

APPENDIX H. GRINDSTONE RIVER DAM REMOVAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Grindstone Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) – Final EIS Summary

Grindstone River Dam Removal

Final Environmental Impact Statement Summary

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) section of Fisheries is proposing to remove the dam on the Grindstone River within the city of Hinckley, in Pine County, Minnesota. This would restore connectivity of the river channel and permanently remove the Grindstone Reservoir, a 26.6-acre public water basin within the state-owned Hinckley Aquatic Management Area (AMA). The proposed project is needed to address public safety concerns from the dam due to instability issues and inability to pass floods. The proposed project is also needed to allow for passage of fish and other aquatic wildlife and restore natural stream features, natural sediment transport, and habitat diversity within this section of the Grindstone River.

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is mandatory for this project pursuant to Minnesota Rules 4410.2000, subpart 2. The Grindstone Reservoir has been identified as a public waters basin. Once the dam is removed, the public water basin will no longer exist as a basin. Minnesota Rules 4410.4400, subpart 20, identifies that projects that will eliminate a public water or public waters wetland require preparation of an EIS.

The scope of the EIS was developed from March through December 2020 and included a scoping environmental assessment worksheet (EAW), a draft scoping decision document (DSDD), a public meeting and comment period, and a final scoping decision document (FSDD). The FSDD identified topics which would be assessed in the EIS including project alternatives, topics with potential effects, and studies required to assess effects. The draft EIS was developed April 2021 through June 2023. Publication of the draft EIS included a public meeting (held July 12, 2023) and comment period (which ended on July 26, 2023), where 17 commenters submitted comments.

Minnesota Rules 4410.2700 subparts 1 and 2 dictate what the contents of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should include and states that:

- The final EIS shall respond to the timely substantive comments on the draft EIS consistent with the scoping decision.
- The RGU shall discuss at appropriate points in the final EIS any responsible opposing views relating to scoped issues which were not adequately discussed in the draft EIS and shall indicate the RGU's response to the views.
- If only minor changes in the draft EIS are suggested in the comments on the draft, the written comments and the responses may be attached to the draft or bound as a separate volume and circulated as the final EIS. If other than minor changes are required, the draft text shall be rewritten so that necessary changes in the text are incorporated in the appropriate places.

In accordance with Minnesota Rules, 4410.2700 subpart 1, responses to all substantive comments submitted are included in Appendix I of this document and responsible opposing views are discussed below. As no changes to the draft EIS were suggested during the public comment period, the draft EIS is the Final EIS, in accordance with Minnesota Rules 4410.2700, subpart 2.

Response to comments:

In accordance with Minnesota Rules, subpart 1, responses to all substantive comments submitted are included in Appendix I of this EIS.

Responsible opposing views:

Two commenters raised opposing views during the public comment period. The opposing comments came from Don Zeman, mayor of the City of Hinckley, and Nathan Nelson, State Representative for District 11B. Responsible opposing views were related to two topics, historic significance of the Grindstone River Dam to the City of Hinckley, and recreational opportunities provided by presence of the dam to City of Hinckley residents and visitors.

Historic Significance

Comments provided by the City of Hinckley stated that the Grindstone River Dam and the Grindstone reservoir have been a part of the landscape in various forms for 147 years and that the dam has been an integral part of the City's past, helping it grow as a logging town, providing the first electrical power to the city in 1908, and providing outdoor recreational opportunities to city residents and visitors.

The DNR acknowledges that a dam has been present at this location for various uses (logging, hydropower, water storage) since the 1800s. The current dam was built in 1931 to provide a water supply for the fish-rearing ponds that are located in an adjacent unit of the AMA. The history of the dam was discussed in the draft EIS in section 1.1. The history of the dam was also discussed within the scoping EAW in item 14. In 2018, the DNR Division of Parks and Trails Cultural Resources Program conducted cultural resource investigations in the Grindstone River Dam area. These investigations indicated that the completion of the proposed project should not adversely affect any known archaeological sites or data. In 2020, the DNR submitted a request to the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for review of the 2018 report and assessment. The SHPO responded and agreed that the efforts to identify archeological resources was adequate and that no further archeological survey work is warranted for the project as it is currently proposed. The SHPO also agreed with the determination that the Grindstone River Dam is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and that no properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the NRHP would be affected by the proposed project (see scoping EAW Attachment 3). In 2019, the DNR Division of FAW was granted \$150,000 by the Minnesota Legislature to "maintain the history of the Grindstone River Dam at Hinckley." The funds were distributed to the DNR via a Minnesota Historical Society

grant and were used to conduct research into the history of dams at the site and to prepare an interpretive sign to be posted within the Hinckley AMA, near the current dam location.

Recreational Opportunities

Comments provided by the City of Hinckley and State Representative Nathan Nelson expressed interest in desire to keep the dam at the site in order to continue to allow for fishing, swimming, and other recreational opportunities at the site.

This socioeconomic topic was also discussed in the draft EIS in section 1.4.2.1.6, which discusses recreation. Assessment of the proposed project and project alternatives did not identify potential negative socioeconomic effects on the community. The existing benefits would be expected to be maintained or improved following the proposed project. Though the existing boat launch and fishing pier will be removed by the proposed project, public access to the Grindstone River would be maintained by an anticipated carry-in access for kayaks, canoes, and tubes at or near the location of the existing boat launch. Access for anglers would continue along the restored riverbank and the improved fish passage, as a result of dam removal, would be expected to provide a similar or improved angling experience.

Final EIS

As no changes to the draft EIS were suggested during the public comment period, the draft EIS is the final EIS, in accordance with Minnesota Rules, subpart 2.