

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

NorthWestern Energy

Project No. 1869-066

NOTICE OF APPLICATION ACCEPTED FOR FILING, SOLICITING
MOTIONS TO INTERVENE AND PROTESTS, READY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL
ANALYSIS, AND SOLICITING COMMENTS, RECOMMENDATIONS,
PRELIMINARY TERMS AND CONDITIONS, AND PRELIMINARY FISHWAY
PRESCRIPTIONS

(September 16, 2026)

Take notice that the following hydroelectric application has been filed with the Commission and is available for public inspection.

- a. Type of Application: New Major License
- b. Project No.: 1869-066
- c. Date Filed: December 29, 2023
- d. Applicant: NorthWestern Energy (NorthWestern)
- e. Name of Project: Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (project)
- f. Location: On the Clark Fork River in Sanders County in the city of Thompson Falls, Montana. The project occupies 103.80 acres of federal lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service.
- g. Filed Pursuant to: Federal Power Act, 16 U.S.C. §§ 791(a) – 825(r)
- h. Applicant Contact: Andrew Welch, Manager, Hydro License Compliance, NorthWestern Energy, 208 N. Montana, Avenue, Suite 200, Helena, Montana 59601; phone: (406) 444-8115 or via email at andrew.welch@northwestern.com.
- i. FERC Contact: John Baummer at (202) 502-6837 or john.baummer@ferc.gov.
- j. Deadline for filing motions to intervene and protests, comments, recommendations, terms and conditions, and prescriptions: **on or before 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on November 16, 2026; reply comments are due on or before 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on December 30 , 2026.**

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The Commission strongly encourages electronic filing. Please file motions to intervene, protests, comments, recommendations, preliminary terms and conditions, and preliminary fishway prescriptions using the Commission's eFiling system at <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/FERCOOnline.aspx>. Commenters can submit brief comments up to 10,000 characters, without prior registration, using the eComment system at <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/QuickComment.aspx>. For assistance, please contact FERC Online Support at FERCOOnlineSupport@ferc.gov, (866) 208-3676 (toll free), or (202) 502-8659 (TTY). In lieu of electronic filing, you may submit a paper copy. Submissions sent via the U.S. Postal Service must be addressed to: Debbie-Anne A. Reese, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street NE, Room 1A, Washington, DC 20426. Submissions sent via any other carrier must be addressed to: Debbie-Anne A. Reese, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 12225 Wilkins Avenue, Rockville, Maryland 20852. The first page of any filing should include docket number P-1869-066.

The Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure require all intervenors filing documents with the Commission to serve a copy of that document on each person on the official service list for the project. Further, if an intervenor files comments or documents with the Commission relating to the merits of an issue that may affect the responsibilities of a particular resource agency, they must also serve a copy of the document on that resource agency.

k. This application has been accepted for filing and is now ready for environmental analysis.

l. The existing project consists of two dams that form the project reservoir and two powerhouses. The project includes: (1) a 1,016-foot-long, 54-foot-high, concrete gravity dam (i.e., Main Channel Dam) with a 913-foot-long overflow section with 8-foot-high fixed wheel panels atop 8-foot-high stoplogs and four radial gates; (2) an upstream fish passage facility on Main Channel Dam; (3) a 449-foot-long, 45-foot-high concrete gravity dam (i.e., Dry Channel Dam) located downstream of the Main Channel Dam with a 289-foot-long overflow section with 8-foot-high fixed wheel panels atop 4-foot-high stoplogs; (4) a 1,226-acre reservoir impounded by the two dams (Thompson Falls Reservoir); (5) a 300-foot-long, 78-foot-wide excavated channel leading to a 200-foot long, 78-foot-wide reinforced concrete intake structure; (6) three 39-foot-high, 18-foot-wide, and 75-foot-long rectangular conduits extending from the intake to a 200-foot-long, 78-foot-wide concrete powerhouse containing a Kaplan-type turbine-generator unit with an installed capacity of 52.61 megawatts (MW); (7) a 450-foot-long, 80-foot-wide forebay channel leading to a 258-foot-long, 40-foot-high second intake structure (adjacent to the other intake structure); (8) six steel, 14-foot-diameter main turbine penstocks and two 6-foot-8-inch-diameter exciter turbine penstocks extend from the second intake to a 292-foot-long, 97-foot-wide second powerhouse containing six Francis-type turbine-generating units, with three rated at 7.0 MW, two rated at 6.38 MW,

and one rated at 6.0 MW; (9) a 1,000-foot-long, 100-foot-wide tailrace channel leading from the outlet of the first powerhouse; (10) a 800-foot-long, 130-foot-wide tailrace channel leading from the outlet of the second powerhouse; (11) three generator step-up transformers; (12) a 300-foot-long, 115-kilovolt generator lead line extending from the first powerhouse to the second powerhouse and two 50-foot-long, 6.6-kilovolt generator lead lines connecting to a breaker within the second powerhouse serving as the interconnection point for both powerhouses; (13) a 1,000-foot long access road; and (14) appurtenant facilities. The project bypasses approximately 3,500 feet of the Clark Fork River.

