPA fails to explain why APS cannot meet the bottom ash BAT limit by November 1, 2020, 80 Fed. Reg. at 67,883. Here too, EPA references the Applicant’s requested compliance date, as well as information submitted by the Applicant. But the 2015 ELG Rule places the burden on the permitting authority to explain why a discharger cannot meet the earliest possible compliance deadline. *See id.* EPA has not provided such an explanation in the draft permit, fact sheet, or any other document prepared by EPA.

2. *EPA’s potential reconsideration of the bottom ash BAT requirements does not justify selecting December 31, 2023 as the compliance date.*

The proposed permit provides no rationale for selecting the latest possible compliance date, December 31, 2023, for meeting the bottom ash BAT limit. In particular, EPA does not rely on the potential reconsideration of the bottom ash BAT requirements as justification for the compliance date it selected. While EPA has not raised this issue, we wish to make clear that it is not a permissible reason for selecting December 31, 2023 as the compliance date.

EPA has an obligation to comply with the legal requirements that are in effect when EPA issues the final NPDES permit for Four Corners. Currently, the substantive BAT limit contained in the 2015 ELG Rule is in effect, and that BAT limit prohibits the discharge of any bottom ash transport water. 40 C.F.R. § 423.13(k)(1)(i). While EPA postponed the earliest compliance date for the bottom ash BAT limit, it did not alter the substantive effluent limit, nor did EPA change the obligation for each permitting authority to incorporate all applicable effluent limits into each NPDES permit. *See* 82 Fed. Reg. at 43,496 (“This maintains the 2015 Rule as a whole at this time, with the only change being to postpone specific compliance deadlines for two wastestreams.”); *see also* EPA, Response to Comment Document, EPA-HQ-OW-2009-0819, SE06669, at 8 (“The only thing the Postponement Rule does is revise the 2015 ELG Rule’s new, more stringent compliance dates for two wastestreams discharged from existing sources (bottom ash transport water and flue gas desulfurization wastewater). Otherwise, it leaves the Rule unchanged.”).

Moreover, as of the date these comments are being submitted, EPA has not yet initiated a formal reconsideration proceeding by issuing a proposal to revise the bottom ash BAT limits. Even if EPA were to subsequently issue such a proposal, there is no realistic possibility that EPA will finalize revisions to the bottom ash BAT limit prior to August 31, 2019, when EPA has said it intends to finalize this permit. In addition, EPA is prohibited from prejudging the outcome of any reconsideration rulemaking, and one possibility is that EPA will not change the bottom ash BAT limits at all, as the agency has acknowledged.³³ Given that EPA cannot know during this permit proceeding whether it will change the bottom ash BAT limit, it would be unlawful and unreasonable for EPA to select a compliance date for the bottom ash BAT limits based on the assumption that the agency will revise the bottom ash BAT limit.

Finally, the mere possibility that EPA might change the bottom ash BAT limits is not a permissible rationale for selecting December 31, 2023 as the compliance date. It is always possible for EPA to convene a rulemaking to reconsider prior effluent limits. Indeed, the Clean Water Act requires EPA to review, and as necessary revise, each effluent limit every 5 years, 33 U.S.C. § 1311(d). Yet the overriding statutory goal was to eliminate water pollution by 1985, *id.* § 1251(a)(1). It would be inconsistent with the Clean Water Act's statutory goal of swiftly eliminating water pollution for EPA to set the latest permissible date for complying with an existing effluent limit based on nothing more than the speculative possibility that the effluent limit may change in the future. *See Kennecott v. EPA*, 780 F.2d 445, 448 (4th Cir. 1985) (“The BAT standard reflects the intention of Congress to use the latest scientific research and technology in setting effluent limits, pushing industries toward the goal of zero discharge as quickly as possible.”).

3. *The rationale provided by APS for a compliance date of December 31, 2023 is unsupported and unlawful.*

In an April 4, 2019 document, APS asks that EPA select December 31, 2023 as the deadline for complying with the bottom ash BAT limitations for Four Corners. *See* NPDES Effluent Limitation Guideline Compliance Project Summary, APS, Four Corners Power Plant [hereinafter, *Project Summary*]. APS' Project Summary fails to consider the factors listed in 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t) that are a prerequisite to selecting a compliance deadline later than November 1, 2020.

40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t) provides that a compliance date later than November 1, 2020 must be based on a consideration of the “[t]ime to *expeditiously* plan (including to raise capital), design, procure, and install equipment to comply with the requirements of this part.” (emphasis added). It is now more than three-and-a-half years since EPA issued the final ELG Rule on November 3, 2015, but the Project Summary expressly states that “APS has yet to develop a firm schedule for implementing this project” for a closed-loop recycling system to meet the bottom ash BAT limit. Project Summary at pdf p. 5. Having failed to even “develop a firm schedule”

³³ EPA, Response to Comment Document, EPA-HQ-OW-2009-0819, SE06669, at 6 (“It is possible that the costs, impacts and benefits of the rule may be unchanged after EPA completes its new rulemaking.”).

for complying with the ELG Rule, APS has not documented the “time to expeditiously plan” to comply with the bottom ash BAT requirements. Given that APS has not provided any information on the first factor listed in 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t)(1), and EPA has not conducted its own analysis of this issue, the record is devoid of any information on the factor listed in 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t)(1). The absence of record evidence on the first, mandatory factor in 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t)(1) precludes EPA from selecting a compliance date later than November 1, 2020.

Moreover, the APS Project Summary unlawfully relies on alleged “uncertainty” concerning the bottom ash BAT requirements as justification for selecting the latest possible compliance date, December 31, 2023. APS claims that the “uncertainty” stems from both the possibility that EPA will reconsider the bottom ash BAT standards and pending litigation in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals over the standards.

As mentioned above, the Clean Water Act and implementing regulations require EPA to incorporate into this NPDES permit all applicable effluent limitations that are in effect at the time the final permit is issued. The zero-discharge bottom ash BAT limits contained at 40 C.F.R. § 423.13(k)(1)(i) are in effect now, and should be in effect when EPA issues the final Four Corners permit in a few months. Moreover, the regulations concerning selection of the bottom ash BAT compliance date do not list uncertainty over potential revisions of the BAT standards as a factor to consider. *See* 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t). Nor is the speculative possibility that the BAT standards may change an “appropriate” factor to consider under 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t)(4). As discussed above, given that EPA has not even proposed a rule revising the bottom ash BAT standards, and given that EPA cannot prejudge the outcome of any rulemaking, it is entirely speculative whether EPA will revise the zero-discharge BAT limit for bottom ash. Moreover, it is always possible for EPA to convene a rulemaking to reconsider effluent limits that are currently in effect, and indeed, the CWA requires regular review of all effluent limits, *see* 33 U.S.C. § 1311(d). It would be inconsistent with the Clean Water Act’s statutory goal and structure to set the latest permissible date for complying with an existing effluent limit based on nothing more than the speculative possibility that the effluent limit may change in the future. For all these reasons, the potential for EPA to revise the underlying bottom ash BAT limits is not an appropriate factor to consider under 40 C.F.R. § 423.11(t)(4) when selecting the compliance date.

Similarly, the pending Fifth Circuit litigation cited by APS is not an appropriate or lawful basis for selecting a compliance date later than November 1, 2020. The Fifth Circuit already issued a decision resolving claims by Environmental Petitioners challenging the legacy wastewater and leachate provisions of the 2015 ELG Rule. *See Sw. Elec. Power Co. v. EPA*, 920 F.3d 999 (5th Cir. 2019). The claims in the Fifth Circuit challenging other portions of the 2015 ELG Rule, including the bottom ash BAT standards, remain in abeyance until any reconsideration proceeding concludes. Even if the abeyance of the Fifth Circuit litigation were to end, it is entirely speculative whether the Fifth Circuit would vacate and/or remand the bottom ash BAT standards. We are not aware of any precedent for a permitting agency to delay compliance with a BAT standard that is currently in effect, solely or primarily because of the speculative possibility that a court could vacate and/or remand the standard.

4. *The final permit must require compliance with the bottom ash BAT limit no later than November 1, 2020.*

As explained above, EPA has failed to “explain why allowing additional time to meet the limitations is appropriate, and why the discharger cannot meet the final effluent limitations as of” November 1, 2020. 80 Fed. Reg. at 67,883. As a result, the ELG Rule directs EPA to require compliance with the bottom ash BAT limits by November 1, 2020. *See* 40 C.F.R. §§ 423.13(k)(1)(i), 423.11(t).

The accompanying report from Dr. Ranajit Sahu provides additional support for setting a compliance deadline of November 1, 2020.³⁴ As Dr. Sahu explains, even if APS had not begun any preparations to comply with the bottom ash BAT standards, APS would need no more than 24 months to achieve compliance. But as explained above, APS has in fact been on notice of the final ELG Rule requirements since the Rule was issued in November 2015, 80 Fed. Reg. 67,838 (Nov. 3, 2015). In the preamble to the 2015 ELG Rule, EPA directed all power plant owners and operators to begin preparing to comply with the ELG Rule’s requirements:

Regardless of when a plant’s NPDES permit is ready for renewal, the plant should immediately begin evaluating how it intends to comply with the requirements of the final ELGs. In cases where significant changes in operation are appropriate, the plant should discuss such changes with the permitting authority and evaluate appropriate steps and a timeline for the changes, even prior to the permit renewal process.

80 Fed. Reg. at 67,883. Given EPA’s admonition to begin preparations to comply immediately after the November 2015 ELG Rule was issued, and that Dr. Sahu documents that compliance with the bottom ash BAT limit can be achieved within 24 months, APS had more than enough time to meet a November 1, 2020 compliance deadline. To the extent that APS has chosen not to “develop a firm schedule for implementing this project” to meet the bottom ash BAT limit, Project Summary at pdf p. 5, APS should not be rewarded with a later compliance deadline when it failed to heed EPA’s instructions to begin compliance preparations immediately after the ELG Rule was finalized in November 2015.

Even accounting for the approximately five months during which EPA stayed the effectiveness of the entire ELG Rule,³⁵ the new bottom ash BAT limits have been in effect for more than three years. Thus, based on Dr. Sahu’s conclusion that compliance can be achieved within 24 months, APS has already had ample time to come into compliance with the bottom ash

³⁴ Exhibit 14 hereto (Sahu Report).

³⁵ EPA purported to stay the entire ELG Rule on April 25, 2017. 82 Fed. Reg. 19,005 (Apr. 25, 2017). EPA claimed to withdraw the stay when it finalized its postponement of the deadlines to comply with the new, more stringent bottom ash and scrubber wastewater BAT limits. 82 Fed. Reg. 43,494, 43,496 (Sept. 18, 2017). The interval between these two actions, during which the stay was in effect, was approximately five months.

BAT requirements, and a November 1, 2020 deadline is appropriate.

Finally, permitting agencies have required other facilities to meet a November 1, 2020 deadline for complying with the bottom ash BAT limit, which supports selecting the same compliance deadline here. In renewing the NPDES permits for the Chalk Point and Dickerson plants, the Maryland Department of the Environment required compliance with the zero-discharge limit for bottom ash transport water by November 1, 2020.³⁶ The compliance deadlines in these two permits have been upheld by the Maryland Court of Appeals.³⁷

For all these reasons, the final NPDES permit issued to APS for the Four Corners plant must require compliance with the zero-discharge limit for bottom ash transport water by November 1, 2020.

C. The Final Permit Must Include a BPJ Determination for Legacy Bottom Ash Transport Water Discharged by the Four Corners Plant.

- 1. The Clean Water Act requires a permitting authority to set BAT limits for a wastestream when there are no applicable, nationwide effluent limitations guidelines establishing BAT for that wastestream.*

Each NPDES permit must ensure that discharges “will meet . . . all applicable requirements under sections 1311, 1312, 1316, 1317, 1318, and 1343 of this title.” 33 U.S.C. § 1342(a)(1). Section 1311 in turn requires that for toxic and other pollutants, there “shall be achieved . . . effluent limitations . . . which (i) shall require application of the best available technology economically achievable for such category or class” and “shall require the elimination of discharges of all pollutants” if achievable. *Id.* § 1311(b)(2)(A); *see also* 40 C.F.R. § 125.3(a) (“[t]echnology-based treatment requirements under Section 301(b) of the [CWA] represent the minimum level of control that must be imposed” in a NPDES permit). The Supreme Court held long ago that BAT must represent “a commitment of the maximum resources economically possible to the ultimate goal of eliminating all polluting discharges.” *EPA v. Nat’l Crushed Stone Ass’n*, 449 U.S. 64, 74 (1980). Moreover, “BAT limitations must ‘be based on the performance of the single best-performing plant in an industrial field.’” *Sw. Elec. Power Co. v. EPA*, 920 F.3d 999, 1006 (5th Cir. 2019) (quoting *Chem. Mfrs. Ass’n v. EPA*, 870 F.2d 177, 226 (5th Cir. 1989)).³⁸

There are two primary ways in which a permitting authority incorporates the required BAT limits into a NPDES permit. If EPA has issued nationwide effluent limitations guidelines (“ELG”) that establish BAT, each permitting authority must incorporate that BAT limit into

³⁶ *See* Exhibit 15 hereto (Chalk Point permit) and Exhibit 16 hereto (Dickerson permit).

³⁷ *See* Exhibit 17 hereto (Chalk Point decision) and Exhibit 18 hereto (Dickerson decision).

³⁸ Congress intended that permitting authorities would “use the latest scientific research and technology in setting effluent limits, pushing industries toward the goal of zero discharge as quickly as possible.” *Kennecott v. EPA*, 780 F.2d 445, 448 (4th Cir. 1985); *see also NRDC v. EPA*, 863 F.2d 1420, 1431 (9th Cir. 1988)

NPDES permits. 40 C.F.R. § 125.3(c)(1). If EPA has not issued applicable ELGs that establish BAT, then each permitting authority must determine BAT on a case-by-case basis using best professional judgment (“BPJ”). *Id.* § 125.3(c)(2).³⁹

In 1982, EPA issued ELGs establishing best practicable technology (“BPT”) limits for bottom ash transport water. *See* 47 Fed. Reg. 52,290 (Nov. 19, 1982). However, in the 1982 rule, EPA declined to set BAT limits for priority pollutants in bottom ash transport water. *Id.* at 52,297 (“EPA determined at proposal that the available data regarding the degree of toxic pollutant reduction to be achieved beyond BPT were too limited to support national limitations. Therefore, EPA did not propose BAT limitations or PSES for the priority pollutants.”). Indeed, the 1982 guidelines did not set any specific limits on the discharge of toxic metals in power plant wastewater. *See* 80 Fed. Reg. at 67,840-41.

The 2015 ELG Rule created two sets of BAT limits, based on when coal ash wastewater is generated: wastewater generated after the compliance date is subject to more stringent BAT limits; whereas wastewater generated before the compliance date is considered “legacy wastewater” and is subject to extremely lax BAT limits. For non-legacy wastewater, the BAT standard established in 2015 prohibits the discharge of any bottom ash transport water. 40 C.F.R. § 423.13(k)(1)(i). By contrast, for legacy bottom ash transport water (and all other legacy wastewater), EPA set the BAT limit “equal to the previously promulgated BPT limitations,” 80 Fed. Reg. at 67,854, which contain numeric limits for only total dissolved solids and oil and grease, and lack numeric limits for toxic metals, *see* 40 C.F.R. § 423.13(k)(1)(ii).⁴⁰

However, the BAT limits for legacy bottom ash transport water are no longer in effect. In April 2019, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with Environmental Petitioners that the legacy wastewater limits are unlawful, and vacated and remanded the legacy wastewater limits to EPA. *Sw. Elec. Power Co. v. EPA*, 920 F.3d 999, 1033 (5th Cir. 2019). As of the date of these

³⁹ EPA summarized this process in proposing a NPDES permit for the Merrimack coal-fired power plant, noting that “in the absence of promulgated technology-based effluent limits, the permitting authorities make BPJ case-by-case determinations as to BAT and BCT. *See* 40 C.F.R. § 125.3(c).” EPA, Statement of Substantial New Questions for Public Comment, Merrimack Station (NPDES Permit No. NH0001465) at 54 (2017), *available at* <https://www3.epa.gov/region1/npdes/merrimackstation/pdfs/2017-statement-snqpc.pdf>; *see also* EPA Memorandum from James Hanlon, NPDES Permitting of Wastewater Discharges at Attachment A, June 7, 2010 (providing guidance regarding the existing statutory obligation to establish technology-based effluent limits for scrubber wastewater prior to the finalization of the 2015 ELGs). Permitting authorities routinely set effluent limits using best professional judgment where there is no applicable, nationwide ELG. *See, e.g.*, Missouri State Operating Permit No. MO-0001171 at 13, 15, 17 (Apr. 22, 2011).

⁴⁰ As the Fifth Circuit explained, “[w]hereas the BAT for the other streams adopts modern technologies, they [Petitioners] claim the agency arbitrarily set BAT for legacy wastewater and leachate using the same archaic technology in place since 1982—namely, impoundments. It was as if Apple unveiled the new iMac, and it was a Commodore 64.” *Sw. Elec. Power Co. v. EPA*, 920 F.3d 999, 1004 (5th Cir. 2019).

comments, there are no nationwide ELGs establishing BAT limits for legacy bottom ash transport water.⁴¹ As a result, EPA must use its best professional judgment to set BAT limits for Four Corners' discharge of legacy bottom ash transport water—specifically, the discharge of any bottom ash transport water that is generated prior to the date EPA selects for Four Corners to meet the zero-discharge BAT standard for bottom ash transport water.

EPA must use its best professional judgment to set BAT limits for legacy bottom ash transport water even though BAT limits are in effect for non-legacy wastewater. The Fifth Circuit recently held in *Sw. Elec. Power Co. v. EPA* that the agency must set BAT limits on a wastestream by wastestream basis. In that case, EPA argued that lax BAT limits on leachate were justified because of more stringent BAT limits for other wastestreams such as scrubber and ash transport wastewaters. The Court rejected EPA's argument, stating that:

the Act does not permit the agency to set a BAT by playing one pollution source off against another. As petitioners point out, the Act instead requires a BAT determination to be made with respect to a discrete "point source." 33 U.S.C. § 1314(b)(2)(B). . . . This broad definition easily includes leachate, and the rule leaves no doubt that it treats leachate as a distinct point source. . . . The Act thus specifically requires the BAT factors be applied with respect to a specific point source—here, leachate. *See* 33 U.S.C. § 1314(b)(2)(B) (providing that regulations "shall ... specify factors to be taken into account in determining the best measures and practices available to comply with [the BAT requirements in § 1311(b)(2)] applicable to any point source ... within such category or classes" (emphasis added)). But in the final rule the agency has explicitly factored into its BAT determination the regulation of wastestreams other than leachate, which contravenes the plain text and structure of the Act.

Sw. Elec. Power Co., 920 F.3d at 1027. The Fifth Circuit's holding is consistent with EPA regulations providing that "[w]here promulgated effluent limitations guidelines only apply to certain aspects of the discharger's operation, or to certain pollutants, other aspects or activities are subject to regulation on a case-by-case basis in order to carry out the provisions of the Act." 40 C.F.R. § 125.3(c)(3). Here, the only nationwide BAT limits that are in effect apply to only the non-legacy bottom ash transport water discharged by Four Corners, and thus under 40 C.F.R. § 125.3(c)(3), EPA must set BAT limits for legacy bottom ash wastewater using its best professional judgment.

In sum, given that the 2015 BAT limits for legacy wastewater have been vacated are no longer in effect, EPA must use its best professional judgment to set BAT limits for legacy bottom ash transport water.

⁴¹ As a result of the Fifth Circuit's decision, there are no nationwide BAT limits in effect for any other legacy wastestreams as well. These comments focus solely on legacy bottom ash transport water because it is our understanding that the only coal ash wastewater that Four Corners discharges is bottom ash transport water.

2. *EPA must consider the multiple technologies that are more effective than impoundments at treating legacy bottom ash transport water, and set BAT limits based on the technology used at the best-performing plant.*

In setting BAT limits for legacy bottom ash transport water, EPA must consider technologies more effective than surface impoundments at removing toxic metals and other pollutants. EPA has repeatedly concluded that surface impoundments do not represent BAT because they are ineffective at treating the dissolved metals present in coal ash wastewaters. *See, e.g.*, 80 Fed. Reg. at 67,851 (“pollutants that are present mostly in soluble (dissolved) form, such as selenium, boron, and magnesium, are not effectively and reliably removed by gravity in surface impoundments”); 78 Fed. Reg. 34,432, 34,459 (June 7, 2013) (“For metals present in both soluble and particulate forms (such as mercury), surface impoundments will not effectively remove the dissolved fraction.”). The Fifth Circuit held that EPA’s decision to base BAT limits for legacy wastewater on the use of surface impoundments was unlawful in light of EPA’s findings that surface impoundments are archaic and ineffective. *Sw. Elec. Power Co.*, 920 F.3d at 1017 (“[T]he final rule describes impoundments as an outdated and ineffective pollution control technology, and yet the same rule chooses to freeze impoundments in place as BAT for legacy wastewater. That is inconsistent with the ‘technology-forcing’ mandate of the CWA.”).⁴² The Fifth Circuit’s decision forecloses EPA from basing BAT limits for legacy ash transport water on the use of surface impoundments, unless EPA develops a record materially different from the record for the 2015 ELG Rule—which EPA has not done here.

EPA must consider the multiple technologies that are more effective than surface impoundments at treating legacy bottom ash transport water. For example, chemical precipitation is capable of treating many of the pollutants present in bottom ash transport water. While EPA did not select chemical precipitation as BAT in the 2015 ELG Rule, EPA noted that it was an available technology for treating bottom ash transport water. *See* EPA, Final Technical Development Document at 7-36 (Sept. 2015).⁴³ Even if a portion of Four Corners’ bottom ash transport water is commingled with other wastestreams, chemical precipitation is still an available technology, because it has been used by coal-fired power plants to treat commingled coal ash wastewaters. *See* 80 Fed. Reg. at 67,855 n.29 (stating that EPA was aware of “fewer than ten plants that use chemical precipitation to treat [impoundment] wastewater that contains, among other things, ash transport water.”).

⁴² *See also id.* at 1016 (“[H]aving rejected impoundments as BAT because they would not achieve ‘reasonable further progress’ toward eliminating pollution from those streams, EPA turned around and chose impoundments as BAT for each of those same streams generated before the compliance date. That paradoxical action signals arbitrary and capricious agency action.”), 1019 (“Far from demonstrating that impoundments are the ‘best available technology economically achievable’ for treating legacy wastewater, the evidence recounted in the final rule shows that impoundments are demonstrably ineffective at doing so and demonstrably inferior to other available technologies. In light of this record, we cannot accept that an outdated, ineffective and inferior technology is BAT when applied to legacy wastewater.”).

⁴³ Available at https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/steam-electric-tdd_10-21-15.pdf.

Biological treatment systems can also address pollutants of concern in bottom ash transport water. Various vendors have been developing biological treatment systems for compliance with the ELG Rule. For example, Frontier Water Systems has developed compact biological treatment systems,⁴⁴ which EPA should consider as an available technology for developing BAT limits for legacy bottom ash transport water.

Finally, it is unclear from the existing record the extent and capabilities of Four Corners' on-site wastewater treatment system. EPA should examine whether it is feasible to route legacy bottom ash transport water to any existing wastewater treatment system at Four Corners.

D. EPA's Draft Permit Fails to Regulate All Point Sources that Discharge or May Discharge Into Navigable Waters

Section 301 of the Clean Water Act mandates that all "discharge of pollutants" be subject to a permit or otherwise comply with the CWA. 33 U.S.C. §1311(a). The term "discharge of pollutant" is defined as "any addition of any pollutants to navigable waters from any point source..." 33 U.S.C. §1362(12). The term "point source" is defined to include "any discernable, confined and discrete conveyance...from which pollutants are **or may be discharged.**" 33 U.S.C. §1362(14)(emphasis added). EPA's draft permit is deficient because it fails to require permitting for all point sources of water pollution that discharge, or may discharge, pollutants into waters of the United States from the FCPP: namely, 1) seepage from the coal ash facilities and related contamination; 2) the seepage from the garage fueling area and related contamination; 3) the discharge from the Morgan Lake spillway; and, 4) the discharge of Total Dissolved Solids and other pollutants into Morgan Lake from the FCPP and from Morgan Lake into receiving waters.

1. EPA must permit the seepage from the coal ash facilities.

The FCPP began operations in 1963.⁴⁵ As early as 1971, the State of New Mexico identified coal ash seepage from the plant.⁴⁶ In 1977, APS began operating a "system to collect seepage water from the ash disposal facilities, a system that operates today."⁴⁷

An October 4, 2007 EPA Region 9 site inspection report of FCPP revealed seepage from the FCPP coal ash disposal facilities along the eastern bank of the Chaco River.⁴⁸ These seeps

⁴⁴ See <https://frontierwater.com/how-it-works/>; see also Letter from James Peterson, CEO, Frontier Water Systems to EPA (July 5, 2017), available at <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=EPA-HQ-OW-2009-0819-6575>.

⁴⁵ See Exhibit 19 hereto (coal ash seepage timeline and map).

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ Exhibit 20 hereto (EPA Inspection Report October 4, 2007).

are more fully described in a letter from APS to OSM dated April 3, 2013.⁴⁹ A May 8, 2012 EPA Inspection Report also states:

Sanitary, fly ash and FGD blowdown wastewater is not regulated in the NDPEs Permit. Although there is no discrete outfall from the fly ash ponds, the ponds do have a potential to discharge to Waters of the U.S. through subsurface leaching.⁵⁰

The lease between the Navajo Nation and the owners of the FCPP specifically allows the discharge of coal ash seepage into Chaco River and its tributaries.⁵¹ More specifically, the Lease states,

“In addition, the Company shall have the right to dispose of waste water on the Reservation by permitting waste water from the power plant to flow from the ash disposal area into the Chaco Wash.”⁵²

This lease provision makes it clear that the Navajo Nation has authorized the discharge of wastewater from the ash disposal areas into surface waters. The FCPP power plant and related coal ash facilities are man-made point sources. Pollutants “are or may be discharging” from these point sources into navigable waters. 33 U.S.C. §1362(14). As such, EPA has a duty to subject the historic and existing seepage from the coal ash facilities to NPDES permitting requirements. EPA’s draft permit fails to comply with this obligation. The draft permit fails to: conclude and document whether a discharge of coal ash waste from FCPP is reaching the Chaco River; undertake a BPJ analysis of pollutants discharging from the coal ash facilities; apply any applicable ELGs to such a discharge; impose TBELs for pollutants discharging from the coal ash facilities; and, impose WQBELs for pollutants discharging from the coal ash facilities.

Instead of imposing effluent limitations and monitoring requirements on the seepage, the draft permit now contains the following conditions to deal with the substantial problem of seepage from coal ash disposal facilities at the FCPP, a problem that has been documented for decades.

“2. Surface Seepage

“Surface seepage intercept systems shall be maintained and operated for existing unlined ash ponds. Water collected by these intercept systems shall be returned to the double lined water decant pond. All provisions of the Seepage Monitoring and Management Plan as described below in the Special Conditions Section must be implemented...”⁵³

This provision is deficient and inconsistent with Part III A. of the draft permit because it only requires “surface seepage intercept systems” for seepage from “existing unlined ash ponds”, whereas Part III A. of the draft permit requires seepage management for “seepage below *all* ash

⁴⁹ Exhibit 21 hereto (APS letter to OSM April 3, 2013).

⁵⁰ Exhibit 22 hereto at p. 5 (EPA May 8, 2012 Inspection Report).

⁵¹ Exhibit 6 hereto, p. 6, ¶2)c. (Indenture of Lease)

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ Draft permit, p. 12, §B.2.

ponds that receive or received coal combustion residue either currently or in the past” (emphasis added). At a minimum, Provision 2 of page 12 should be amended to state that the “[s]urface seepage intercept systems shall be *constructed*, maintained and operated for *all* ash ponds.”

As to Part III A. of the draft permit, it now states

“Part III. SPECIAL CONDITIONS

“A. Seepage Management and Monitoring Plan

A Seepage Monitoring and Management Plan shall be established and implemented to determine the source of and pollutants in seepages below all ash ponds that receive or received coal combustion residue either currently or in the past. The Plan shall be established and submitted to EPA within 120 days of the issuance of this permit. The Plan shall at a minimum do the following:

1. Identify all seeps within 650 meters down gradient of such impoundments;
2. Conduct sampling (or provide summary of current data if sufficient and valid) of seepages for boron, mercury, nickel, selenium, uranium, zinc and total dissolved solids.
3. Provide information about number of flows observed and range of flows observed.
4. Provide information about exceedances of any human health, livestock, or chronic or acute aquatic life standards as established in the 2007 Navajo Nation Water Quality Standards in the samples collected for analysis.”

EPA’s proposed Seepage Monitoring and Management Plan (“SMMP”) is deficient. Although preparation of the Seepage Monitoring and Management Plan is a time bound requirement (120 days), the timeframe for the obligation to construct and operate surface seepage intercept systems for existing and future unlined ash ponds, is not specified in the draft permit. As such, the Plan is unenforceable, arbitrary, and capricious. The Seepage Plan is also deficient because it only requires the FCPP owners to “[i]dentify all seeps within 650 meters down gradient of such impoundments.” The language of the Seepage Plan must be amended to trace the flow of all seeps from their source to the point where they either terminate or reach a receiving water. EPA’s draft permit, fact sheet, and administrative record fail to contain any rationale for limiting the capture of seepage to 650 meters down gradient of such impoundments. For example, the Water Resources section of the FEIS shows coal ash seepage approximately 2.6 miles downgradient of the impoundments.⁵⁴ Further, the FEIS also states that the French drains used to collect the ash pond seepage are “2 miles long” confirming that the extent of the coal ash seepage problem far exceeds EPA’s 650 meter limit.⁵⁵ To further illustrate, 650 meters is only four tenths (.4) of a mile thus is wholly inadequate to collect the coal ash seepage located 2.6 miles or further down gradient of the impoundments. In fact, EPA’s own April 2019 Supplemental Reasonable Potential analysis admits that the coal ash seeps exist “one mile and a half downstream of Outfall 001 from Morgan Lake...”⁵⁶ If EPA intends to rely on the seepage

⁵⁴ See, Exhibit 23 hereto, p. 7 of pdf (FEIS, Section 4.5, Figure 4.5.1, displaying “seeps” and “CCB” (coal combustion byproduct) monitoring wells approximately 2.6 miles down gradient of the impoundments).

⁵⁵ *Id.* at p. 4.5-61 of FEIS.

⁵⁶ Exhibit 76 hereto, p. 3 (EPA’s April 22, 2019 Supplemental Reasonable Potential analysis

management plan to avoid NPDES permitting of the seeps, it must provide evidentiary support that the seepage monitoring plan will collect all seeps and that no seepage is entering No Name Wash or the Chaco River. EPA's administrative record for the draft permit does neither.

Also, the SMMP should require a calculation and reporting of flow for all seeps as they enter any receiving water and also require a full suite of water quality sampling of all seeps. This monitoring data should be reported monthly to EPA in Discharge Monitoring Reports. The final permit should also specify either that the obligation to finalize construction and operation surface seepage intercept systems is subject to the 120 day deadline, or impose a separate short deadline for the applicant to do so. The SMMP should also require the FCPP owners to produce all existing studies on the hydrological connection of the coal ash facilities with all waters of the United States. The SMMP should also require monthly water quality sampling immediately upstream and downstream in the receiving water both before and after any influence by any seepage. The SMMP should also require the FCPP owners to conduct dye testing or some other technical study to definitively confirm the hydrologic connection between the coal ash facilities and the receiving waters.

As described above, EPA has arbitrarily failed to subject the seepage from the coal ash facilities to CWA permitting requirements. Because these discharges have never been subject to NPDES permitting, they may constitute "new" or "increased" discharges that are subject to both anti-degradation review and impaired waters limitations. EPA's administrative record for this proceeding is silent on both these issues.

2. The draft permit fails to regulate discharges from the garage fueling area and contamination.

A February 2013 report prepared for APS by Mogollan Environmental Services documents continuing and ongoing releases of petroleum, benzene, and other petroleum byproducts from the FCPP Garage Fueling Area into soil, groundwater, and Morgan Lake.⁵⁷ The FCPP Garage Fueling Area is immediately adjacent to, and nearly surrounded by, Morgan Lake.⁵⁸ In the mid-1980's it was reported that "diesel was bubbling up" to the surface of Morgan Lake.⁵⁹ It was found that there were releases of petroleum substances from the FCPP Garage Fueling Area into Morgan Lake.⁶⁰ The results of the 2013 investigation revealed that petroleum substances are still present in the soil and groundwater at the FCPP Garage Fueling Area.⁶¹

The draft permit fails to impose permitting requirements on the discharge of petroleum substances from the FCPP Garage Fueling Area into Morgan Lake. The draft permit fails to undertake a BPJ analysis, fails to impose TBELs, and fails to impose QBELs for the

memo).

⁵⁷ Exhibit 24 hereto (2013 Petroleum Spill Report) and Exhibit 25 (Field Sampling Plan 2013).

⁵⁸ Exhibit 24 at Figure 1. *See also*, Exhibit 25 at Figure 1 and 2).

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.*

discharges from the FCPP Garage Fueling Area. The permit should include effluent limits for all pollutants expected to be found in fuels used at FCPP, including, but not limited to benzene. The discharges from the FCPP Garage Fueling Area also violates the Navajo Nation narrative water quality standards (which EPA claims are applicable) because they “[c]ause solids, oil, grease, foam, scum, or any other form of objectionable floating debris on the surface of the water body; may cause a film or iridescent appearance on the surface of the water body; or that may cause a deposit on a shoreline, on a bank, or on aquatic vegetation.”⁶² The permit must ensure that both numerical and narrative water quality standards are complied with.

The FCPP and/or Garage Fueling Areas are point sources under the CWA. As discussed below, Morgan Lake is a “water of the United States”, “navigable water”, “water of the Navajo Nation” and “water of the State of New Mexico.” As such, EPA must properly regulate this discharge of pollutants into Morgan Lake and downstream watersheds.

EPA’s response to comments on this issue for the previous 2014 draft permit argues that any discharges from the garage fueling area would be covered by the facility’s stormwater permit.⁶³ However, this response ignores that these discharges are coming from “soil and groundwater” not surface stormwater flows. Thus, the stormwater permit would do nothing to regulate the garage fueling area discharges. Further, EPA’s administrative record for the 2019 draft permit provides no evidence to contradict the technical findings in the 2013 Mogollan Environmental Services report that the source of the continuing discharges are from soil and groundwater. As such, EPA’s failure to regulate the discharges from the garage fueling area is arbitrary, capricious, and contrary to the requirements of the CWA.

3. The draft permit fails to regulate discharges from Morgan Lake via the spillway.

As discussed below, Morgan Lake is a “water of the United States,” “navigable water,” “water of the Navajo Nation,” and “water of the State of New Mexico” and discharges into the Lake must be permitted and regulated. However, if EPA refuses to do so, it still must require a permit for discharges from the Morgan Lake spillway into No Name Wash, Chaco River, and/or the San Juan River. EPA’s 2012 Inspection Report notes, there are discharges from the Morgan Lake spillway into No Name Wash and/or Chaco River during high wind events.⁶⁴ EPA’s draft permit states that Morgan Lake is a man-made cooling water pond and fails to treat it as a water of the United States. While we disagree with this conclusion, under EPA’s theory, if Morgan Lake is not a water of the United States and instead is a “waste treatment facility”, then it is a “point source” and all discharges from Morgan Lake must be permitted. EPA’s inspection report admits that such discharges should be permitted.⁶⁵ EPA’s draft permit is deficient because it fails to do so. If EPA is going to treat Morgan Lake as a “waste treatment system”, it must permit all discharges from Morgan Lake and undergo the appropriate BPJ analysis, and impose TBELs and/or WQBELs in this renewal permit.

⁶² Exhibit 11 hereto (Navajo Nation 2007 Water Quality Standards, §202A.5.).

⁶³ Exhibit 26 hereto, EPA’s Response to Comments on 2014 draft permit, Response #7, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Exhibit 22 hereto (EPA 2012 Inspection Report, p. 4).

⁶⁵ *Id.* at p. 5.

4. EPA's permit must regulate discharge of TDS into and/or from Morgan Lake

An EPA Region 9 site inspection report of the FCPP on May 8, 2012 states: “Total Dissolved Solids are built-up in Morgan Lake before being discharged to the receiving water. Elevated TDS may adversely impact downstream beneficial uses, however there is no criterion for TDS in the Navajo Nation Water Quality Standards.”⁶⁶

As discussed below, Morgan Lake itself is a “water of the United States” and “navigable water” and thus EPA must establish effluent limitations for the discharge of TDS into Morgan Lake from the FCPP and/or all related point sources.

In 2004 the Navajo Nation adopted a numerical TDS water quality standards for livestock watering of 2212 mg/l.⁶⁷ Livestock watering is a current use of Morgan Lake, as well as primary contact recreation, aquatic life, and other uses.⁶⁸ The 2004 TDS standard cannot be found in the 2007 Navajo Nation water quality standards. It is unclear why this standard was not carried forward into the 2007 Standards. We request that EPA explain why it approved the 2007 standards that appear to omit the 2004 TDS standard. Nevertheless, Morgan Lake is used for livestock watering and aquatic life and these uses must be protected by adopting TDS effluent limits and monitoring requirements into the current permit.

Even if EPA refuses to regulate discharges of TDS into Morgan Lake, it still must incorporate effluent limitations in the permit for the discharge of TDS from Morgan Lake into No Name Wash, Chaco River, and the San Juan River. EPA's permit is deficient because it fails to do so. EPA incorrectly and arbitrarily states that there are no TDS water quality standards for discharges from the FCPP. To the contrary, the current lease between the FCPP owners and the Navajo Nation contains the following provision establishing a concentration-based TDS standard:

“Total dissolved solids in the surface return flow *shall be measured at the plant release point*, and the effect of such release on the total dissolved solids in the river computed. The Lessees and Arizona agree that such water return will not increase the total dissolved solids of the San Juan River as so computed an average of more than 100 parts per million in any three calendar month period, or an average of more than 400 parts per million in any 24-hour period, provided that the river flow passes such point of return averages 200 cfs or more over such three months' period. If the river averages less than 200 cfs in such a three-month period, such returned water will not increase the total dissolved solids in the river as so computed an average of more than 100 parts per million multiplied by a factor equal to 200 cfs divided by the average actual river flows in cfs in said three-month period.”⁶⁹ (emphasis added).

⁶⁶ Exhibit 22 at p. 4.

⁶⁷ Exhibit 12, p. 30 (2004 Navajo Nation water quality standards).

⁶⁸ Exhibit 11.

⁶⁹ Exhibit 7, pp. 54-55, ¶35a.

The above lease provision requires monitoring of TDS “at the plant release point” prior to Outfall 001A and requires adoption of an effluent limitation at the same point of release from the plant to ensure that TDS is not increased above the limits established in the lease. The “plant release point” would be the power plant’s discharge *into* Morgan Lake. Alternatively, this language imposes a water quality standard for TDS in the San Juan River that must be utilized by EPA in making a reasonable potential analysis. EPA’s draft permit is defective because it fails to impose TDS monitoring requirements at the point of release of the discharge from the FCCP, fails to impose a TDS effluent limit from the FCCP plant to ensure compliance with the TDS water quality standard for the San Juan River contained in the lease, fails to require flow monitoring in the San Juan River above the point of discharge, and fails to require TDS monitoring upstream and downstream of the discharge in the San Juan River. Please include such requirements in the permit.

In addition, EPA’s March 2001 NPDES permit includes monitoring requirements for TDS at Outfall 001.⁷⁰ These requirements are consistent with those of the previous permit.”⁷¹ EPA’s draft permit violates the anti-backsliding provisions of the Clean Water Act, Section 402(o)), by eliminating effluent limitations and/or required monitoring requirements for TDS. At a minimum, the TDS monitoring requirements at Outfall 1 must be reinstated in this draft permit.

As noted earlier, we ask that the EPA apply federal, state, lease, or tribal standards for TDS and other pollutant discharges into Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, Chaco River, and the San Juan River. Alternatively, we request that EPA apply the 2004 Navajo Nation TDS standard to Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, and the Chaco River, and apply the lease TDS standards to the San Juan River. We also request that EPA perform a reasonable potential analysis and submit the same for public notice and comment. We also request that EPA collect from the FCCP owners the flow data and water quality data necessary to determine historic compliance with the TDS lease standards for the San Juan River. We ask that this compliance analysis, and EPA’s reasonable potential analysis, be released for public review and comment prior to the issuance of the final permit.

E. Morgan Lake is a “navigable water,” a “water of the United States,” a “water of the Navajo Nation,” and a “water of the State of New Mexico” and all discharges into Morgan Lake must comply with water quality standards.

The draft permit incorrectly labels Outfall 01A (Condenser Cooling Water Discharge) as an “Internal Outfall” when in fact it discharges to a water of the United States (Morgan Lake). EPA’s draft permit is deficient because it fails to assure compliance with water quality standards for pollutant discharges into Morgan Lake, which is a “navigable water,” a “water of the United States,” a “water of the Navajo Nation,” and a “water of the State of New Mexico.” Instead, the draft permit only purports to regulate pollutant discharges “of effluent from Morgan Lake to the No Name Wash, a tributary of the Chaco River which eventually drains to Segment 2-401 of the

⁷⁰ Exhibit 27 hereto, p. 2, §A, 1 (2001 NPDES Permit for FCCP). The Fact Sheet for the 2001 NPDES permit is attached hereto as Exhibit 28.

⁷¹ Exhibit 28 hereto, p. 3.

San Juan River...⁷²

Morgan Lake is a “water of the Navajo Nation”

In its previous NPDES permits, EPA regulated Morgan Lake as a water of the United States. More specifically, EPA’s 1983, 1988, and 1993 NPDES permits for the FCPP all treated Morgan Lake as a “receiving water,” and thus a water of the United States.⁷³ Any deviation from this status violated the CWA anti-backsliding provision because EPA would be imposing less stringent requirements in the subsequent permit.

EPA applies the Navajo Nation water quality standards to this permit. Therefore, EPA must apply all aspects of the Navajo Nation water quality standard regulations, including its definition of “waters of the Navajo Nation.” The Navajo Nation’s Water Quality Standards defines “waters of the Navajo Nation” as follows:

all surface waters including, but not limited to, portions of rivers, streams (including perennial, intermittent and ephemeral streams and their tributaries), **lakes**, ponds, dry washes, marshes, waterways, wetlands, mudflats, sandflats, sloughs, prairie potholes, wet meadows, playa lakes, impoundments, riparian areas, springs, and **all other bodies or accumulations of water, surface, natural or artificial, public or private, including those dry during part of the year, which are within or border the Navajo Nation. This definition shall be interpreted as broadly as possible to include all waters which are currently used, were used in the past, or may be susceptible to use in interstate, intertribal or foreign commerce.**⁷⁴ (emphasis added).

This broad definition of “waters of the Navajo nation clearly includes Morgan Lake as a because it is a “lake...within...the Navajo Nation.” This definition does not create any exception for “artificial” lakes, cooling ponds, waste treatment ponds. Instead, it broadly includes “all surface waters” including any “all other bodies or accumulations of water.” If EPA is going to apply the Navajo Nations’ water quality standards to this permit, it must also apply its definition of the “waters of the Navajo Nation.” Therefore, EPA must regulate Morgan Lake as a “water of the Navajo Nation” and “water of the United States” for purposes of this draft permit.

Further, The Navajo Nation has adopted water quality standards for all waters on the reservation.⁷⁵ EPA has approved the Navajo Nation’s water quality standards.⁷⁶ Morgan Lake is designated for the following uses: primary human contact, fish consumption, aquatic and wildlife

⁷² EPA Public Notice, p. 1.

⁷³ Exhibit 29 hereto, pp. 1 and 43 (1983 permit Authorization to Discharge May 20 1983) and Exhibit 30 hereto (1993 permit), p. 13. The 1988 NPDES Permit is attached hereto as Exhibit 31.

⁷⁴ Exhibit 11 hereto (Navajo Nation water quality standards 2007, §104, XX.).

⁷⁵ Exhibit 11 hereto (Navajo Nation water quality standards 2007).

⁷⁶ See, <http://water.epa.gov/scitech/swguidance/standards/wqslibrary/tribes.cfm> (last visited on 1/2/15).

habitat, and livestock watering.⁷⁷ The Navajo Nation water quality standards include both narrative and numerical water quality standards for Morgan Lake.⁷⁸ As noted by EPA, Section 402 and 301(b)(1)(C) of the CWA require that NPDES permits contain effluent limits necessary to meet water quality standards.⁷⁹ Morgan Lake has numeric water quality standards for a large variety of organic, inorganic, and physical pollutants.⁸⁰ EPA's Draft Permit must regulate the discharge of these pollutants *into* Morgan Lake to comply with its legal requirements under Section 402 and 301(b)(1)(C) of the CWA.

Morgan Lake is a "water of the United States"

EPA's website states:

"The definition of "waters of the United States" currently applicable in 28 states is the definition promulgated in 1986/1988, implemented consistent with subsequent Supreme Court decisions and guidance documents."⁸¹

EPA's website also states that the 1986/1988 definition of "waters of the United States" is as follows:

1986/1988 Regulatory Definition of "Waters of the United States"

40 CFR 230.3(s) The term waters of the United States means:

1. All waters which are currently used, or were used in the past, or may be susceptible to use in interstate or foreign commerce, including all waters which are subject to the ebb and flow of the tide;
2. All interstate waters including interstate wetlands;
3. All other waters such as intrastate lakes, rivers, streams (including intermittent streams), mudflats, sandflats, wetlands, sloughs, prairie potholes, wet meadows, playa lakes, or natural ponds, the use, degradation or destruction of which could affect interstate or foreign commerce including any such waters:
 1. Which are or could be used by interstate or foreign travelers for recreational or other purposes; or
 2. (From which fish or shellfish are or could be taken and sold in interstate or foreign commerce; or
 3. Which are used or could be used for industrial purposes by industries in interstate commerce;
 4. All impoundments of waters otherwise defined as waters of the United States under this definition;
 5. Tributaries of waters identified in paragraphs (s)(1) through (4) of this section;

⁷⁷ Exhibit 11, p. 27 (Navajo Nation water quality classifications for Morgan Lake 2007).

⁷⁸ Exhibit 11 (Navajo Nation water quality standards 2007).

⁷⁹ EPA Fact Sheet, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Exhibit 11 hereto (2007 Navajo Nation Water Quality Standards).

⁸¹ <https://www.epa.gov/wotus-rule/about-waters-united-states#Guidance> (last visited on June 11, 2019).

6. The territorial sea;
7. Wetlands adjacent to waters (other than waters that are themselves wetlands) identified in paragraphs (s)(1) through (6) of this section; waste treatment systems, including treatment ponds or lagoons designed to meet the requirements of CWA (other than cooling ponds as defined in 40 CFR 423.11(m) which also meet the criteria of this definition) are not waters of the United States.⁸²

According to EPA, New Mexico and the Navajo Nation are both subject to the pre-2015 regulations and guidance, which is the 1986/1988 definition identified above.⁸³

Under 40 CFR § 122.2:

Waters of the United States or *waters of the U.S.* means:

(a) All waters which are currently used, were used in the past, or may be susceptible to use in interstate or foreign commerce, including all waters which are subject to the ebb and flow of the tide;

In May 2011 the U.S. EPA issued “Draft Guidance on Identifying Waters Protected by the Clean Water Act” clarifying the meaning of these traditional navigable waters:

“For purposes of CWA jurisdiction and this guidance, waters will be considered traditional navigable waters if....

- They are waters currently being used for commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation (for example, boat rentals, guided fishing trips, or water ski tournaments); or
- They have historically been used for commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation; or
- They are susceptible to being used in the future for commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation. Susceptibility for future use may be determined by examining a number of factors, including the physical characteristics and capacity of the water to be used in commercial navigation, including commercial recreational navigation (for example, size, depth, and flow velocity.), and the likelihood of future commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation. A likelihood of future commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation, can be demonstrated by current boating or canoe trips for recreation or other purposes. A determination that a water is susceptible to future commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation, should be supported by evidence.

⁸² *Id.*

⁸³ See map at bottom of page at <https://www.epa.gov/wotus-rule/definition-waters-united-states-rule-status-and-litigation-update> (last visited on June 11, 2019).

Morgan Lake is currently used for boating, on-water fishing, and windsurfing.⁸⁴ Therefore, Morgan Lake is a traditional navigable water under the Clean Water Act.

Morgan Lake is a tributary of a Water of the United States because it contributes flow to a traditional navigable water

Under 40 CFR 122.2:

Waters of the United States or waters of the U.S. means:

(e) Tributaries of waters identified in paragraphs (a) through (d) of this definition;

In May 2011 the U.S. EPA issued “Draft Guidance on Identifying Waters Protected by the Clean Water Act” clarifying the meaning of tributaries:

“EPA and the Corps will assert jurisdiction over tributaries under either the plurality standard or the Kennedy standard, as described below.

“For purposes of this guidance, a water may be a tributary if it contributes flow to a traditional navigable water or interstate water, either directly or indirectly by means of other tributaries. A tributary can be a natural, man-altered, or man-made water body. Examples include rivers and streams, as well as lakes and certain wetlands that are part of the tributary system and flow directly or indirectly into traditional navigable waters or interstate waters. A tributary is physically characterized by the presence of a channel with defined bed and bank. The bed of a stream is the bottom of the channel. The lateral constraints (channel margins) are the stream banks. Channels are formed, maintained, and altered by the water and sediment they carry, and the forms they take can vary greatly.”

EPA’s 2001 permit acknowledges that Morgan Lake contributes flow to the San Juan River via No Name Wash and Chaco River. More specifically, EPA’s 2001 permit states, “...Morgan Lake, a tributary to No Name Wash, a tributary to the Chaco River, and then to Segment 2-401 of the San Juan River basin...”

Further, the 2019 draft permit also states:

“Outfall No. 001 discharges from Morgan Lake to the No Name Wash which is tributary to the Chaco River, which in turn drains to Segment 2-401 of the San Juan River. The discharges according to the permit application submitted by APS from Outfall No. 001 are intermittent with an average of 2.5 days per week of discharge for about 6 months in a year. The average flow rate for the discharge is 4.2 million gallons a day. The length of the No Name Wash from Outfall 001 (parshall flume) to the Chaco River is about 2.5 miles and the point where the No Name Wash meets the Chaco River is about 7 miles

⁸⁴ Exhibit 32 hereto (APS website). See also, <http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SPD/BOATINGWeb/MorganLake.html>; <https://www.aps.com/en/communityandenvironment/environment/morganlakewebcam/Pages/home.aspx>

from where the Chaco eventually meets the San Juan River. APS mostly discharges in order to regulate total dissolved solids (TDS) build up in the lake which is used for once through cooling of the generating units.”

Morgan Lake is therefore a tributary to the San Juan River, an interstate water, even though it is a “man-altered or man-made water body.”

Further, EPA previous NPDES permits for the FCPP regulated discharges into Morgan Lake and acknowledged that Morgan Lake is tributary to No Name Wash, the Chaco River, and the San Juan River. More specifically, EPA’s 2001 regulates discharges into Morgan Lake from the FCPP by stating, “Arizona Public Service Company...is authorized to discharge from the APS Four Corners Power Plant...to receiving waters named Morgan Lake...”⁸⁵ Further, the 2001 NPDES permit also acknowledges that Morgan Lake is tributary to No Name Wash, the Chaco River, and San Juan River by stating, “...Morgan Lake, a tributary to No Name Wash, a tributary to the Chaco River, and then to Segment 2-401 of the San Juan River basin...” Accordingly, any finding in the 2019 draft permit that Morgan Lake is *not* tributary to the San Juan River and/or is *not* a water of the United States is contrary to EPA’s own findings in previous NPDES permits for the facility and this is arbitrary, capricious, and contrary to law.

Further, any finding in the 2019 draft permit that Morgan Lake is *not* a water of the United States and is *not* tributary to the San Juan River is precluded by the anti-backsliding rule Section 402(o) of the CWA, that prevent EPA from renewing or reissuing an NPDES permit that contains effluent limits less stringent than those established in the previous permit.

Morgan Lake is a water of the State of New Mexico

The New Mexico Water Quality Act also broadly defines the term “water” to include, “all water, including water situated wholly or partly within or bordering upon the state, whether surface or subsurface, public or private, except private waters that do not combine with other surface or subsurface water.” NMSA §74-6-2 (H). Further, New Mexico regulations define “surface water(s) of the state” to include:

“all surface waters situated wholly or partly within or bordering upon the state, including lakes, rivers, streams, (including intermittent streams), mudflats, sandflats, wetlands, sloughs, prairie potholes, wet meadows, playa lakes, reservoirs or natural ponds. Surface waters of the state also means all tributaries of such waters, including adjacent wetlands, and manmade bodies of water that were originally created in surface waters of the state or resulted in the impoundment of surface water of the state, and any “waters of the United States” as defined under the Clean Water Act that are not included in the preceding description. Surface waters of the state does not include private waters that do not combine with other surface or subsurface water or any water under tribal regulatory jurisdiction pursuant to Section 518 of the Clean Water Act. Waste treatment systems, including treatment ponds or lagoons designed and actively used to meet requirements of the Clean Water Act (other than cooling

⁸⁵ Exhibit 27, p. 1 (2001 FCPP NPDES Permit). See also, Exhibit 33 hereto, Form 2C, p. 1 of 4 (Four Corner’s 2005 NPDES application describing Morgan Lake as a “receiving water”).

pond as defined in 40 CFR Part 423.11(m) that also meet the criteria of this definition), are not surface waters of the state, unless they were originally created in surface water of the state or resulted in the impoundment of surface waters of the state.” NMAC §20.6.4.7(S)(5).

Because Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, and the Chaco River are surface waters within the border of New Mexico that combine with other surface waters, they are “water[s]” of the State of New Mexico.” Under New Mexico regulation, Morgan Lake, No Name Wash and the Chaco River are not “closed basin[s]” because the topography does not prevent the surface outflow of water...” NMAC §20.6.4.7(C)(4). Morgan Lake is not a “waste treatment system” in New Mexico because it is a cooling pond resulting from the impoundment of surface waters of the state (the San Juan River). Further, because of the contractual waiver and EPA’s refusal to approve tribal water quality standards for Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, and the Chaco River, the Navajo Nation does not have tribal regulatory jurisdiction pursuant to Section 518 of the Clean Water Act over Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, and the Chaco River and thus they are “waters of the State of New Mexico.”

There is a hydrologic connection between the San Juan River and Morgan Lake

EPA has found that “Morgan Lake is restocked with water from the San Juan River through an intake and diversion structure located on the side of the river (Figure 23). Facility representatives indicated that they pull no more than 48 MGD from the river to pump up to the lake.”⁸⁶ EPA has also found that “Outfall 001 (Figure 20) discharges effluent from Morgan Lake to the effluent-dependent No Name Wash which flows to the San Juan River.”⁸⁷ Morgan Lake discharges water into the San Juan River via No Name Wash and the Chaco River downstream of the point withdrawal. The flow rate of this discharge from Morgan Lake is approximately 4.2 million gallons/day.⁸⁸ The San Juan River is an interstate water of the United States. These findings by EPA establish a hydrologic surface water connection between the San Juan River and Morgan Lake, thus proving that Morgan Lake is a “water of the United States” for purposes of NPDES permitting.

The second largest of the three sub-basins of the Colorado River, the San Juan River is one of the most important waterways in the Southwest. Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, and the Chaco River are tributary to the San Juan River. Morgan Lake is a 1,200-acre cooling pond for the power plant that is also operated as a public recreation area.⁸⁹ Primary contact recreation is allowed on the lake, including windsurfing, waterskiing, boating, fishing, and other activities which can result in ingestion, inhalation, and direct contact with the waters of Morgan Lake.⁹⁰ The lake is also used for livestock watering. EPA previously required the adjacent Navajo coal mine to obtain an NPDES permit for discharges into the lake, thus concluding that the lake was a

⁸⁶ Exhibit 22, p. 9 (EPA May 8, 2012 Inspection Report).

⁸⁷ *Id.* See also, p. 24, Figure 20 showing the discharge from Morgan Lake into No Name Wash.

⁸⁸ *Id.* at p. 2.

⁸⁹ <https://farmingtonnm.org/listings/morgan-lake/> (last visited July 4, 2018).

⁹⁰ Exhibit 26, pp. 15-16. Although EPA claims these uses of the lake are “incidental” and do not indicate the presence of ‘interstate commerce’, these statements are arbitrary and capricious because they are not supported by evidence in the administrative record.

“water of the United States.”⁹¹

The Navajo Nation has adopted water quality standards for all waters on the reservation.⁹² EPA approved the Navajo Nation’s water quality standards in 2009.⁹³ The Navajo Nation’s water quality standards establish water quality classifications and standards for Morgan Lake and designate the lake for the following uses: primary human contact, fish consumption, aquatic and wildlife habitat, and livestock watering.⁹⁴ The activities considered primary human contact include water skiing, which is a use of the lake.⁹⁵ The Navajo Nation water quality standards include both narrative and numerical water quality standards for Morgan Lake.⁹⁶ Morgan Lake has numeric water quality standards for a large variety of organic, inorganic, and physical pollutants.⁹⁷ Section 402 and 301(b)(1)(C) of the CWA require that NPDES permits contain effluent limits necessary to meet water quality standards.

Further, there is an aquatic life connection between the San Juan River. APS admits that there is “some incidental introduction of aquatic organisms” between the San Juan River and Morgan Lake.⁹⁸ Further APS also admits that Morgan Lake “pose[s] a risk to threatened or endangered species in nearby waterbodies (i.e. the San Juan River) if these species were to be transported downstream of Morgan Lake.”⁹⁹ Further, the Department of Fish and Wildlife found that “gizzard shad have been introduced into the San Juan River by way of Morgan Lake and have made it down to Lake Powel [sic]. Also, it is likely that the San Juan River has been the source of introduction of the common carp into Morgan Lake.”¹⁰⁰ Additionally, as recently as 2016 the US Fish and Wildlife Agency reported that APS “will develop and implement a Non-native Species Escapement Prevention Plan, which will include the following measures to minimize: (a) the risk of non-native species (plants, invertebrates, and fish) that inhabit Morgan Lake invading San Juan River...[and] b. Project Proponents will install and operate a device designed to prevent the transfer of nonnative fish species from Morgan Lake to the San Juan River.”¹⁰¹

As such, Morgan Lake has a biological connection to an interstate water of the United States, namely the San Juan River.

Morgan Lake is a “traditional navigable water” because it supports interstate and foreign

⁹¹ Exhibit 18, cover page and p. 3 (Navajo Mine NPDES permit).

⁹² *Id.*

⁹³ Exhibit 35 (EPA March 28, 2009 letter).

⁹⁴ Exhibit 11, p. 27.

⁹⁵ *Id.*, §205, pp. 12-13.

⁹⁶ *Id.* at Section 202; Table 204.1; Section 206; and p. 27.

⁹⁷ *Id.*

⁹⁸ Exhibit 36, p. 3 hereto (2005 APS Morgan Lake letter).

⁹⁹ Exhibit 37 hereto, p. 13 (CWA 316(b) Proposal for Information Selection Apr).

¹⁰⁰ *Id.* at p. 59. See also, Exhibit 38 hereto (DFW fish in lake letter).

¹⁰¹ Exhibit 39, p. 2 (Agenda BO Conservation 12). See also, Exhibit 40 (Discharge Screen Feasibility Study).

commerce and commercial waterborne recreation.

Under 40 CFR § 122.2:

Waters of the United States or *waters of the U.S.* means:

(a) All waters which are currently used, were used in the past, or may be susceptible to use in interstate or foreign commerce, including all waters which are subject to the ebb and flow of the tide;

In May 2011 the U.S. EPA issued “Draft Guidance on Identifying Waters Protected by the Clean Water Act” clarifying the meaning of these traditional navigable waters:

“For purposes of CWA jurisdiction and this guidance, waters will be considered traditional navigable waters if...

- They are waters currently being used for commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation (for example, boat rentals, guided fishing trips, or water ski tournaments); or
- They have historically been used for commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation; or
- They are susceptible to being used in the future for commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation. Susceptibility for future use may be determined by examining a number of factors, including the physical characteristics and capacity of the water to be used in commercial navigation, including commercial recreational navigation (for example, size, depth, and flow velocity.), and the likelihood of future commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation. A likelihood of future commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation, can be demonstrated by current boating or canoe trips for recreation or other purposes. A determination that a water is susceptible to future commercial navigation, including commercial waterborne recreation, should be supported by evidence.

EPA has previously recognized that Morgan Lake “is frequently used by aquatic life and recreationally. Navajo Nation and US Fish & Wildlife stock the lake with fish. Bass thrive in the lake to the point that the lake hosts bass fishing tournaments...[c]ommon recreational activities on the lake include fishing, wind surfing and jet skiing. A publicly accessible dock and boat ramp are available on the north side of the lake...”¹⁰²

There is extensive interstate commerce on Morgan Lake. Fishing clubs from New Mexico, Colorado and other states regularly hold winter fishing tournaments on the lake.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Exhibit 22, p. 10 (EPA May 8, 2012 Inspection Report). See also, p. 26, Figure 25 for photo of publicly accessible boat dock and fishermen on Morgan Lake.

¹⁰³ Exhibits 41-46 hereto (documenting interstate commerce resulting from fishing tournaments

Because the Navajo Nation requires a tribal fishing license, Morgan Lake generates extensive interstate commerce.¹⁰⁴ There is also extensive boating, water skiing and windsurfing on the lake.¹⁰⁵ As such, Morgan Lake meets the definition of a “traditional navigable water” under the Clean Water Act.¹⁰⁶

Morgan Lake is not a ‘waste treatment system’ excluded from the definition of a water of the United States.

For the first time, EPA claims that Morgan Lake is excluded from the definition of a “water of the United States” because it is allegedly falls under the “waste treatment system” exclusion.¹⁰⁷ None of EPA’s prior NPDES permits for the FCPP asserted this exemption for Morgan Lake.

Under 40 CFR 122.2 states:

“Waste treatment systems, including treatment ponds or lagoons designed to meet the requirements of CWA (other than cooling ponds as defined in 40 CFR 423.11(m) which also meet the criteria of this definition) are not waters of the United States. This exclusion applies only to manmade bodies of water which neither were originally created in waters of the United States (such as disposal area in wetlands) nor resulted from the impoundment of waters of the United States” (emphasis added).

The referenced section that supposedly defines “cooling ponds” does not exist in the current Code of Federal Regulations. However, at the time the original definition of “waters of the United States” was promulgated, “cooling ponds” were defined as “any manmade water impoundment which does not impede the flow of a navigable stream and which is used to remove heat from condenser water” 40 C.F.R. §423.11(m) (1979).

Because Morgan Lake is a manmade water impoundment that does not impede the flow of a navigable stream and is used to remove heat from condenser water, Morgan Lake is a ‘cooling pond’ and not a waste treatment system excluded from the definition of a water of the United States. Further, the “waste treatment system” exclusion does not apply because Morgan Lake resulted from the impoundment of waters from the San Juan River, a water of the United States.

on Morgan Lake).

¹⁰⁴ *Id.* and Exhibit 47 hereto.

¹⁰⁵ Exhibit 48, p. 3. See also,

<http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SPD/BOATINGWeb/MorganLake.html>;

<https://www.aps.com/en/communityandenvironment/environment/morganlakewebcam/Pages/home.aspx>

¹⁰⁶ While EPA argues that “incidental use of the cooling pond does not provide a sufficient nexus to interstate commerce to justify as assertion of federal jurisdiction” the agency provides no evidentiary support for this conclusion in its administrative record. Exhibit 26, p. 16, Response 10.

¹⁰⁷ 2019 draft permit fact sheet, p. 2, fn. 1.

Finally, Morgan Lake was not constructed wholly in uplands. Instead, it is connected to the San Juan River via a pipeline, as well as via Outfall 001 which discharges to No Name Wash, the Chaco River, and the San Juan River. The “constructed wholly in uplands” criteria does not apply to waters that are tributary to other “waters of the United States”, as is Morgan Lake.

For the reasons stated above, Morgan Lake does not qualify for the “waste treatment system” exclusion to the definition of “waters of the United States. EPA’s attempt to invoke this exclusion for the first time in 2019 violates the anti-backsliding requirements of Section 402(o) of the CWA because it results in less stringent requirements for Morgan Lake.

EPA’s analysis fails to comply with its own requirements for conducting a WOTUS determination.

In a wholly incomplete analysis, EPA cites 40 C.F.R. 122.2 for its finding that Morgan Lake is excluded from the definition of “waters of the United States.” For the reasons stated below, EPA’s “water of the United States” analysis is legally and technically deficient and is arbitrary and capricious.

First, the administrative record for this permitting proceeding confirms that neither the EPA nor U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has issued “any approved jurisdictional determinations for activities within the ordinary high water mark of Morgan Lake.”¹⁰⁸ EPA’s July 20, 2017 Memo fails to conduct a site inspection, wetlands or “water of the United States” delineation, or other required technical analysis. Instead, EPA relies solely on photographs and maps provided by APS.¹⁰⁹

Further, EPA’s factual finding that the “artificial cooling pond [was] constructed wholly in uplands” is not supported by the agency’s own administrative record.¹¹⁰ Instead, the administrative record proves that in 2005 EPA found “the dry wash that was impounded to create Morgan Lake contained valuable ecosystem functions.”¹¹¹ Thus, Morgan Lake was constructed in a watershed located on the Navajo Nation, not “wholly in uplands” as stated by EPA in 2019. This fact is confirmed by the construction of a dam on Morgan Lake for the purpose of containing the flow of the watershed. Further, EPA’s 2019 finding ignores that Morgan Lake is hydrologically connected to No Name Wash via both the dam, spillway, and Outfall 001 (all components of Morgan Lake) and thus was not constructed “wholly in uplands.”

EPA’s failure to regulate water pollution discharges into Morgan Lake is arbitrary and capricious because EPA has taken the opposite position in its NPDES permit for the Navajo Mine. In 2008 EPA issued a final permit for the adjacent Navajo Mine. EPA’s Navajo Mine permit treats Morgan Lake as a “water of the United States” by regulating discharges into Morgan Lake from the Navajo Mine and imposing effluent limitations based on water quality

¹⁰⁸ Exhibit 49 hereto (USACE email to Hagler No JD for Morgan Lake).

¹⁰⁹ Exhibit 50 hereto (2017 EPA Sheth Morgan Lake memo).

¹¹⁰ 2019 draft permit Fact Sheet, p. 3, footnote 1.

¹¹¹ Exhibit 51 hereto (EPA July 6, 2005 Morgan Lake Letter).

standards for the lake.¹¹² Further, even APS has previously admitted that Morgan Lake is “a water of the U.S.”¹¹³

Finally, Morgan Lake and the FCPP have been in operation since approximately 1960. In its previous permitting actions, EPA has never taken the position that Morgan Lake qualifies as a “waste treatment system” for purposes of 40 CFR 122.2. EPA’s finding in this 2019 draft permit is inconsistent with its previous findings, is arbitrary and capricious for the reasons stated herein, and violates the CWA anti-backsliding provisions.

In summary, EPA must treat Morgan Lake as a “water of the United States,” “navigable water,” “water of the Navajo Nation,” and “water of the State of New Mexico” for purposes of the CWA. EPA’s failure to regulate discharges into Morgan Lake is arbitrary, capricious, and violates the provisions of the CWA identified herein.

F. The FCPP has “once through cooling,” not “recirculated cooling.”

EPA’s draft permit finds that “APS operates a closed-cycle recirculating system, circulating from approximately 1000 up to about 1700 million gallons a day (“MGD”) through the FCPP manmade cooling pond, Morgan Lake.”¹¹⁴ This finding has regulatory implications for both effluent limits and CWA Section 316(b) cooling water intakes. EPA has always regulated the FCPP cooling system as a “once through” cooling system, not as a recirculated system. For the reasons stated below, EPA must continue to regulate the FCPP cooling system as a “once through” cooling system for all purposes.

First, EPA’s currently effective 2001 NPDES permit regulates Outfall 001A as a “once through cooling water” discharge.¹¹⁵ Further, as recently as 2005 even the operator APS admitted that “Four Corners has five once-through cooling Units.”¹¹⁶ APS’s 2005 renewal permit application also admits that its cooling system is “Once through Cooling Water.”¹¹⁷ APS’ attempt to re-characterize its cooling system should be rejected by EPA. Second, EPA has consistently regulated the cooling system as a “once through” system.¹¹⁸ In an EPA inspection of FCPP as recent as May 8, 2012, EPA found that “[o]nce-through cooling water from units 4 and 5 is then discharged into an effluent channel...”¹¹⁹ Third, the definition of “recirculated cooling water” in 40 CFR 423.11(h) does not apply to FCPP because the cooling water is not “passed through a cooling device for the purpose of removing heat from the water and then passed again.” Instead, it is discharged into Morgan Lake, where it is then mixed with existing water in

¹¹² Exhibit 34 hereto (EPA’s Navajo Mine NPDES Permit #NN0028193).

¹¹³ Exhibit 52 hereto, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ EPA 2019 Fact Sheet, pp. 3 and 9.

¹¹⁵ Exhibit 27 hereto, p. 3 (2001 NPDES permit).

¹¹⁶ Exhibit 37, p. 9 (CWA 316(b) Proposal for Information Selection Apr”).

¹¹⁷ Exhibit 33, p. 10 of pdf (Four Corners 2005 NPDES application). See also, pp. 51 and 56 of pdf. *See also*, Exhibit 60 hereto.

¹¹⁸ Exhibit 30 hereto (1993 permit), p. 2, Part 1, footnote 1 (p. 17 of pdf).

¹¹⁹ Exhibit 22, p. 9 (EPA May 8, 2012 inspection report). See also, p. 11.

the Lake and eventually discharged into No Name Wash. Morgan Lake is not a “device” because it is a “water of the United States.” Further, Morgan Lake is not a “closed” system. It receives approximately 50 million gallons per day from the San Juan River and discharges approximately 4.2 million gallons a day back the San Juan River from the Lake.¹²⁰ As such, it is not a “closed” re-circulating system and instead is a “once through cooling system.” FCPP’s cooling system is not best technology available (“BTA”) for purposes of 40 CFR 125.92 or 125.94.

Because EPA has historically regulated the FCPP cooling system as a “once through” system and because the cooling system does not meet the definition of “recirculated cooling water”, EPA must amend this draft permit and regulate the cooling system as a “once through” cooling system for all purposes, both to set effluent limits for discharges into Morgan Lake and for purpose of CWA Section 316(b). . EPA’s failure to regulate the FCPP system as a “once through” cooling system violates the anti-backsliding requirements of Section 402(o) of the CWA because it results in less stringent requirements for Morgan Lake.

G. The draft permit erroneously concludes that ‘discharges do not present a “reasonable potential” to cause or contribute to an exceedance of water quality standards.

The Fact Sheet for the Draft Permit states:

“In addition to technology-based effluent limitations, the Clean Water Act (CWA) Sections 402 and 301(b)(1)(C) require that an NPDES permit contain effluent limitations that, among other things, are necessary to meet water quality standards. An NPDES permit must contain effluent limits for pollutants that are determined to be discharged at a level which has “the reasonable potential to cause or contribute to an excursion above any State [or Tribal] water quality standard, including State [or Tribal] narrative criteria for water quality.” 40 CFR 122.44(3)(1)(i).¹²¹

Based on an application of these factors to the APS FCPP operations and projected wastewater quality data provided in the application, EPA concluded that the discharges do not present a “reasonable potential” to cause or contribute to an exceedance of water quality standards. Due to the facility potentially discharging to dry washes, EPA has not considered available dilution, which may be present in the receiving waters. Therefore, EPA has made the most conservative and protective assumption of no available dilution in its analysis and that water quality standards must be met at the end of pipe prior to discharge. Therefore, based on sampling data and an evaluation of discharge characteristics, EPA has concluded, consistent with the previous permit, that other than the effluent limitations for pH, TSS, Oil and Grease, which are promulgated under the

¹²⁰ Exhibit 36 hereto (2005 APS Morgan Lake letter), pp. 2-4. See also, 2019 draft permit Fact Sheet, p. 2.

¹²¹ 2019 draft permit fact sheet, p. 5.

Steam Electric Power Generation ELGs as described in 40 CFR Section 423, that there is no reasonable potential for other pollutants to cause or contribute to a violation of receiving water standards. However, EPA has included monitoring in the permit for several additional parameters in order to further verify these assumptions.”

Outfall 01A and outfall 01E of the FCPP discharge wastewaters into Morgan Lake, which enjoys the following designated uses under the 2007 Navajo Nation Surface Water Quality Standards:¹²²

Table 205.1 (continued) Designated Uses for Navajo Nation Surface Waters

Surface Water Body	Basin	Cataloging Unit	Domestic Water Supply (Dom)	Primary Human Contact (PrHC)	Secondary Human Contact (ScHC)	Agricultural Water Supply (AgWS)	Fish Consumption (FC)	Aquatic & Wildlife Habitat (A&WHbt)	Livestock Watering (LW)
Morgan Lake	San Juan	Chaco		PrHC	ScHC		FC	A&WHbt	LW

Outfall 001 discharges from Morgan Lake to the Chaco River/Chaco Wash a tributary of the San Juan River, which enjoy the following designated uses under the 2007 Navajo Nation Surface Water Quality Standards.¹²³

Table 205.1 (continued) Designated Uses for Navajo Nation Surface Waters

Surface Water Body	Basin	Cataloging Unit	Domestic Water Supply (Dom)	Primary Human Contact (PrHC)	Secondary Human Contact (ScHC)	Agricultural Water Supply (AgWS)	Fish Consumption (FC)	Aquatic & Wildlife Habitat (A&WHbt)	Livestock Watering (LW)
Chaco River/Chaco Wash, mouth to mouth of Dead Man's Wash	San Juan	Chaco		PrHC	ScHC		FC	A&WHbt	LW
San Juan River and perennial tributaries (except as listed below)	San Juan	Numerous	Dom	PrHC	ScHC	AgWS	FC	A&WHbt	LW

Because Morgan Lake, Chaco River/Chaco Wash, and the San Juan River enjoy these designated uses, they are protected by a large set of numerical water quality standards for metals and other pollutants that are enriched in discharges from coal-fired power plants.¹²⁴

Of particular concern are mercury and selenium. Selenium levels in fish from Morgan Lake have been found to be elevated to the point where public health advisories, such as the one below, have been issued:¹²⁵

Navajo Nation Fish Consumption Health Advisory

The Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency (NNEPA) in cooperation with the Navajo Nation Division of Health and Navajo Nation Fish and Wildlife Department is issuing a fish consumption advisory for Red Lake near Navajo, NM, and Morgan Lake, NM. A recent fish tissue study completed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NNEPA concluded that methylmercury concentrations in catfish caught from Red Lake exceeded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) recommended human health criterion. Selenium concentrations in bass and catfish caught from Morgan Lake also exceeded the USEPA human health criterion.

¹²² Exhibit 11.

¹²³ Exhibit 11.

¹²⁴ Exhibit 11 at Table 206.1

¹²⁵ <http://www.navajonationepa.org/Pdf%20files/unsavfish.pdf>

The U.S. EPA erroneously concluded that the discharges from the FCPP “do not present a ‘reasonable potential’ to cause or contribute to an exceedance of water quality standards” based on effluent quality analyses that employed detection limits far too high to ascertain whether discharges from the FCPP would impair water quality.

The Navajo Nation Water Quality Standard for mercury for water bodies with a designated use of Aquatic & Wildlife Habitat (including Morgan Lake, Chaco River/Chaco Wash and the San Juan River) is 0.001 micrograms per liter (0.001 µg/L) on a long-term (chronic) basis. Yet, the test method that was employed in the priority pollutant scans for outfalls 001, 01A and 01E to ascertain whether discharges from the FCPP would impair water quality (EPA Test Method 200.7) has a detection limit for mercury of 0.2 µg/L – 200 times the applicable water quality standard.

Similarly, the Navajo Nation Water Quality Standard for selenium for water bodies with a designated use of Aquatic & Wildlife Habitat (including Morgan Lake, Chaco River/Chaco Wash and the San Juan River) is 2 µg/L on a long-term (chronic) basis.¹²⁶ Yet, the test method that was employed in the priority pollutant scans for outfalls 001, 01A and 01E to ascertain whether discharges from the FCPP would impair water quality has a detection limit for mercury of 100 µg/L – 50 times the applicable water quality standard.

In addition to these inadequacies with respect to mercury and selenium, the test method that was employed in the priority pollutant scans for outfalls 001, 01A and 01E has a detection limit for **arsenic** of 100 µg/L compared to the water quality standard of 30 µg/L for waters with a designated use of Primary Human Contact, and 10 µg/L for waters with a designated use of Domestic Water Supply (the San Juan River); a detection limit for **antimony** 40 µg/L compared to the chronic water quality standard of 30 µg/L for waters with a designated use of Aquatic & Wildlife Habitat; and a detection limit for **thallium** of 100 µg/L compared to the water quality standard of 1 µg/L for waters with a designated use of Fish Consumption.

EPA relied largely on the 2012 priority pollutant scan (“PPS”) submitted by the FCPP owners in its determining that there is no reasonable potential for water quality standards to be violated by discharges from FCPP.¹²⁷ As stated above, EPA’s reliance on the 2012 PPS is arbitrary and capricious because the FCPP owners did not employ appropriate minimum detection limits to determine whether there could be a violation of water quality standards. The use of inappropriate detection limits violates the terms of the current NPDES Permit for the FCPP.¹²⁸ EPA’s reliance on the 2012 PPS is arbitrary and capricious because it fails to employ detection limits necessary to determine whether the discharge has the reasonable potential to violate water quality standards.

Finally, all waters of the Navajo Nation are protected by the following narrative water

¹²⁶ The federal water quality criteria for selenium is 5ug/l. *See*, Exhibit 53 attached hereto.

¹²⁷ Exhibit 54 hereto (Priority Pollutant Scan).

¹²⁸ Exhibit 27, p. 7, §E.1.b. (Current NPDES Permit for FCPP).

quality standard.¹²⁹

“A. All Waters of the Navajo Nation shall be free from pollutants in amounts or combinations that, for any duration:

“1. Cause injury to, are toxic to, or otherwise adversely affect human health, public safety, or public welfare.

“2. Cause injury to, are toxic to, or otherwise adversely affect the habitation, growth, or propagation of indigenous aquatic plant and animal communities or any member of these communities; of any desirable non-indigenous member of these communities; of waterfowl accessing the water body; or otherwise adversely affect the physical, chemical, or biological conditions on which these communities and their members depend.”

The draft permit is defective because it fails to include any analysis of how permitted discharges would impair narrative water quality standards in Morgan Lake despite the following evidence that such discharges have and are causing water quality impairments:

“There have been several investigations into the quality of water or fish collected from Morgan Lake (Sanchez 1972, 1973; Blinn et al. 1976, Westinghouse Electric Corporation 1975; Geotz and Abeyta 1987; USFWS 1988; Esplain 1995, Bristol et al. 1997; and this study). Sanchez (1972) reported on the quality of water, sediment and invertebrates collected from 1966 to 1972. In 1973, a fish kill occurred during August 10 through 17, 1973. An estimated 33,674 fish ranging in total length from 5 to 24 inches (127 to 609 mm) were lost during the die-off (Sanchez 1973). A blue-green algal bloom and high surface water temperatures (32.2 to 40C) were thought to be contributing factors. In 1975, the Northern Arizona University was contracted to evaluate the probable causes of previous fish kills in the lake (Blinn et al. 1976). Blinn et al. (1976) identified the relationship between bluegreen (Cyanophyta) algal blooms, elevated water temperatures, early summer warming, and anoxic conditions. Westinghouse Electric Corporation (1975) also reported on the quality of Morgan Lake fish collected during 1973 and 1975. Management of the lake was changed to reduce the potential for frequent fish kills.”¹³⁰

Under Table 204.1 “Numeric Targets for Lakes and Reservoirs” of the Navajo Nation Surface Water Quality Standards 2007, Lakes designated for use as Primary Human Contact may not contain more than 20,000 blue-green algae per milliliter. No analysis is provided in the record for the draft permit showing how the hot water discharges from outfall 01A, which were measured at 42.4 degrees Celsius (108.3 degrees Fahrenheit) during the summer,¹³¹ will affect levels of blue-green algae in Morgan Lake.

¹²⁹ Exhibit 11 at § 202.

¹³⁰Exhibit 55 hereto (United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency (2005) "Methylmercury and Other Environmental Contaminants in Water and Fish Collected from Four Recreational Fishing Lakes on the Navajo Nation" at page 12).

¹³¹ Exhibit 56 hereto (EPA Consolidated Permit Program Wastewater Discharge Information Form 2C for permit NN000019).

The draft permit is defective because it fails to include any analysis of how permitted discharges would comply with the numerical water-quality standard for temperature contained in the Navajo Nation Surface Water Quality Standards 2007, reproduced below.

- F. **Temperature:** The maximum allowable increases in ambient water temperature, expressed in degrees Celcius, due to a thermal discharge are as follows:

A&WHbt (warm water)	A&WHbt (cold water)
3.0	1.0

This does not apply to a stormwater discharge.

Morgan Lake should be considered a warm water because it typically has temperatures exceeding 20° Celsius.¹³² Therefore, permitted discharges from the FCPP should not increase the ambient water temperature of Morgan Lake by more than 3° Celsius even though Morgan Lake is a cooling pond. Under Navajo Nation Surface Water Quality Standards 2007 at § 209: “A wastewater mixing zone is a defined and limited part of a surface water body with defined boundaries adjacent to a point source of pollution, in which initial dilution of wastewater occurs, and in which certain numeric water quality standards may apply. Mixing zones shall be limited to perennial streams, lakes and reservoirs. All mixing zones shall have defined boundaries, beyond which applicable water quality standards shall be met. In no instance shall mixing zones constitute more than 10% of the surface area of a lake or reservoir ...” Therefore, any permitted discharges from the FCPP that increase the ambient water temperature of Morgan Lake by more than 3° Celsius must be limited to a defined boundary of Morgan Lake that comprises 10% or less of this water body.

EPA also prepared a supplemental memo dated April 22, 2019 supplementing its Reasonable Potential Analysis. The 2019 memo only reviews mercury and selenium data provided by the Navajo Nation from 2002-2010. The data contained seven sampling events from Morgan Lake and only one sampling event from unspecified locations in No Name Wash and seeps down gradient of the fly ash ponds. A map of the sampling sites was not provided. From this meager data, EPA concludes that “[t]here is no reasonable potential for exceedance of either mercury or selenium from the permitted discharge of cooling water from Morgan Lake to No Name Wash.” The Memo notes that one sample in No Name Wash had a mercury value of 9.2 nanograms per liter but EPA concluded, “it is very unlikely that the source of mercury is solely or even mostly from discharge Outfall 001 as the sampling point was over a mile and a half downstream of Outfall 001, and there are several other sources including runoff from other ephemeral washes and runoff from surrounding lands, as well as potential air deposition of mercury.” The conclusions reached by EPA in its April 2019 memo are arbitrary and capricious because:

¹³² Exhibit 11 at § 205 A

- EPA only reviewed mercury and selenium and no other constituents;
- EPA only provided “average” results and did not evaluate individual sample results.
- EPA did not provide a map of sampling locations
- Conclusions can not be reached based on a single sample from nearly a decade ago.
- EPA did not evaluate discharge of temperature or TDS from Morgan Lake into No Name Wash

Further, the water quality data provided by EPA show that fingerprinted coal ash byproducts, including boron and other constituents, from the coal ash ponds are reaching No Name Wash and the Chaco River. This data supports the conclusion that APS is discharging pollutants into No Name Wash and the Chaco River from point sources (the FCPP and its coal ash ponds). As such, EPA must regulate these discharges in this permit.

For the reasons stated above, EPA’s conclusions that discharges from FPCC “do not present a ‘reasonable potential’ to cause or contribute to an exceedance of water quality standards” lacks a defensible foundation.¹³³

H. EPA’s draft permit fails to identify impaired waters and need for TMDLs.

EPA’s draft permit fails to determine whether the FCPP impacts any impaired waters and whether additional effluent limitations should be placed in the permit as part of a Total Maximum Daily Load. As part of the permitting for this facility, EPA should determine whether Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, Chaco River and the San Juan River are impaired by any pollutant. If so, EPA must impose restrictive effluent limits to achieve compliance with water quality standards. EPA’s draft permit is defective because it fails to perform such an analysis and include any such effluent limitations.

I. There is no evidence that the intake system on the San Juan River is equivalent to interim best technology available (BTA) under EPA's regulation for minimizing impacts due to entrainment.

Under 40 CFR Part 125, Subpart J—Requirements Applicable to Cooling Water Intake Structures for Existing Facilities Under Section 316(b) of the Clean Water Act, the following provisions apply:

40 CFR §125.94(a):

“a) Applicable Best Technology Available for Minimizing Adverse Environmental Impact (BTA) standards. (1) On or after October 14, 2014, the owner or operator of an existing facility with a cumulative design intake flow (DIF) greater than 2 mgd is subject

¹³³ Exhibit 57 (EPA’s Reasonable Potential Analysis).

to the BTA (best technology available) standards for impingement mortality under paragraph (c) of this section, **and** entrainment under paragraph (d) of this section including any measures to protect Federally-listed threatened and endangered species and designated critical habitat established under paragraph (g) of this section.

40 CFR §125.94(d) states:

“BTA standards for entrainment for existing facilities. The Director **must** establish BTA standards for entrainment for each intake on a site-specific basis. These standards must reflect the Director's determination of the **maximum reduction in entrainment warranted after consideration of the relevant factors as specified in §125.98.** The Director may also require periodic reporting on your progress towards installation and operation of site-specific entrainment controls.”

40 CFR §125.98(f) states:

“(f) **Site-specific entrainment requirements. The Director must establish site-specific requirements for entrainment after reviewing the information submitted under 40 CFR 122.21(r) and §125.95. These entrainment requirements must reflect the Director's determination of the maximum reduction in entrainment warranted after consideration of factors relevant for determining the best technology available for minimizing adverse environmental impact at each facility.** These entrainment requirements may also reflect any control measures to reduce entrainment of Federally-listed threatened and endangered species and designated critical habitat (e.g. prey base). The Director may reject an otherwise available technology as a basis for entrainment requirements if the Director determines there are unacceptable adverse impacts including impingement, entrainment, or other adverse effects to Federally-listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat.

(1) **The Director must provide a written explanation of the proposed entrainment determination in the fact sheet or statement of basis for the proposed permit under 40 CFR 124.7 or 124.8.** The written explanation must describe why the Director has rejected any entrainment control technologies or measures that perform better than the selected technologies or measures, and must reflect consideration of all reasonable attempts to mitigate any adverse impacts of otherwise available better performing entrainment technologies.

(2) The proposed determination in the fact sheet or statement of basis must be based on consideration of any additional information required by the Director at §125.98(i) and the following factors listed below. The weight given to each factor is within the Director's discretion based upon the circumstances of each facility.

(i) Numbers and types of organisms entrained, including, specifically, the numbers and species (or lowest taxonomic classification possible) of Federally-listed, threatened and endangered species, and designated critical habitat (e.g., prey base);

EPA's duty to make a site-specific determination of the best technology available that would attain the maximum reduction in entrainment for the FCPP is not dependent on receipt of further information from the applicant. 40 CFR §125.98 (g) states:

“(g) Ongoing permitting proceedings. In the case of permit proceedings begun prior to October 14, 2014. Whenever the Director has determined that the information already submitted by the owner or operator of the facility is sufficient, the Director may proceed with a determination of BTA standards for impingement mortality and entrainment without requiring the owner or operator of the facility to submit the information required in 40 CFR 122.21(r). The Director's BTA determination may be based on some or all of the factors in paragraphs (f)(2) and (3) of this section and the BTA standards for impingement mortality at §125.95(c). In making the decision on whether to require additional information from the applicant, and what BTA requirements to include in the applicant's permit for impingement mortality and site-specific entrainment, the Director should consider whether any of the information at 40 CFR 122.21(r) is necessary.”

The “requirements of this rule will be implemented in NPDES permits as the permits are issued.”¹³⁴ When the agency began a permit proceeding prior to October 14, 2014, the permit must be issued by July 14, 2018.¹³⁵ The EPA has failed to comply with this deadline.

Further, APS has failed to comply with all of the application requirements found in Attachment A to EPA's December 11, 2014 Section 316(b) Memo, including:

- Failure to submit an adequate water baseline characterization study
- A description of the existing impingement and entrainment technology or operational measures and a summary of their performance, including reductions in impingement and mortality
- Studies addressing technology efficacy, through-plant entrainment survival and other entrainment studies
- Entrainment characterization studies
- A benefits valuation study
- A comprehensive technical feasibility and cost evaluation study
- External peer review studies.¹³⁶

The record for the draft permit reveals the following correspondence between the US EPA and the permit applicant relevant to the issue of best technology available for minimizing impacts due to entrainment:

¹³⁴ Exhibit 77 hereto, p. 3 (EPA's 2014 316(b) memo).

¹³⁵ *Id.*

¹³⁶ *Id.*, Attachment A.

From: Sheth, Gary
Sent: Tuesday, June 10, 2014 1:08 PM
To: Michele.Robertson@aps.com
Subject: RE: Questions about Morgan Lake Intake

Hi Michele,

Please provide a full description of the intake structure, mechanism, and process for intake of water from the San Juan River to Morgan Lake. Please include information about the exact location of the intake structure, design capacity, average intake volume, as well as any measures in place to minimize entrainment and impingement of biota resulting from the intake of water.

Thanks,

Gary Sheth
NPDES Permits Office (WTR-5)

The answer in the record from the permit applicant that is relevant to the issue of best technology available for minimizing impacts due to entrainment is reproduced below:

From: Michele.Robertson@aps.com
Sent: Friday, August 08, 2014 11:16 AM
To: Sheth, Gary
Cc: Pamela.Norris@aps.com
Subject: RE: Questions about Morgan Lake Intake
Attachments: removed.txt

Gary,

I apologize for the delay in responding to your request. Here is the information on the river station intake.

Morgan Lake Intake

The intake structure on the San Juan River consists of two 10- by 10-foot intake bays, placed perpendicularly to the flow of the river. These intake bays are located just upstream of the APS Weir. The weir includes a control gate that provides the ability to control water depths at the intake location. The intakes are screens with an approximately 1-inch by 3-inch opening. Approach velocities toward the screens are approximately 0.38 foot per second. No fish collection or return facilities are associated with the intake

The administrative record is lacking in the collection and presentation of data, information, and discussion of fish impingement/entrainment and whether the FCPP intakes reflect the best technology available that would attain the maximum reduction in entrainment. Maintaining the intake flow velocity to below 0.5 feet per second will reduce losses due to impingement, but not entrainment. Intake structures with screens having a mesh size of 1-inch by 3-inches, and no fish collection or return facilities, is well short of best technology available that would attain the maximum reduction in entrainment. For example, fine mesh screens with a mesh size of less than 1/5 inch (less than 5 millimeters) would significantly reduce losses from entrainment of eggs, larvae and juvenile forms of fish by the FCPP.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ U.S. EPA (2004) "Technical Development Document for the Final Section 316(b) Phase II Existing Facilities Rule: Chapter 4: Efficacy of Cooling Water Intake Structure Technologies." http://water.epa.gov/lawsregs/lawsguidance/cwa/316b/upload/Cooling-Water_Phase-

It should be noted that the FCPP owners began collection of data on fish impingement and/or entrainment in 2005.¹³⁸ The Conservation Organizations issued a Freedom of Information request to EPA requesting certain information submitted by APS to the agency on fish impingement/entrainment and intake structure alternatives.¹³⁹ Despite apparently receiving such information from APS, EPA was unable to produce these documents to the Conservation Organizations.¹⁴⁰ There is no evidence in the record for this permitting proceeding that EPA has requested the results of any fish impingement/entrainment studies, impacts on threatened or endangered species, or any intake structure alternatives from the FCPP owners. This information is vital to a determination of BTA at the FCPP. This data is especially important due to the verified presence of several threatened and endangered fish species living in the San Juan River in the vicinity of the FCPP intake structures and discharge point. The Conservation Organizations request that EPA use its information gathering authority under the CWA and/or other federal statutes to obtain all fish impingement/entrainment data and intake structure alternatives from the FCPP owners and release the information for public comment prior to finalization of the NPDES permit for the FCPP.

J. To reduce impingement and entrainment losses, the NPDES permit should place a cap on water intake from the San Juan River to reflect the applicant's retirement of three units

According to the permit Fact Sheet:

“Plant’s total generation capacity was originally 2100 megawatts, but following the shutdown of Units 1, 2, and 3 (which occurred on December 30, 2013) the capacity is now 1540 megawatts. ...

“D. Cooling Water Regulation

“APS operates a closed-cycle recirculating system, circulating from around 1000 up to about 1,700 million gallons a day (MGD) through Morgan Lake, a man-made cooling water impoundment. The Applicant withdraws up to a maximum of 48 MGD of water from the San Juan River as make-up water to replenish losses that have occurred due to blowdown, drift, evaporation within Morgan Lake and the cooling system. Currently the San Juan River intake system is equipped with a weir and a channel with a gate. If the water in the river is too low at the intake screens to supply the pumps, the gate in the channel is lowered. The gate and the weir together increase the level at the intake screens to supply the pumps. The intake screens are periodically changed out for cleaning.”

The administrative record for the Draft permit contains the following additional information:

2_TDD_2004.pdf

¹³⁸ Exhibit 58 hereto (Fish Impingement Studies).

¹³⁹ Exhibit 59 hereto.

¹⁴⁰ *Id.*

Impacts of Units 1-2-3 Shutdown

It is estimated that the shutdown of units 1-2-3 will occur about mid-year 2013. The shutdown of these three units will impact some of the water and wastewater discharges. These include:

1. The closed cycle recirculating cooling water volume will decrease by about 30%.

Because the applicant has retired more than 25% of its total generation capacity, a withdrawal of up to 48 MGD from the San Juan River is no longer necessary. Impingement and entrainment losses are proportional to the amount of water intake from the San Juan River. As a means of attaining the maximum reduction in impingement/entrainment as required by Section 316(b) of the Clean Water Act, the Draft permit must cap the applicant's intake of water from the San Juan River to a rate not more than is necessary for the applicant's reduced need for cooling water. The Conservation Organizations request, at a minimum, that the allowable water withdrawal from the San Juan River be reduced by 30% and such limitation be included as an enforceable requirement in any final permit.

K. EPA's reliance on a future, undisclosed, pumping plan to mitigate impacts to endangered fish species is arbitrary and capricious.

For the first time, the 2019 draft permit states that "EPA determined that BTA for the cooling water intake structure for the proposed permit consists of a closed cycle recirculating system pursuant to 40 CFR 125.94(c & d) and the USFWS approved Pumping Plan pursuant to 40 CFR 125.94(g)." ¹⁴¹ EPA claims "[t]he Pumping Plan includes removing the barrier between the two pump trains to reduce intake flow velocity, as well as prohibiting intake during certain periods of the year to minimize inadvertent intake of fish eggs and larvae." ¹⁴² How EPA knows the contents of the pumping plan is unknown because EPA's own draft permit does not require APS to produce the plan until 60 days after issuance of the permit. More specifically, the draft permit states, "[a] copy of the Pumping Plan must be provided to EPA within 60 days of issuance of the permit and within 30 days of any updates." ¹⁴³ Further, EPA has not produced a copy of the actual pumping plan in response to the Conservation Organizations' May 2019 FOIA request and thus have denied the public the opportunity to comment on this important aspect of the draft permit.

EPA's reliance on a future, undisclosed pumping plan for its finding that "BTA for the cooling water intake structure for the proposed permit consists of a closed cycle recirculating system pursuant to 40 CFR 125.94(c & d) and the USFWS approved Pumping Plan pursuant to 40 CFR 125.94(g)" is arbitrary and capricious because the pumping plan has yet to be created, produced to EPA, or provided to the public for review and comment with the draft permit.

¹⁴¹ 2019 draft permit fact sheet, p. 9.

¹⁴² *Id.*

¹⁴³ Draft permit, p. 12, Section B.3.b. iii.

L. EPA Failed to Comply With the Endangered Species Act.

EPA has failed to comply with the Endangered Species Act's ("ESA") requirement to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service to avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of species listed under the Act, including the endangered Colorado pikeminnow. The Colorado pikeminnow is at acute risk of extinction in the San Juan River due to a number of factors including decreased flows, mercury and selenium toxicity, and impingement/entrainment in the FCPP cooling water system. EPA's proposed permit would violate its obligation to consult and avoid jeopardy in four major respects. First, EPA's reliance on the 2015 Biological Opinion ("BO" or "BiOp") for the Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Mine Project both fails to address fatal legal flaws in that Biological Opinion. Second, EPA's draft permit fails to address significant new information subsequent to that BiOp relevant to the status of Colorado pikeminnow in the San Juan River and the threats to its continued existence. Third, EPA has arbitrarily deferred adoption of recommended monitoring measures that could enable the agency to better assess mercury and selenium levels in fish tissue. Fourth, EPA has improperly segmented the scope of its review of endangered species impacts by ignoring related actions.

The ESA implements a Congressional policy that "all Federal Departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered species and threatened species." 16 U.S.C. § 1531(c)(1). An "endangered species" is a species of plant or animal that is "in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range," while a "threatened species" is one which is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future. 16 U.S.C. § 1532(6), (20). The operative core of the ESA is a list maintained by the Secretary of the Interior of threatened and endangered species, and the ESA permits citizens to petition the Secretary to add species to that list. 16 U.S.C. § 1533(b)(3)(A).

At the heart of Congress's plan to preserve endangered and threatened species is Section 7 of the ESA, which places affirmative obligations upon federal agencies. Section 7(a)(1) provides that all federal agencies "shall, in consultation with and with the assistance of the Secretary [of Commerce or the Interior], utilize their authorities in furtherance of the purposes of this chapter by carrying out programs for the conservation of endangered species and threatened species." 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(1). The mandate of section 7(a)(2) is even clearer:

Each Federal agency shall, in consultation with and with the assistance of the Secretary [of Commerce or the Interior], insure that any action authorized, funded, or carried out by such agency ... is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of habitat of such species which is determined . . . to be critical, unless such agency has been granted an exemption for such action . . . pursuant to subsection (h) of this section.

16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(2). Thus, section 7(a)(2) imposes two obligations upon federal agencies. The first is *procedural* and requires that agencies consult with the FWS to determine the effects of their actions on endangered or threatened species and their critical habitat. *See* 16 U.S.C. § 1536(b). The second is *substantive* and requires that agencies insure that their actions not

jeopardize endangered or threatened species or their critical habitat. *See* 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(2); *see also, Florida Key Deer v. Paulison*, 522 F.3d 1133, 1138 (11th Cir. 2008).

The requirements of the ESA are triggered by “any ‘agency action’ which may be likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species or its habitat.” 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a). By this process, each federal agency must review its “actions” at “the earliest possible time” to determine whether any action “may affect” listed species or critical habitat in the “action area.” 50 C.F.R. § 402.14; 50 C.F.R. § 402.02. When there exists a chance that such species “may be present,” the agency must conduct a biological assessment (“BA”) to determine whether or not the species “may be affected” by the action. *See* 16 U.S.C. § 1536(c). The term “may affect” is broadly construed by FWS to include “[a]ny possible effect, whether beneficial, benign, adverse, or of an undetermined character,” and is thus easily triggered. 51 Fed. Reg. at 19926. If a “may affect” determination is made, “formal consultation” is required and a biological opinion must be prepared.

In determining whether an agency action jeopardizes listed species or adversely modifies critical habitat, the Services must “evaluate the current status of the listed species” and “[e]valuate the effects of the action and cumulative effects on the listed species or critical habitat.” 50 C.F.R. §§ 402.14(g)(2)-(3). This requires the Services to distinguish between the pre-action condition of all affected species and critical habitat and the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the agency’s action:

“Effects of the action” include both direct and indirect effects of an action that will be added to the “environmental baseline.” The environmental baseline includes “the past and present impacts of all Federal, State or private actions and other human activities in the action area” and “the anticipated impacts of all proposed Federal projects in the action area that have already undergone formal or early section 7 consultation.”

Nat’l Wildlife Fed’n v. Nat’l Marine Fisheries Serv., 422 F.3d 782, 790 (9th Cir. 2005) (citing regulatory definitions found at 50 C.F.R. § 402.02). This environmental baseline includes the existence of structures such as dams and power plants, but does not include fish kills or other adverse effects resulting from the *operation* of such structures and facilities, where such ongoing operation is within the control of the action agency. “The environmental baseline is a ‘snapshot’ of a species’ health at a specified point in time. *It does not include the effects of the action under review in the consultation.*”¹⁴⁴ Just as the Ninth Circuit held in the recent case of *National Wildlife Federation v. National Marine Fisheries Service*, 524 F.3d 917 (9th Cir. 2008), agencies cannot manipulate the environmental baseline in order to ignore or minimize the effects of future operation of already-built projects such as the FCPP. In *NWF v. NMFS*, the court held that it was illegal for federal agencies to attempt to disregard certain ongoing impacts of FCRPS operations, rather than focusing “on whether the action effects, when added to the underlying baseline conditions, would tip the species into jeopardy.” *Nat’l Wildlife Fed’n v. Nat’l Marine Fisheries*

¹⁴⁴ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Endangered Species Act Consultation Handbook 4-22 (1998) (emphasis added).

Serv., 524 F.3d 917, 929 (9th Cir. 2008). The court explained that there was a critical difference between the basic existence of the dams and the discretionary federal decision about how to continue operating them:

The current existence of the FCRPS dams constitutes an “existing human activity” which is already endangering the fishes' survival and recovery. See *ALCOA*, 175 F.3d at 1162 n.6 (citing 50 C.F.R. § 402.02). Although we acknowledge that the existence of the dams must be included in the environmental baseline, *the operation of the dams is within the federal agencies' discretion* under both the ESA and the Northwest Power Act, 16 U.S.C. § 839.

Nat'l Wildlife Fed'n v. Nat'l Marine Fisheries Serv., 524 F.3d 917, 930-931 (9th Cir. 2008) (emphasis added).

Issuance of a (discretionary) NPDES permit is plainly a federal action subject to the requirements of ESA section 7, and compliance with the substantive minimum requirements of the CWA does not, in and of itself, necessarily satisfy the independent substantive requirements of ESA Section 7(a)(2). See *National Association of Home Builders v. Defenders of Wildlife*, 551 U.S. 644, 666-68 (2007) (CWA, ESA, and implementing regulations require consultation and jeopardy determination for discretionary permit issuance).

Here, EPA seeks to rely on the consultation process for the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement's (OSMRE) Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Mine Energy (FCPP/NM) Project.¹⁴⁵ In 2015, OSMRE has prepared a Biological Opinion including findings on jeopardy and adverse modification and reasonable and prudent alternatives.¹⁴⁶ OSMRE's 2014 Biological Assessment finds that OSMRE's proposed operation of the FCPP “may affect and is likely to adversely affect” both the Colorado pikeminnow and the razorback sucker,¹⁴⁷ and that its proposed action will adversely modify designated critical habitat for both these listed fish species.¹⁴⁸ These jeopardy and adverse modification findings result from several adverse impacts, including but not limited to entrainment of razorback sucker at the APS weir, release of non-native fish from Morgan Lake, and impaired passage of Colorado pikeminnow at the APS weir.¹⁴⁹ “Because of the impairment of fish passage at the APS Weir and potential release of non-native fish from Morgan Lake, it is concluded that the Proposed Action would adversely modify critical habitat for Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.”¹⁵⁰ The 2015 BiOp acknowledged that operations of the Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Mine will continue to have adverse effects, including releases of mercury and selenium, blockage of fish passage, and

¹⁴⁵ See, Exhibit 70 hereto (Memorandum from Gary Speth, United States Environmental Protection Agency, Re: Review of Information and Literature to Assess Impacts on Threatened and Endangered Species and Critical Habitat Pursuant to the Federal Endangered Species Act, Nov. 10, 2014).

¹⁴⁶ Exhibit 3 hereto (BO).

¹⁴⁷ Exhibit 61 hereto (BA) at 9-1.

¹⁴⁸ Exhibit 61, FCPP/NM BA at 9-4.

¹⁴⁹ Exhibit 61, FCPP/NM BA at 9-1 to 9-3.

¹⁵⁰ Exhibit 61, FCPP/NM BA at 9-4.

release of non-native fish from Morgan Lake.¹⁵¹ The 2015 BiOp concluded, however, that the FCPP/NM Project would not jeopardize the continued existence of the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker,

EPA states that “EPA as a cooperating agency plans to use the review and analysis conducted by OSMRE and rely on the Biological Opinion developed by the USFWS to complete its obligations under ESA for this permit.”¹⁵² It goes on to claim that “[h]owever, it should be noted that because the Federal Action that EPA is simply to reissue a NPDES permit for the discharge of cooling water to a surface water on Tribal land, the impacts evaluated for this Action relate only to the uptake of water from the San Juan River to the cooling water system and discharge of cooling water to the receiving surface water.”¹⁵³ EPA’s apparent attempted partial reliance on the OSMRE FCPP/NM consultation process to fulfill its ESA obligations is misplaced for three reasons.

First, as discussed in detail below, the BiOp relies on erroneous legal and factual assumptions and methodologies in an effort to obscure or downplay the effects of continued FCPP operations on listed species and their critical habitat. For EPA to meet its obligations under section 7(a)(2) to ensure that federal actions do not jeopardize listed species or adversely modify their critical habitat, it must address and rectify these errors and omissions. Second, significant new information since the 2015 BiOp suggests that the conservation measures for the FCPP/NM Project, including reliance Colorado River Recovery program, are not sufficient to avoid jeopardy to the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker and/or adverse modification of their critical habitats.

Third, the EPA memorandum apparently attempts to argue that its Section 7 obligations include consideration only of the uptake of San Juan River water and discharge of cooling water. Under the law and FWS guidance, this constitutes improper segmentation of interrelated and interdependent actions. Under FWS consultation guidelines, “effects of the action under consultation are analyzed together with the effects of other activities that are interrelated to, or interdependent with, that action.”¹⁵⁴ These terms are defined as follows:

Interrelated actions are those that are part of a larger action and depend on the larger action for their justification. Interdependent actions are those that have no independent utility apart from the action under consideration.¹⁵⁵

EPA’s issuance of a NPDES permit for the discharge of FCPP cooling water is both an interrelated activity and an interdependent activity for purposes of the larger FCPP/NM decision. There would be no justification for the uptake and discharge of cooling water absent the continued operation of the mine and coal combustion at FCPP, nor would water intake and discharge have any utility whatsoever save for operation of the plant and its cooling needs. When federal agencies are interdependent and/or

¹⁵¹ Exhibit 3 (FCPP/NM BO) at 105-119.

¹⁵² Exhibit 70, Speth ESA Memo at 2.

¹⁵³ Exhibit 70, Speth ESA Memo at 2.

¹⁵⁴ ESA Consultation Handbook 4-26.

¹⁵⁵ 50 C.F.R. § 402.02.

interrelated, they must be combined in consultation, and a lead agency determined for the overall consultation.¹⁵⁶ NPDES permit issuance is an interrelated and interdependent action for purposes of the larger FCPP/NM action, and thus the consultation obligation to consider effects of the action includes the entirety of the actions at issue – not merely water intake and outflow.

1. Reliance on the 2015 BiOp Is Arbitrary and Capricious Due to Multiple Legal and Factual Errors

a. The Biological Opinion Omits Endangered Species Recovery Needs from Adverse Modification and Jeopardy Analyses

The 2015 BiOp is arbitrary and capricious because it excludes a “detailed discussion” regarding the species’ recovery needs as required by the ESA. Under the ESA, 16 U.S.C. 1536(a)(2), the Service must evaluate the effects and cumulative effects of the proposed project on listed species and critical habitat in the formal consultation process.¹⁵⁷ In issuing conclusions on jeopardy and adverse modification, the Service must provide a detailed discussion of its findings of the direct and cumulative effects of the proposed action considered in the BiOp in providing an analysis of such actions on the recovery of an endangered species.

In the Service’s 2015 BiOp of the FCPP/NM Project for the OSM, the Service failed to include a detailed discussion of the project’s adverse effect to the recovery of the Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker in reaching the no-jeopardy conclusion and no adverse modification conclusions. Although the BiOp mentions the issue of recovery in isolated instances in the BiOp, it fails to provide any sort of scientific, detailed discussion of the adverse impacts of the effects of the proposed action to the recovery of the species. The BiOp fails entirely to mention the delisting criteria for Colorado pikeminnow, which includes a self-sustaining population in the San Juan River. Similarly, the BiOp makes only one mention of the criteria for downlisting and then fails entirely to discuss whether meeting that criteria is feasible given the myriad and decades-long impacts of the FCPP/NM Project. Further, the BiOp’s analysis and conclusion of impacts to critical habitat fails entirely to address any recovery criteria. This omission is particularly troubling, given that the threshold mercury levels set by the BiOp for adverse modification of critical habitat correlate with extirpation of the Colorado pikeminnow from the San Juan River.¹⁵⁸ Similarly the BiOp’s no jeopardy and no adverse modification analyses for the Razorback sucker do not address the recovery criteria, particularly the requirement of a self-sustaining population. These omissions render the no-jeopardy and no adverse modification conclusions of the BiOp arbitrary and capricious.

¹⁵⁶ 50 C.F.R. § 402.02 (“*Effects of the action* refers to the direct and indirect effects of an action on the species or critical habitat, together with the effects of other activities that are interrelated or interdependent with that action, that will be added to the environmental baseline.”).

¹⁵⁷ 50 C.F.R. §402.14(g)(3).

¹⁵⁸ Exhibit 3, (BO) at 155.

i. The Biological Opinion Excludes Major Sources of Selenium Pollution from Baseline Conditions and Cumulative Impacts

The BiOp unlawfully excludes from its analysis significant expected increases in selenium concentrations in the San Juan River due to the approved expansion of the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project (“NIIP”).¹⁵⁹ The full expansion of NIIP was approved by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), following informal consultation with the Service in 1999.¹⁶⁰ In the draft Biological Opinion for the Desert Rock Energy Project (DREP), the Service predicted that completion of NIIP would lead to a 119% increase in selenium concentrations in the San Juan River, resulting in significant impairment of Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker.¹⁶¹ The BiOp attempts to justify the exclusion of selenium increases from NIIP by stating that “BIA has agreed to reconsider its effects findings associated with the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project (NIIP) and other irrigation projects. BIA has begun developing additional scientific information that may be necessary to supplement their BA (BIA 1999). Therefore, potential future Se discharges potentially from BIA irrigation projects and associated effects to listed species were not considered part of cumulative effects during the ESA consultation.”¹⁶² BIA’s informal agreement to “reconsider” its prior findings, however, is no basis for excluding the expected impacts from the fully approved future expansion of NIIP. The BiOp’s failure to consider this significant projected increase in selenium concentrations in the San Juan River was arbitrary and capricious.

Significant omissions aside, the BiOp’s discussion of selenium impacts to Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker is also arbitrary and capricious. The BiOp states that selenium deposition from the NMEP will cause significant harm to eggs and ovaries of Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker. But the BiOp provides no information about how it arrived at such figures, no citation to any authorities, no discussion of population-level impacts, and no discussion of projected selenium increases in the San Juan River.¹⁶³ This latter point is significant because a number of the Service’s own documents predict an increase in selenium concentrations in the San Juan River, with increasing negative impacts to Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker. Furthermore, the BiOp’s no-jeopardy and no adverse modification conclusions rely on “conservation measures,” but no conservation measures actually address selenium concentrations in the San Juan River. Further, the BiOp’s reliance on the effects of stocking to mitigate impacts to critical habitat is illogical. Putting more fish in the river may, temporarily, provide the illusion of a stable fish population, but it does nothing to alter the underlying habitat conditions that threaten the fishes’ survival and recovery. Notably, the BiOp recognizes that current habitat conditions are “insufficient to support successful Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker recruitment at levels that will provide for the species conservation.”¹⁶⁴ Further, Miller 2014 recognizes that if stocking were to cease, the pikeminnow

¹⁵⁹ Exhibit 3, BO at 14.

¹⁶⁰ Exhibit 3, BO at 14.

¹⁶¹ Exhibit 64, Desert Rock Energy Project draft BiOp at 106.

¹⁶² Exhibit 3, BO at 15.

¹⁶³ Exhibit 3, BO at 119.

¹⁶⁴ Exhibit 3, (BO) at 136.

population would plummet and population would quickly be extirpated. Thus, currently the primary constituent elements in the San Juan River are insufficient to support Colorado pikeminnow or Razorback sucker and the myriad negative impacts of the Project will only worsen these conditions, as the BiOp recognizes. It is illogical for the BiOp to conclude, in these circumstances, that the Project will not adversely modify critical habitat.

b. The Biological Opinion Fails to Analyze Cumulative Impacts of Climate Change

The BiOp recognizes that the impacts of climate change are projected to be significant throughout the American Southwest, including the San Juan Basin. The best-available science predicts streamflow in the San Juan River will decrease by eight to forty-five percent by mid-century.¹⁶⁵ The BiOp acknowledges that this dramatic reduction in water will “make it increasingly challenging” to meet flow requirements, especially the high flow requirements that provide both for channel maintenance and create the backwater habitat required by Colorado pikeminnow. The BiOp also recognizes that this “may also exacerbate contaminant issues.”¹⁶⁶ Despite this acknowledgement, the BiOp fails to factor these projected significant changes into its analysis of the overall impacts of the project on Colorado pikeminnow. The BiOp does not consider potential increased mercury and selenium concentrations due to reduced flows in its analysis of the impacts of those pollutants. Nor does the BiOp consider reduced flows in its analysis of impingement/entrainment, water withdrawals (the BiOp notes that any increased depletions beyond 3,000 AFY will harm Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker), or the blockage of fish passage due to the APS weir. This failure was arbitrary and capricious and in violation of the ESA. Notably, the BiOp considered the cumulative effects of climate change in its analysis of impacts to the southwestern willow flycatcher and the yellow-billed cuckoo.¹⁶⁷ By contrast, the BiOp failed at any point to consider how the project impacts of climate change would affect or exacerbate the FCPP/NMEP’s impacts on the Colorado pikeminnow or the Razorback sucker.

Further, while the BiOp acknowledges that climate change will lead to significant changes in streamflow in the San Juan River, it fails to address other climate change related impacts that may adversely affect Colorado pikeminnow. For example, the BiOp does not consider that water shortages and reduced precipitation due to climate change could cause irrigators to call on previously unused water rights, which in turn would further reduce instream flows. This would be particularly problematic given that the San Juan River is over appropriated: if all water rights are used (which is currently not the case), there would be no water for fish.

Climate change will also affect the timing of flows in the San Juan River. This could in turn interfere with spawning. It is possible that Colorado pikeminnow and the Razorback sucker would not be able to adjust their spawning in response to changes in runoff and river flows.¹⁶⁸ In its draft BiOp for DREP, the Service noted that “fish may not be able to adjust to an earlier

¹⁶⁵ Exhibit 3, (BO) at 68.

¹⁶⁶ Exhibit 3, (BO) at 104.

¹⁶⁷ Exhibit 3, (BO) at 132.

¹⁶⁸ Exhibit 64, Desert Rock Energy Project draft BiOp at 70-71.

spawning date, especially if it were one or two months earlier.”¹⁶⁹ Increased air and water temperatures could lead to increased mercury uptake by Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker. Altered river conditions could also create an environment in which non-native species could out-compete native Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker. The BiOp fails entirely to address the harmful impacts of climate change, rendering its analysis arbitrary and capricious and in violation of the Endangered Species Act.

Moreover, the BiOp bases its conclusions regarding jeopardy and adverse modification of critical habitat on the current state of the San Juan River and the expectation that that state will remain at the completion of the Project in 2042. However, the best available science clearly demonstrates that the climate in the Southwest is changing rapidly and that the San Juan River will be very different in 2042 than it is currently. The failure of the BiOp to assess the impacts of the Project in light of the environment that will exist in 2042 when it is completed was arbitrary and capricious and inconsistent with the Endangered Species Act and its implementing regulations.

c. The Biological Opinion Fails to Consider Impacts of Fish Stocking or Reduced Genetic Diversity of Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker

The BiOp bases its conclusions regarding jeopardy and adverse modification of critical habitat in large part on the SJRRIP’s ongoing fish stocking program.¹⁷⁰ There is, however, no analysis of the various potentially negative impacts of this massive fish stocking effort, particularly on the effect of stocking on any remaining wild Colorado pikeminnow or Razorback sucker in the San Juan River. Artificial stocking of fish has inherent risks of genetic introgression, hybridization, inbreeding depression, and outbreeding depression. Hatchery fish can also threaten wild stocks by competition, predation, and potential transmission of disease. Stocking can lead to decreased genetic diversity, reduction in effective population, and long-term genetic drift, all of which affect the long-term health of the species. Stocking should only be considered a temporary management tool to be used as a last resort. Notably, stocking cannot be considered a long-term solution because, aside from the negative effects of stocking, stocking does not address underlying habitat problems.

The Service’s BiOp relies primarily on the ongoing, massive stocking efforts of SJRRIP to justify its no jeopardy and no adverse modification conclusions. However, at no point does the BiOp address the many potential negative effects of artificial stocking. Further, the BiOp relies heavily on the population viability analysis from Miller 2014 to justify its no jeopardy and no adverse modification conclusions, but Miller 2014 also does not address potential inbreeding depression or the impacts of stocking on the remaining wild Colorado pikeminnow in the San Juan River. The BiOp’s complete failure to address the potential impacts of stocking and lack of genetic diversity was arbitrary and capricious.

¹⁶⁹ *Id.*

¹⁷⁰ Exhibit 3, BO at 132-36.

d. The Biological Opinion Fails to Employ Best Available Science or Adequately Assess the Impacts of Mercury Deposition on Endangered Species

The BiOp's analysis of mercury impacts is wholly inadequate. The BiOp relies significantly on the analysis and modeling from EPRI 2014 and the population viability analysis from Miller 2014. Based on these models, the agency concludes that mercury levels will only reach levels that cause "significant decline" in Colorado pikeminnow populations in 2046, five years after the cessation of the FCPP/NMEP.¹⁷¹ The BiOp fails however to assure that these models accurately reflect real world conditions. For example, the EPRI 2014 study premises its analysis on annual mercury emissions from the Four Corners Power Plant of 102 lbs/yr.¹⁷² The BiOp itself notes however that the projected annual emissions from the power plant are in fact 50% higher, 149 lbs./yr.¹⁷³ Further, the BiOp, in accepting the analysis from EPRI 2014, repeatedly adopts the lowest possible estimates of mercury emissions and concentrations in water and fish, without providing any explanation for rejecting higher mercury levels. The ERPI 2014 study and BiOp rejected actual water quality measurements in favor of lower estimates based on modeling. The BiOp consequently adopts EPRI 2014's estimated mercury concentrations that are significantly lower than actual measurements, alternative models, and the Service's own calculations. No justification for these decisions is provided. The Service provides no explanation for accepting EPRI's modeled mercury concentrations over the other measurements, models, and calculations. The BiOp then adopts the lowest possible estimate of mercury transfer to Colorado pikeminnow eggs, without providing any explanation, even though the transfer rate adopted by the Service was up to two orders of magnitude lower than other studies had estimated.¹⁷⁴ Next the BiOp adopted lower injury estimates from ERM 2014a, b (a study paid for by the Navajo Mine's strip mine operator—BHP Billiton), which were notably lower than estimates from the peer reviewed Dillon 2010 report. The BiOp also relied on the population viability analysis of Miller 2014 to establish the supposed threshold for adverse habitat modification from mercury, even though Miller 2014 expressly did not address behavioral or genetic injury to Colorado pikeminnow. Miller 2014 acknowledges that its analysis is an underestimate of mercury impacts because of these exclusions. The BiOp recognizes that continuing mercury pollution in the San Juan River will cause behavioral injury in 43 to 60 percent of Colorado pikeminnow¹⁷⁵ and also estimates that these behavioral injuries will lead to mortality of 1.1% of the adult pikeminnow population.¹⁷⁶ Despite this, the BiOp's no jeopardy and no adverse modification conclusions relied entirely on the population viability analysis of Miller 2014, without addressing or explaining the projected harmful behavioral or genetic injury to pikeminnow. On account of these multiple, unexplained unrealistically low estimates, the BiOp failed to use the best available science and failed to adequately assess mercury impacts on Colorado pikeminnow and their critical habitat. This conclusion is all the more arbitrary because

¹⁷¹ Exhibit 3, BiOp at 133, 135.

¹⁷² Exhibit 3, BiOp at 134.

¹⁷³ Exhibit 3, BiOp at 26.

¹⁷⁴ Exhibit 3, BiOp at 82.

¹⁷⁵ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 118.

¹⁷⁶ *Id.*

it does not take into account at all lead pollution in the basin, which is a recognized threat to Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker.

e. The Biological Opinion Fails to Assess Impacts of Impingement on Endangered Fish

The Arizona Public Service Company (APS), part owner of the FCPP, operates a Weir for the FCPP in the San Juan River Basin action area. The APS Weir is used to divert water from the San Juan River to Morgan Lake, for use in coal plant operations.¹⁷⁷ River diversion to Morgan Lake occurs just upstream from the APS Weir by two 8 by 8.5 foot intake pipes.¹⁷⁸ There is one diversion pump at each intake pipe.¹⁷⁹ The pipes pump river water to a single pipe for transport to Morgan Lake.¹⁸⁰ Both intake pipes are fully screened with 1 by 3 inch mesh screens.¹⁸¹ The pumps divert an average of 76.4 cfs (cubic-feet per second) daily, depending on the seasonal flow of the river, with the greatest withdrawal occurring in the summer, when river flows are the lowest.¹⁸² Annually, an average of 27,682 acre-feet per year (AFY) of water is pumped from the San Juan River to Morgan Lake, though APS has the right to withdraw nearly twice this amount.¹⁸³ The intake pipes were installed pursuant to the original FCPP lease.¹⁸⁴ No modifications to the intake pipes are planned or proposed by project proponents.¹⁸⁵ The Weir does not have any fish passage, collection or return facilities.¹⁸⁶ The APS Weir's intake pipes are located in critical habitat for the Colorado pikeminnow.¹⁸⁷

Although the Service observed that the risk of impingement was an adverse effect, the Service's failed to include any detailed discussion of the project's adverse effect of impingement for the jeopardy or adverse modification of critical habitat of the Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker. This omission was arbitrary and capricious.

f. The Biological Opinion Fails to Consider Foreseeable Impacts from the Project that Will Occur After 2041

The Service concludes that the proposed action, along with cumulative effects, will not adversely modify or destroy critical Colorado pikeminnow habitat because mercury concentrations are not expected to reach critical levels until 2046.¹⁸⁸ The agency argues that it is

¹⁷⁷ Exhibit 61 (BA) at 65.

¹⁷⁸ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 109.

¹⁷⁹ Exhibit 61 (BA) at 65.

¹⁸⁰ *Id.*

¹⁸¹ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 109.

¹⁸² Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 110.

¹⁸³ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 27; Exhibit 61 (BA) at 65.

¹⁸⁴ Exhibit 61 (BA) at 65.

¹⁸⁵ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 144.

¹⁸⁶ Exhibit 61 (BA) at 65.

¹⁸⁷ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 114.

¹⁸⁸ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 135.

precluded by law from assessing any cumulative impacts that occur after completion of the action.¹⁸⁹ Because the proposed action (mine expansion and extension of the lease for the power plant) will be complete in 2041, the agency insists that it must ignore the critical impacts projected to occur in 2046.¹⁹⁰ The BiOp is mistaken as a matter of law. The ESA requires the Service to consider the impacts of the proposed action along with cumulative impacts for the duration of the effects of the proposed action, even if those effects extend beyond the completion of the proposed action. Accordingly, the BiOp's analysis of impacts to critical habitat is mistaken as a matter of law. The EPRI (2014) report on which the Service principally relies models mercury concentrations well beyond 2041. It is also arbitrary for the Service to rely on this report throughout the BiOp, but then arbitrarily conclude that the report is not reliable for mercury estimates beyond 2041.

g. The Biological Opinion Improperly Bases Its Conclusions on Jeopardy and Adverse Modification on Uncertain and Vague Mitigation Measures

The BiOp identifies eleven voluntary conservation measures drafted by the action agencies and project proponents.¹⁹¹ The conservation measures were developed after the release of the initial Biological Assessment.¹⁹² The Service relied on these proposed conservation measures to mitigate the adverse effects that “would otherwise occur as a result of the proposed action...”¹⁹³ The Service incorrectly relied on the implementation and success of the drafted conservation measures to reach the no jeopardy or adverse modification conclusion.

First, although an agency may rely on a clear, definite commitment of resources for future improvements that minimize the adverse impacts of a proposed project, it may not depend on such future improvements in reaching a no jeopardy or adverse modification determination if they are not binding or they are uncertain or vague.¹⁹⁴ This is because the ESA requires the agencies' to *assure* that the species and their critical habitat will not be jeopardized or adversely modified. In the BiOp, the conservation measures were listed in the “Description of the Proposed Action” section. At the time of the BiOp's release, implementation of the conservation measures had not begun in the action area. Additionally, the measures were not included in the initial project proposal. Finally, the Service failed to include any discussion of the conservation measures in the effects analysis of the proposed action. Therefore, the measures were incorrectly relied on by the Service in reaching a no jeopardy or adverse modification determination.

Next, the conservation measures were improperly incorporated in the reasonable and prudent measures and terms and conditions of the incidental take statement. Reasonable and prudent measures are only issued after a no jeopardy or adverse modification determination is made. By contrast, the conservation measures were relied on by the Service in reaching the no

¹⁸⁹ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 135.

¹⁹⁰ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 135.

¹⁹¹ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 28-31.

¹⁹² Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 28.

¹⁹³ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 132.

¹⁹⁴ *Nat'l Wildlife Fed'n v. Nat'l Marine Fisheries Serv.*, 524 F. 3d 917, 936 (9th Cir. 2008).

jeopardy or adverse modification conclusion. Thus, the Service incorrectly relied on conservation measures which cannot retroactively to mitigate adverse effects of the project. This retroactive application of the conservation measures directly contradicts the preventative intent of the ESA. Further, the conservation measures are not sufficiently specific or binding. They do not address all of the adverse impacts from the Project, such as water withdrawals and selenium loading. In many cases, as with mercury, the pumping, and non-native fish releases, the conservation measures are merely vague promises to formulate plans to mitigate impacts in the future. Similarly, because there is no discussion about *how* the conservation measures will supposedly offset the impacts of the Project, there is no indication that the conservation measures will entirely offset the harmful effects and, if not, whether the remaining adverse impacts will cause jeopardy or adverse modification to Colorado pikeminnow, Razorback sucker, or their critical habitat.

Further, reliance on the Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker stocking programs to supposedly mitigate impacts was arbitrary and capricious. There is no indication and no obligation that these programs will continue through the entirety of the project life (2041). Further, artificial propagation of stocked fish does not offset impacts to wild fish and, because it does not address impacts to the primary constituent elements for Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker critical habitat, it cannot “mitigate” those effects. All it does is temporarily mask the admittedly insufficient and degraded critical habitat in the San Juan River.

h. The Biological Opinion’s Conclusions on Jeopardy and Adverse Modification of Critical Habitat Are Inconsistent

The Service’s BiOp is also arbitrary and capricious because its ultimate determinations are inconsistent. Key to the BiOp’s no jeopardy determination is the conclusion that “any increases in Hg deposition are due, not to the proposed action, but attributable to global sources.”¹⁹⁵ By contrast, in reaching its no adverse modification determination, the BiOp states that the lack of co-occurrence of the primary constituent elements for Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker are “attributable to the degraded environmental baseline, the proposed action and future predicted increased global contributions of Hg to the basin.”¹⁹⁶ Further, the BiOp also recognizes that mercury deposition from FCPP “ha[s] a clear but lesser effect” on overall mercury deposition in the San Juan Basin.¹⁹⁷ Inconsistent findings and conclusions are the mark of arbitrary decision-making. The Service cannot maintain on one hand that continued mercury deposition from FCPP does not contribute to the worsening problem of mercury pollution in the San Juan River and, on the other hand, admit that mercury deposition from the proposed action has a clear contribution to the problem and that impacts on endangered fish are “attributable” to the proposed action. Furthermore, there is no rational connection between the agency’s findings that Colorado pikeminnow and Razorback sucker are unable to recruit at sufficient rates to sustain their populations under current conditions (which are expected to worsen), and its conclusion that the species will not face jeopardy because of continuation of current conditions

¹⁹⁵ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 134.

¹⁹⁶ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 136.

¹⁹⁷ Exhibit 3 (BiOp) at 134.

(along with non-specific and non-binding mitigation measures).

2. EPA Must Take Into Account New Information Regarding Endangered Fish Populations and Baseline Mercury and Selenium Levels

The 2014 BA acknowledges that “the available data on San Juan River mercury body burdens and mercury toxicity in fish clearly indicates that current mercury body burdens are at levels that may result in adverse effects to Colorado pikeminnow populations in the San Juan River.”¹⁹⁸ The FWS has previously determined that baseline mercury levels in the San Juan River basin are causing reproductive impairment in 64 percent of pikeminnow, a number which is expected to rise to 72 percent by 2020. Exhibit 64 hereto (Desert Rock BiOp) at 96. Even with the shutdown of Units 1-3 and the anticipated installation of pollution controls on Units 4-5, the FCPP is a major source of these mercury concentrations in the San Juan River basin, and its emissions of mercury are significantly contributing to these effects. The San Juan River basin is one of only three sub-basins where pikeminnow still survive, and it is critical to their long-term recovery from the brink of extinction.¹⁹⁹

Subsequent research has continued to show that, even with continued Recovery Program efforts, Colorado pikeminnow have been unsuccessful at reestablishing sustainable populations in the San Juan River. A 2019 peer-reviewed study of Colorado pikeminnow and mercury exposure noted that the San Juan River population contains essentially zero wild-spawned adults:

The status of wild Colorado pikeminnow populations in all upper basin rivers remains tenuous. The San Juan River population consists almost exclusively of stocked fish, the last capture of a wild adult having occurred in 2000 (Ryden 2003; Furr and Davis 2009; Durst and Franssen 2014). At least some of the stocked fish have survived to maturity and the presence of larvae in the system verifies successful reproduction has occurred. However, recruitment of these wild-produced larvae to the adult phase has not yet been documented (Durst and Franssen 2014).²⁰⁰

Mercury is an element that occurs naturally, but it is also a local, regional, and global pollutant that is harmful to wildlife and human health.²⁰¹ Atmospheric mercury is produced from, among other things, combustion of coal at power plants, which releases mercury into the air where it is then deposited by precipitation water bodies, where micro-organisms convert it to

¹⁹⁸ Exhibit 61 (FCPP/NM BA) at 6-20.

¹⁹⁹ See United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado pikeminnow (*ptychocheilus lucis*) recovery goals: amendment and supplement to the Colorado squawfish recovery plan (2002).

²⁰⁰ Exhibit 62 hereto (Barbara Osmundson and Joel Lusk, Field Assessment of Colorado pikeminnow Exposure to Mercury Within Its Designated Critical Habitat in Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico 22-23, Archives of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology (2019) 76:17–30, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00244-018-0566-2>).

²⁰¹ See, MSI Report attached hereto as Exhibit 63.

methyl mercury – a particularly toxic form – at which point it becomes biomagnified through the food chain.²⁰² A recent study by the Mountain Studies Institute reports that coal-fired power plants are the largest human source of mercury emissions in the United States, and atmospheric deposition appears to be the dominant source of mercury contamination in North America.²⁰³

There are high mercury levels in southwestern Colorado and northwestern New Mexico. The state of Colorado has posted advisories warning against eating fish from McPhee, Totten, Narraguinnep, and Vallecito reservoirs and Navajo Lake due to mercury accumulation.²⁰⁴ Nine water bodies in northwestern New Mexico have mercury consumption advisories.²⁰⁵ Sediment cores at four high-elevation lakes in the San Juan Mountains show mercury concentrations that are up to six times above pre-industrial times. San Juan County, New Mexico is among the highest emitters of mercury among U.S. counties due to its coal-fired power plants including FCPP.²⁰⁶ Data collected from Mesa Verde National Park show mercury deposition levels that are among the highest in the western U.S.²⁰⁷ Modeling of 47 single storm events from 2002 to 2008 and subsequent identification of storm source direction indicate that 87 percent of mercury deposition came from south of the Park – in particular, from air-pollution plumes from FCPP and the San Juan Generating Station (“SJGS”), another coal-fired power plant located nearby.^{208 209}

FCPP is a “significant source” of mercury deposition at Mesa Verde National Park.²¹⁰ FCPP has installed air pollution measures for sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, and these emission reductions correlate with decreasing trends of sulfate, nitrate, and chloride, and an increasing trend in pH in precipitation, at the Park.²¹¹ Unlike SJGS, however, FCPP has not installed mercury pollution control measures, and there has been no change in mercury concentrations and deposition in the Park.²¹² Current rates of mercury deposition in the San Juan River basin from FCPP are expected to be unchanged over the next decade.²¹³

The Colorado pikeminnow is a critically-endangered fish and top natural predator in the Colorado River that has been federally protected since 1967. The pikeminnow is imperiled due

²⁰² See, Exhibit 64 hereto.

²⁰³ See MSI Report.

²⁰⁴ *Id.*

²⁰⁵ *Id.*

²⁰⁶ *Id.*

²⁰⁷ *Id.*

²⁰⁸ *Id.*

²⁰⁹ Public Service New Mexico (“PNM”), the operator of SJGS, recently installed new pollution controls at SJGS as part of a court-ordered Consent Decree. These new improvements include mercury removal on Units 3 and 4 of SJGS. The improvements were completed in early 2009, and are expected to reduce mercury emissions by 62 percent. APS has not taken steps to install any such improvements at FCPP.

²¹⁰ MSI Report.

²¹¹ *Id.*

²¹² *Id.*

²¹³ See Exhibit 64 (Desert Rock BiOp) Appendix A.

to widespread destruction and modification of the Colorado River basin, including its tributaries, where it once occurred. It currently survives as a result of stocking programs in some areas of the upper and lower Colorado River basins, and in a limited stretch of the San Juan River. The San Juan River is critical to the long-term survival and recovery of the Colorado pikeminnow.

In considering the effects of the Desert Rock Energy Project – a coal-fired plant that was proposed to be sited on the Navajo Nation within 20 km of FCPP – FWS considered the effects of atmospheric mercury deposition to endangered and threatened species including the Colorado pikeminnow.²¹⁴ Using a threshold for adverse effects of 0.2 mg/kg WW, 64 percent of Colorado pikeminnow experience reproductive impairment due to mercury presently.²¹⁵ By 2020, the Desert Rock BiOp finds that mercury deposition in the San Juan River basin is expected to increase by 35.4 percent without or 35.5 percent with the construction of the proposed Desert Rock Energy Project.²¹⁶ For this reason, FWS’s draft biological opinion predicts that 72 percent of Colorado pikeminnow in the San Juan River basin will experience mercury-induced reproductive impairment by 2020 – which “is likely to *jeopardize* the continued existence of the Colorado pikeminnow.”²¹⁷ Neither the FCPP/NM BiOp nor either of the ERAs even attempts to provide such quantitative assessment of probable levels of reproductive impairment. The Deposition ERA, acknowledging risks to fish from mercury and selenium, goes on to state that “[a]lthough risks to mobile adult fish are likely overestimated by the [critical body residues “CBRs”], and in particular by the [No Observed Effect Concentration] CBRs, the potential for risks to sensitive life stages and listed species cannot be ruled out.”

²¹⁴ See Exhibit 64 (Desert Rock BiOp) at 106; The Desert Rock BiOp was prepared by FWS pursuant to section 7(a)(2) of the ESA, which imposes a “substantive duty on federal agencies” to “insure” that any action they undertake or authorize is “not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species”; it is each agency’s duty to “insure no jeopardy.” 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(2); 51 Fed. Reg. at 19926. The ESA’s implementing regulations set forth a process by which an action agency ensures that its affirmative duties under section 7(a)(2) are satisfied. 50 C.F.R. § 402.14(a); *Sierra Club v. Babbitt*, 65 F.3d 1502, 1504-05 (9th Cir. 1995). By this process, each federal agency must review its “actions” at “the earliest possible time” to determine whether any action “may affect” listed species or critical habitat in the “action area.” 50 C.F.R. § 402.14. If the biological assessment concludes that the action is “likely” to adversely “affect listed species,” the agency must enter into “formal consultation,” with FWS. *Id.* §§ 402.14(a), 402.01(b), 402.12(k); *Gifford Pinchot Task Force v. U.S. Forest Service*, 378 F.3d 1059, 1063 (9th Cir. 2007). In formal consultation, after evaluating all relevant information, FWS prepares a “biological opinion,” which considers the current status of the species, the environmental baseline, and the effects of the proposed action, and concludes “whether the action, taken together with cumulative effects, is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species. . . .” *Id.* § 402.14(g)(2)-(4). If “jeopardy” is likely to occur, FWS must prescribe in the BiOp “reasonable and prudent alternatives” to avoid that result. 50 C.F.R. § 402.14(i)(1)(ii).

²¹⁵ *Id.*

²¹⁶ *Id.* at 3.

²¹⁷ *Id.* at 120 (emphasis added).

Subsequent research has continued to show that mercury concentrations in the tissue of Colorado pikeminnow throughout its range exceed levels shown to have adverse physiological and behavioral effects, and that baseline mercury contamination is sufficiently high as to lead to expected negative effects at the population level.²¹⁸ The researchers examined muscle tissue from Colorado pikeminnow throughout their range and found that fish longer than 400 millimeters contained mercury above recommended toxicity guidelines.

A recent decline in wild adults has been reported for the Green River basin (Bestgen et al. 2016a, b) as well as the upper Colorado River (Osmundson and White 2017; Elverud and White 2017). Especially concerning is the very weak age-0 representation in the middle Green River from 1999 to 2013 (Bestgen and Hill 2015; Bestgen et al. 2016a). A similar decline in young of the year fish (YOY) in the Colorado River from 1997 to 2013 led researchers to conclude that recruitment rates have been insufficient to offset adult mortality rates Exhibit 62 (Osmundson and White 2017).

Water regulation is thought to negatively affect reproductive success and habitat suitability for young (Bestgen and Hill 2015; Osmundson and White 2017), while persistently high densities of nonnative predators (e.g., smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*), northern pike, and walleye), particularly in the Yampa River (Johnson et al. 2008; USFWS 2014a, b, 2015), reduce survival of juveniles. In combination, rates of recruitment to the adult stage are depressed. Predation by nonnative fish on young Colorado pikeminnow is an obvious, direct cause of mortality, while river regulation and the pathways by which associated impacts affect reproduction and recruitment are more complex and therefore less well understood. Layered on this are the effects of environmental contaminants. Our results, along with those from studies of other fish, suggest mercury burdens are sufficiently high in Colorado pikeminnow that negative effects at the population level should be expected.

Due to the failure of stocked fish to survive to adulthood in the San Juan River, the researchers found relatively few examples of large adult fish to sample in the San Juan. “Many of the stocked Colorado pikeminnow in the San Juan River were < 400-mm long, and those that were larger had concentrations exceeding the toxicity guideline.” They noted, however, that

A population viability analysis recently modeled for Colorado pikeminnow in the San Juan River estimated that current levels of mercury toxicity would reduce reproductive success by 2% among newly recruited adult females (Miller 2014). As these females age, the percent injury was expected to increase to 5%. If mercury deposition in the San Juan River increases in the future as anticipated, injury estimates are predicted to increase to 3.5–9%. Under this assumption, the estimated injuries to both reproductive success and agespecific survival led to decreases in simulated population growth potential (Miller 2014). Thus,

²¹⁸ Exhibit 62, Osmundson and Lusk 2019 at 26.

anticipated mercury load increases in the San Juan sub-basin are expected to reduce the effectiveness of current recovery efforts.²¹⁹

* * *

High mercury concentrations are known to adversely affect reproductive output and adult survival in fishes. For Colorado pikeminnow, the high concentrations documented here may act multiplicatively with other threats to reduce population growth rate and ultimately impact recovery potential. Mercury exposure was found in all sampled Colorado pikeminnow. Those > 400-mm long contained mercury above recommended toxicity guidelines designed to protect demographic endpoints, such as reproduction and survival. Although the role that selenium may play in counteracting mercury toxicity is unknown, the relationship we found between mercury concentration and reduced body condition strongly suggests that injury is occurring. Tissue-level studies are needed to better understand physiological pathways of impairment and quantify toxicity effects. Managers tasked with restoring sustainable Colorado pikeminnow populations need to consider mercury contamination as an important threat to demographic rates and recovery of Colorado pikeminnow.

Despite this well-documented threat, EPA continues to rely entirely on a 2014 BiOp and a recovery program that has neither succeeded in establishing self-sustaining populations nor addressed, in any way, mitigation of mercury and selenium toxicity. EPA must engage in separate consultation, employing the best available current scientific information, to evaluate whether the proposed discharges, in conjunction with the continued operation of the Four Corners Power Plant, will contribute to mercury-related impairment, and resulting population-level effects, in endangered fish.

Given EPA's obligations to avoid jeopardy and contribute to the recovery of listed species under the ESA, it is not sufficient to simply conclude that the proposed action contributes to risks that would exist with or without continued FCPP operation.²²⁰ Rather, it must actually take a hard look at what the levels of harm are, including reproductive and other sublethal effects, under all scenarios (including comparing FCPP operation and closure), against a baseline that includes existing conditions and other local, regional, and global sources. In 2009, FWS determined that Desert Rock would jeopardize the continued existence of the Colorado pikeminnow and would adversely modify its critical habitat. FWS reached this determination, which is set forth in the peer-reviewed Desert Rock BiOp, in part due to existing coal-fired power plants, including FCPP, which have degraded the environmental baseline to such a degree

²¹⁹ Exhibit 62, Osmundson and Lusk 2019 at 25-26.

²²⁰ Exhibit 61, FCPP/NM BA at 9-4 (“Atmospheric emissions from FCPP were reduced substantially at the end of the baseline period due to the shutdown of Units 1, 2, and 3, but some emissions will continue to occur and add to this condition, although the amount of this contribution is anticipated to be minute and would not increase the potential effects on these species.”)

that the emissions from an additional coal plant, Desert Rock, would have driven the pikeminnow to extinction in the San Juan River, one of only three sub-basins where it still survives.²²¹ FWS determined that 64 percent of Colorado pikeminnow currently experience reproductive impairment due to mercury.²²² FWS also determined that by 2020, mercury deposition in the San Juan River basin is expected to result in 72 percent of pikeminnow being reproductively impaired.²²³

The Desert Rock BO and its conclusions are based on conservative estimates. Among other things, the Desert Rock BO does not specifically consider the significant contribution of mercury from CCW disposal at the Navajo Mine. According to EPA's TRI, which provides BHP reported data from 2000-2007, thousands of pounds of mercury have been disposed of in the Navajo Mine annually as "minefill."²²⁴ The CCW is not treated prior to disposal and a liner system or other control mechanism is not used, *i.e.*, to prevent saturation and migration of the mercury or other constituents into surface or ground waters which flow directly into the San Juan River. The DEIS acknowledges, but does not analyze at all, the fact that releases are occurring from CCW disposal sites and that CCW leachate contains selenium. DEIS 4.5-14, 4.5-57 ("Previous studies found two primary areas of groundwater seepage beneath the ash disposal areas, the "north seep" and "south seepage area" (APS 2013)").

In reaching its conclusions in the Desert Rock BO, FWS relied on: (1) muscle tissue samples ("plugs") collected from Colorado pikeminnow collected throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin, including within the San Juan River;²²⁵ (2) estimates of brain-tissue population-scale mercury concentrations derived from muscle-brain mercury tissue concentration ratios established in peer-reviewed literature;²²⁶ and, (3) peer-reviewed brain tissue mercury concentration thresholds for reproductive impairment derived.²²⁷ The BA should have been

²²¹ The Desert Rock Energy Project has been on hold following the EPA's Environmental Appeals Board ("EAB") remand of a Prevention of Significant Deterioration permit to EPA, in part due to violations of ESA in connection with the analysis of Desert Rock's effects to endangered and threatened species. *See In re Desert Rock Energy Company, LLC*, 2009 EPA App. LEXIS 28 (EPA App. 2009).

²²² Exhibit 64, Desert Rock BiOp.

²²³ *Id.* Adult fish with diets high in mercury do not typically experience associated mortality; rather, they deposit excess mercury or selenium in the yolks of developing eggs that fry then use as an energy and protein source; it is at this stage that developmental anomalies occur. *Id.* at 120-21. The deformities are either lethal or cause the fry to be more susceptible to predators or other environmental stressors. *Id.*

²²⁴ *See* Environmental Protection Agency, *Toxics Release Inventory*, available at: <http://www.epa.gov/tri/>.

²²⁵ Environmental Contaminants Data Management System (ECDMS) Catalogs, *Hg in San Juan River Colorado Pikeminnow Muscle* (obtained from Desert Rock BiOp record) (attached as Exhibit 66).

²²⁶ *See* Appendix E, *Mercury concentrations in both brain and muscle tissues from fish toxicity studies* (obtained from Desert Rock BiOp record) (attached as Exhibit 65 hereto).

²²⁷ Raw data on effects to Pikeminnow (obtained from Desert Rock BiOp record) (attached as

supported by similar reliance on actual physical evidence, not merely statistical models. Moreover, although the ERAs advocate consideration of “alternative” and more permissive thresholds for toxic exposure, they nevertheless acknowledge that the scientific-consensus exposure levels used in the Desert Rock BiOp are appropriate for listed species and sensitive life stages.

Because, even under conservative estimates baseline mercury levels already exceed thresholds for reproductive impairment in a majority of individuals within Colorado pikeminnow, FCPP’s past and ongoing mercury emissions already jeopardize Colorado pikeminnow by polluting the fish’s critical habitat and preventing its survival and recovery. Because already-deposited mercury that has bio-accumulated in the San Juan River ecosystem will persist for decades, any future mercury emissions from FCPP will worsen baseline conditions for Colorado pikeminnow and other listed species. The fact that these species are already at risk does not excuse EPA/OSMRE from taking a hard look and disclosing the extent of, intensity of, and comparative effects of various alternatives on those risks.

The BA mischaracterizes APS’s own ecological risk analyses.

For its evaluation of potential effects of future emissions, the BA relies almost exclusively on two Ecological Risk Analyses prepared on behalf of Arizona Public Service.²²⁸ These ERA’s attempt to quantify a “hazard quotient,” a method of determining whether a particular constituent of potential ecological concern (“COPEC”) poses a risk to a specified biological receptor. San Juan ERA at 4-5; BA at 4-7. The actual quotient in question refers to an exposure point concentration (“EPC”) divided by an ecological screening value (“ESV”). San Juan ERA at 4-1, 4-5. The DEIS relies on the fact that hazard quotients for mercury and selenium exposure would be extremely high even without future FCPP emissions to avoid engaging in any quantitative or even qualitative analysis of the incremental effects of either FCPP emissions or cumulative emissions on pikeminnow and sucker toxicity, mortality, reproduction, or recovery. The ERA makes clear, however, that the hazard quotient method is designed only to determine whether or not a risk exists (i.e. whether or not the HQ is greater than 1), and that it does not quantify or describe the scope or severity of that risk. *See* San Juan ERA at 6-19 to 6-20 (“The simple ‘HQ’ approach provides a conservative measure of the potential for risk based on a ‘snapshot’ of conditions and the hazard quotient approach has no predictive capability. HQs are measures of levels of concern, not measures of risk.”) (“The HQ is not a measure of risk . . . the HQ is not a population-based measure, HQs do not refer to the number of individuals or percentage of the exposed population that is expected to be impacted . . . HQs are not linearly scaled, the level of concern for a receptor with a HQ of 10 may not be twice the concern over a HQ of 5.”) Because risk does not scale linearly with HQ nor does HQ quantify the extent of potential population effects, the existence of extremely high HQs alone does not excuse EPA from at least making some reasoned attempt to quantify or otherwise describe the numbers of endangered fish that will be adversely affected both with and without FCPP, and to assess the resulting impacts on species survival and/or recovery.

Exhibit 66 hereto).

²²⁸ *See* Exhibit 61, BA at 4-1 to 4-12.

The BA acknowledges briefly, but then fails to act upon, substantial limitations the hazard quotient approach in addressing community- and population-level effects:

It is important to recognize that these ERAs do not directly address potential effects to species communities or populations, but rather address potential effects to individuals. For generic ecological receptors, population-level effects may be of greater relevance than effects to individuals. It is generally assumed that as the number of affected individuals increases, the likelihood of population-level effects also increases. However, effects on individual organisms may occur with little or no population or community-level effects and, therefore, the analysis presented here is considered conservative in the context of population-level risk. Nevertheless, for special-status species and, in particular, federally listed species, potential effects to individuals may be relevant, especially for immobile early life-stage individuals.²²⁹

Despite this acknowledgment, the DEIS's treatment of listed species, including the Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, and southwestern willow flycatcher, fails to undertake any informed analysis of population-level effects or effects on sensitive life stages.

EPA must address reactive gaseous mercury deposition.

EPA must better evaluate FCPP/Navajo Mine Complex's impact on endangered Colorado pikeminnow, the razorback sucker and their critical habitat. Both fish would be exposed to mercury emissions through surface and groundwater contamination and ambient air exposure, deposition, and runoff into aquatic habitats, and subsequent bioaccumulation through the food chain.²³⁰ Upon entering the San Juan River ecosystem, microorganisms convert mercury to methylmercury, a highly toxic form of mercury.²³¹ Because methylmercury is stable and accumulates through the food chain, the highest mercury concentrations are found in top predators, such as the Colorado pikeminnow, causing reproductive impairment, behavioral changes, and brain damage.²³² The FWS and OSM must evaluate the relative contribution of reactive gaseous mercury deposition from FCPP and other coal-fired power plants in the action area. The Desert Rock BiOp notes that "[t]he reactive form of mercury is often deposited to land or water surfaces much closer to their sources due to its chemical reactivity and high water solubility" and that "[p]articulate mercury is transported and deposited at intermediate distances depending on aerosol diameter or mass."²³³ Data from Mesa Verde National Park show mercury concentrations in precipitation that are "among the highest measured in the United States" and "have trajectories that trace back to within 50 km of the FCPP and SJGS," supporting the theory that "air masses passing from south Arizona and near these coal-fired power plant facilities

²²⁹ Exhibit 61 (FCPP/NM BA) at 4-7.

²³⁰ Exhibit 64 (Desert Rock BiOp) at 120.

²³¹ *Id.*

²³² *Id.*

²³³ *Id.* at 74.

[FCPP and SJGS] are contributing to high deposition of mercury there.”²³⁴ There is also a “clear increase” in mercury deposition in lake bottoms in southwestern Colorado that correlates with the construction of FCPP and SJGS between 1963 and 1977.²³⁵ These two plants “are among the largest sources of mercury emissions in the western U.S.”²³⁶ The BiOp suggests but does not explicitly link the reactive form of mercury presumably coming from FCPP and SJGS and the fact that pikeminnow are experiencing reproductive impairment due to mercury.

Analysis of mercury in muscle plugs and emissions sources.

EPA and FWS should undertake an analysis to determine whether and how much of the tissue-bound mercury in endangered Colorado pikeminnow is derived from mercury deposited by FCPP and other regional coal-fired power plants. The BA does not answer this question. The ERAs, by focusing solely on the narrow question of whether a hazard quotient is greater or less than 1 (whether a risk exists or not) under various scenarios, also fail to address the relative contribution of FCPP and other four corners plants to mercury accumulation in fish tissues. In order to determine the sources from which mercury in endangered fish muscle tissue samples is derived, EPA must, as part of the permitting and consultation process, undertake a study to compare isotopic signatures of mercury in endangered fish tissue samples to isotopic signatures of mercury from FCPP and other regional and pan-regional mercury sources and the role of permitted discharges in mercury and selenium loading in endangered fish. Short of undertaking of this or another such analyses, neither EPA nor USFWS can ensure that FCPP’s past, ongoing, and future mercury deposition is not significantly responsible for elevated mercury and corresponding jeopardy in endangered San Juan River fish.

EPA Must Immediately Adopt Standards Based on Endangered Fish Tissue Concentrations

In 2016 communications between FWS and EPA, FWS recommended six conditions for NPDES permits designed as reasonable and prudent measures to minimize adverse impacts to endangered species including the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.²³⁷ These measures were to include (a) evaluation of relationships between water column concentrations and fish tissue concentrations; (b) use of Navajo Nation and EPA fish tissue criteria for mercury and selenium respectively; (c) EPA’s provision of “an analysis of the duration, magnitude, concentration and contribution of the flows in the vicinity downstream from the NPDES permitted discharges to clarify the potential contribution of such flows to the overall impacts from Hg and Se,” (d) antidegradation provisions if fish tissue concentrations are well below guidelines; (e) water quality based effluent limitations if permitted discharges contribute to

²³⁴ *Id.* at 75; *see also* Exhibit 63 (MSI Report).

²³⁵ *Id.*

²³⁶ *Id.* at 76.

²³⁷ *See* Agenda, BO Conservation Measure Implementation Quarterly Meeting, Four Corners Power Plant and Navajo Mine Energy Project at 4-6 (Nov. 30, 2016), attached as Exhibit 67 hereto.

exceeding standards; and (f) a requirement to monitor effluents for mercury and selenium.²³⁸ EPA, however, has incorporated only measure (f) (water column monitoring) into the permit, deferring implementation of measures (a) through (e) to the “next permit cycle.”²³⁹ Although EPA asserts, without detail, that it has “initiated a longer term effort to identify appropriate protocols for evaluating fish tissue concentration and water column values,”²⁴⁰ it has failed to incorporate multiple reasonable and FWS-recommended measures into permit terms and conditions. In particular, given recent available data regarding the failure of pikeminnow recovery efforts and baseline mercury contamination, failure to immediately incorporate conditions requiring monitoring of fish tissue concentrations, compliance with Navajo Nation and EPA mercury and selenium tissue standards, and effluent limitations where necessary, violates EPA’s obligation to prevent jeopardy and adverse modification to listed fish. EPA has provided no reasonable justification for deferring implementation of measures (a) through (e) until the “next permit cycle,” which will allow for at least five years, if not more, of unnecessary impacts to endangered fish.

Impingement and Entrainment Will Jeopardize Colorado Pikeminnow and Razorback Sucker and Adversely Modify Critical Habitat

Operation of water intake structures will adversely modify critical habitat for Colorado pikeminnow and kill and injure adult and larvae Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker through impingement and entrainment. Considered alongside the current status of the fish and an environmental baseline of jeopardy from mercury and selenium contamination, operation of intake structures will jeopardize the continued existence of listed species.

The APS Weir at RM 163.3 is located in designated critical habitat for Colorado pikeminnow and upstream of designated critical habitat for razorback sucker. The weir extends across the San Juan River and impeding its flow, bank to bank. The weir diverts water from the San Juan River into two 10 by 10 ft. intakes. Exhibit 61 (BA) at 7-12. Each intake is covered by 1 by 3 inch wire mesh screen. *Id.* The intakes run in two modes at all times of day, extracting either 31 (17,000 gpm, 24.5 million gpd) or 71 (32,000 gpm, 46 million gpd) cubic feet of river water per second. *Id.* The former mode runs from October to May; the latter, higher flow, from May to October. *Id.*

The weir adversely modifies critical habitat for Colorado pikeminnow by impeding migration within critical habitat:

[t]he weir lies within the critical habitat for Colorado pikeminnow, and may affect, and is likely to adversely affect the function of the habitat for the conservation and recovery of the species, as this structure may impede the migration of Colorado pikeminnow within its critical habitat (Listing Factor A, USFWS 2002a, b).g Factor A, USFWS 2002a, b).²⁴¹

²³⁸ *Id.* at 4-5.

²³⁹ Letter from Elizabeth Sablad, EPA, to Alex Birchfield, FWS (May 20, 2019), attached as Exhibit 68.

²⁴⁰ Permit Fact Sheet at 12.

²⁴¹ See Exhibit 61, BA at 7-12.

Larval or adult Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker can be killed or injured when entrained or impinged. Death from impingement and entrainment can occur immediately or later as a result of injuries sustained during contact with a cooling water intake system. EPA defines impingement and entrainment as follows:

Impingement takes place when organisms are trapped against intake screens by the force of the water being drawn through the cooling water intake structure. The velocity of the water withdrawal by the cooling water intake structure may prevent proper gill movement, remove fish scales, and cause other physical harm or death of affected organisms through exhaustion, starvation, asphyxiation, and descaling.

Entrainment occurs when organisms are drawn through the cooling water intake structure into the cooling system. Organisms that become entrained are typically relatively small, aquatic organisms, including early life stages of fish and shellfish. As entrained organisms pass through a facility's cooling system they may be subject to mechanical, thermal, and at times, chemical stress.²⁴²

The BA acknowledges that intakes will entrain and kill endangered Colorado pikeminnow:

Colorado pikeminnow larvae typically enter the drift from mid-July to early August and drift passively for 3 to 6 days after emergence (USFWS 2009). Larvae would be subject to loss at the diversion for about 30 days. Because the fish drift with the currents, it is assumed that they would be entrained in direct proportion to the amount of flow diverted and the proportion of larvae that enter the drift upstream of the diversion point.

The SJRRIP currently stocks the San Juan River with Colorado pikeminnow. Approximately 300,000 to 400,000 Colorado pikeminnow approximately 6 months of age (50 to 65 mm in size) are stocked each year. Historically, larger fish have been stocked, but there are no plans to do so in the future. Since 2007 nearly all of these fish have been stocked above the APS Weir. These fish could also be vulnerable to entrainment at the diversion. These fish are stocked in October and November when flows in the San Juan River are 728 to 1,530 cfs (USGS Gage 09365000). The diversion is typically operating in the 17,000 gpm mode during this time (37 cfs), and is diverting between 2.4 and 5.1 percent of the flow. These fish actively swim and do not drift passively, as the larvae do, so they would not necessarily be entrained in proportion to the amount of flow diverted. Behavioral characteristics are known to influence the entrainment risk of fish. However, these characteristics are unknown for Colorado pikeminnow, and so it cannot be predicted whether their entrainment risk would be higher or lower than that predicted by the proportion of water diverted. Therefore, it is assumed that these fish could be

²⁴² Final Rule: National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System-Final Regulations to Establish Requirements for Cooling Water Intake Structures at Phase II Existing Facilities, 69 Fed. Reg. 41,576, 41,586 (Jul. 9, 2004) [hereinafter "2004 Cooling Water Intake Structures at Phase II Rule"].

entrained in proportion to the amount of flow diverted.²⁴³

And:

The Proposed Action, in combination with baseline conditions and reasonably foreseeable future conditions, may affect and is likely to adversely affect Colorado pikeminnow, as a result of entrainment at the Arizona Public Service Company (APS) Weir, release of non-native fish from Morgan Lake into the San Juan River via No Name Wash and the Chaco River, and atmospheric emissions of contaminants that are already present in watershed in quantities that may adversely affect the species.²⁴⁴

And:

OSMRE concludes that the Proposed Action may affect and is likely to adversely affect Colorado pikeminnow as a result of entrainment at the APS Weir, release of non-native fish from Morgan Lake into the San Juan River via No Name Wash and the Chaco River, and atmospheric emissions of contaminants, which are already present in watershed in quantities that may adversely affect the species.²⁴⁵

OSMRE concludes that the Proposed Action may affect and is likely to adversely affect razorback sucker, as a result of entrainment at the APS Weir, release of non-native fish from Morgan Lake into the San Juan River via No Name Wash and the Chaco River, and atmospheric emissions of contaminants, which are already present in watershed in quantities that may adversely affect the species.²⁴⁶

In formal consultation, after evaluating all relevant information, EPA/FWS must prepare a “biological opinion,” which considers the current status of the species, the environmental baseline, and the effects of the proposed action, and concludes “whether the action, taken together with cumulative effects, is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species....” *Id.* § 402.14(g)(2)-(4). If “jeopardy” is likely to occur, EPA/FWS must prescribe in the BiOp “reasonable and prudent alternatives” to avoid that result. 50 C.F.R. § 402.14(i)(1)(ii).

Here, the proposed action will adversely modify critical habitat for Colorado pikeminnow and kill and injure adult, juvenile and larvae Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker through impingement and entrainment. Considered alongside the current status of the fish, including an environmental baseline of jeopardy from mercury and selenium contamination, *any* impingement or entrainment at intake structures will jeopardize the continued existence of Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. EPA/FWS must therefore prescribe in the BiOp “reasonable and prudent alternatives” that avoid jeopardy from impingement and entrainment. 50 C.F.R. § 402.14(i)(1)(ii).

²⁴³ Exhibit 61, BA at 7-13.

²⁴⁴ *Id.* at xiv.

²⁴⁵ *Id.* at 9-1.

²⁴⁶ *Id.*

EPA/FWS must require closed-cycle or dry cooling technology in a reasonable and prudent alternative(s) (RPA).

Closed-cycle cooling systems recirculate cooling water in low-profile towers, reducing water withdrawals and fish kills between 95 and 98 percent over once-through cooling systems. In its Clean Water Act 316(b) rulemaking process, analyses and comments thereto, EPA has at its disposal, and must make available to FWS in this instance, extensive information on the benefits of closed-cycle cooling technology for river fish, including San Juan River endangered fish. Commenters provide as reference information for closed-cycle cooling systems comments provided by Riverkeeper et al. to EPA's rulemaking.²⁴⁷ In that rulemaking, EPA analyzed and concluded the effectiveness of closed-cycle cooling system for reducing impingement or entrainment:

In evaluating technologies that reduce impingement or entrainment mortality as the possible basis for section 316(b) requirements, EPA assessed a number of different technologies. Based on this technology assessment, EPA concluded that closed-cycle cooling reduces impingement and entrainment mortality to the greatest extent.²⁴⁸

The ESA demands that federal agencies “afford first priority to the declared national policy of saving endangered species” in light of the “conscious decision by Congress to give endangered species priority over the ‘primary missions’ of federal agencies.” *Tennessee Valley Auth. v. Hill*, 437 U.S. 153, 185 (1978). This means that “[w]hen an agency, acting in furtherance of a broad Congressional mandate, chooses a course of action which is not specifically mandated by Congress and which is not specifically necessitated by the broad mandate, that action is, by definition, discretionary and is thus subject to Section 7 consultation.” *Nat'l Wildlife Fed'n v. Nat'l Marine Fisheries Serv.*, 524 F.3d 917, 929 (9th Cir. 2008). In this case, EPA's discretion in carrying out its duty under the Clean Water Act must be exercised in a manner that neither jeopardizes the recovery or survival of listed species nor adversely modifies critical habitat. *See, e.g., Am. Rivers, Inc. v. U.S. Army Corps of Eng'rs.*, 421 F.3d 618, 631 (8th Cir. 2005) (“[T]he FCA does not mandate a particular level of river flow or length of navigation season, but rather allows the Corps to decide how best to support the primary interest of navigation in balance with other interests. . . . Because the Corps is able to exercise its discretion in determining how best to fulfill the purposes of the reservoir system's enabling statute, the operation of the reservoir system is subject to the requirements of the ESA.”).

Because closed-cycle and dry cycle cooling systems would sharply reduce or eliminate endangered fish kills in the San Juan River, installation of those technologies at Four Corners Power Plant would avoid the likelihood of jeopardizing the continued existence of listed species and avert the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. FWS must therefore require the installation and use of those technologies in a reasonable and prudent alternative to the proposed action. By reducing or eliminating river water withdrawals within designated critical habitat, the use of closed-cycle or dry cooling technology at the Four Corners Power Plant can

²⁴⁷ Exhibit 69 hereto (Riverkeeper comments).

²⁴⁸ 76 Fed. Reg. at 22,207.

sharply reduce or eliminate endangered fish kills, adverse modification of critical habitat, and jeopardy to Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.

In satisfying its duty to avoid jeopardy of threatened and endangered species, an agency must formally consult with the FWS if, as here, a biological assessment finds that the action “may affect” a threatened or endangered species. 16 U.S.C. § 1536(b); 50 C.F.R. § 402.14; also see 51 Fed. Reg. 19,926, 19,949 (June 3, 1986) (“may affect” includes “[a]ny possible effect, whether beneficial, benign, adverse, or of an undetermined character”). Following this formal consultation, the Service issues a biological opinion (“BO”) summarizing its findings and determining whether the proposed action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species and/or result in adverse modification of designated critical habitat. 50 C.F.R. § 402.14(h). If FWS finds the action likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the listed species, the BO must suggest “reasonable and prudent alternative” that could be taken by the action agency to avoid such jeopardy. 16 U.S.C. § 1536(b)(3)(A). § 402.14(h)(3). “[R]easonable and prudent alternatives” are alternative actions identified during formal consultation that (1) can be implemented in a manner consistent with the intended purpose of the action, (2) can be implemented consistent with the scope of the action agency’s legal authority, (3) are economically and technologically feasible, and (4) would avoid the likelihood of jeopardizing the continued existence of listed species and/or avert the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

In this case, and as discussed elsewhere in these comments, the requirement of closed-cycle cooling system at Four Corners Power Plant is entirely consistent with the intended purpose of the action; closed-cycle cooling systems can cool electric generating facilities with fewer environmental impacts, and fewer impacts to endangered species and designated critical habitat, than once-through cooling systems. Requiring a closed-system cooling system at Four Corners Power Plant is also well within EPA's legal authority to regulate facilities using cooling water intake structures (CWISs) under Section 316(b) the Clean Water Act (CWA), and it is entirely within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s authority to regulate federal actions to avoid jeopardy to endangered species or adverse modification of critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act. 16 U.S.C. § 1536(a)(1), (a)(2).²⁴⁹ The Riverkeeper comments on the Section 316(b) rule, which we incorporate here by reference, provide extensive discussion and analysis demonstrating the technical and economic feasibility of installing closed-cycle cooling systems on existing facilities. Finally, insofar as: (1) existing direct, indirect and cumulative impacts create baseline conditions, such as contamination of endangered fish with mercury, that jeopardize endangered fish and adversely modify critical habitat; and, (2) operation of the APS weir and intakes would further contribute to jeopardy of Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker by adversely modifying critical habitat and injuring and killing endangered fish through impingement and entrainment, requiring installation and use of a closed-cycle or dry cooling system at Four Corners Power Plant in the context of a reasonable and prudent alternative to the proposed action would avoid the likelihood of jeopardizing the continued existence of listed species and/or avert the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

²⁴⁹ Exhibit 69 (Riverkeeper 316(b) comments).

M. Comments on EPA's 401 certification waiver

EPA relied on the Navajo Nation water quality standards in making its 401 Certification decision on this draft permit. As stated above, EPA may not rely on the Navajo Nation water quality standards due to the contractual waiver and relevant case law. As such, EPA's reliance on the Navajo Nation water quality standards in issuing its 401 Certification decision is likewise arbitrary and capricious because EPA relies on tribal water quality standards that can not be applied to the facility. EPA also fails to provide a written rationale for relying on the Navajo Nation water quality standards for its permit action or 401 Certification decision. Despite the passage of 18 years since EPA's last issuance of this permit, EPA has failed to promulgate federal water quality standards for Morgan Lake, No Name Wash, the Chaco River, and the San Juan River. Finally, EPA has not applied State of New Mexico Water Quality Standards to the discharges in the draft permit or explained why it has not applied the State standards. For the reasons stated in this comment letter, EPA's 401 Certification decision is arbitrary and capricious.

IV. Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on EPA's 2019 draft NPDES permit for the FCPP. We ask that you incorporate all of our comments into EPA's final permitting decision. As mentioned above, in addition to sending you this letter by email, I also sent you by overnight mail on July 1, 2019 a flash drive containing the 77 exhibits referenced in this letter. Please confirm receipt of this comment letter and the flash drive. Please contact me at (303) 774-8868 if you have any questions. Thank you.

Sincerely,

s/ John Barth

Conservation Organizations

Mike Eisenfeld
San Juan Citizens Alliance
1309 E 3rd Ave #5, Durango, CO 81301
[\(970\) 259-3583](tel:9702593583)
mike@sanjuancitizens.org

Taylor McKinnon
Michael Saul
Center for Biological Diversity
P.O. Box 1178
Flagstaff, AZ 86002-1178
tmckinnon@biologicaldiversity.org
msaul@biologicaldiversity.org

Joe Zuppan
Executive Director
Amigos Bravos
105-A Quesnel, Taos, NM 87571
[\(575\) 758-3874](tel:(575)758-3874)
rconn@amigosbravos.org

Lori Goodman
Dine Citizens Against Ruining the Environment
Dine CARE
10A Town Plaza, Suite 138
Durango, CO 81301
Telephone: (970) 259-0199
lgoodman89@gmail.com

Matt Gerhart
Staff Attorney
Sierra Club Environmental Law Program
2101 Webster St. Suite 1301
Oakland, CA 94612
Matt.gerhart@sierraclub.org

Erik Schlenker-Goodrich
Western Environmental Law Center
208 Paseo del Pueblo Sur, #602
Taos, New Mexico 87571
Ph: 575-751-0351
eriksg@westernlaw.org