NorthWestern operates a fish ladder to pass target species (i.e., Bull trout, other native salmonids and non-sport fish, and certain non-native sport fish) upstream of the Main Channel Dam from mid-March to mid-October. The fish ladder is designed for river flows up to 48,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) and has an operating flow of 83 cfs, including fish attraction flows. Fish ascending the ladder are collected in a holding pool at the top of ladder where they are sorted and released upstream into the reservoir upstream. The project does not include a downstream fish passage facility.

The project includes three licensed recreation facilities: (1) Island Park managed by NorthWestern which features a trail network with interpretive signage, picnic tables, benches, an accessible restroom, parking area, and a viewing platform;¹ (2) Wild Goose Landing Park managed by the City of Thompson Falls under an off-license agreement, which offers open space, picnic facilities, a plumbed restroom, a boat launch with a stationary dock, a floating swim dock, shoreline fishing access, and parking for approximately 20 vehicles; and (3) the South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area managed by NorthWestern which includes parking for four vehicles, signage addressing fluctuating water levels, an accessible vault toilet and garbage facilities, and provides access for fishing the mouth of Prospect Creek and in the main river channel.²

NorthWestern is currently authorized to operate as a peaking facility and provides both baseload and flexible generation within the constraints of its existing license. NorthWestern Energy is authorized to operate the project to maintain the reservoir elevation within a four-foot operating band (i.e., between 2,396.5 feet and 2,392.5 feet); however in practice, it typically operates to maintain the reservoir within 1.5 feet from the full operating level (i.e., between 2,396.5 and 2395.0 feet) while also maintaining a minimum flow of 6,000 cfs or inflow, whichever is less, in the Clark Fork River

¹ Island Park is within the project boundary; however, the parking area owned by NorthWestern that provides walk-in access to the park via the Gallatin Street Bridge is on the north shore, adjacent to the project boundary.

² Because the project boundary follows the south shoreline closely, some of the amenities of the South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area, such as the vault toilet and garbage facilities are adjacent to the project boundary.

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downstream of the project to protect and enhance aquatic resources. The average annual generation of the project was approximately 504,300 megawatt-hours between 2014 and 2018.

NorthWestern proposes to continue operating the project in peaking mode but maintain the reservoir elevation within a 2.5-foot operating band (i.e., between 2,396.5 feet and 2,394.0 feet) while also continuing to maintain a minimum flow of 6,000 cfs or inflow, if less, in the Clark Fork River downstream of the powerhouses. NorthWestern also proposes to continue to operate the existing upstream fish passage facility from March to October, refine operation of the new radial gates at the main channel dam to minimize total dissolved gas levels downstream of the dam, and develop and implement a reservoir drawdown management plan.

NorthWestern also proposes to fully enclose Island Park, Wild Goose Landing Park, South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area, Power Park, Cherry Creek Boat Launch, and the historic Prospect Creek Powerhouse within the project boundary and exclude certain federal and private lands that it says do not serve a project purpose which would reduce the size of the current project boundary by 465 acres.

m. A copy of the application can be viewed on the Commission's website at <http://www.ferc.gov> using the "eLibrary" link. Enter the docket number excluding the last three digits in the docket number field to access the document. For assistance, contact FERC Online Support. A copy is also available for inspection and reproduction at the address in item h above.

Register online at <http://www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/esubscription.asp> to be notified via email of new filings and issuances related to this or other pending projects. For assistance, contact FERC Online Support.

n. Anyone may submit comments, a protest, or a motion to intervene in accordance with the requirements of Rules of Practice and Procedure, 18 C.F.R. §§ 385.210, .211, and .214. In determining the appropriate action to take, the Commission will consider all protests or other comments filed, but only those who file a motion to intervene in accordance with the Commission's Rules may become a party to the proceeding. Any comments, protests, or motions to intervene must be received on or before the specified comment date for the particular application.

All filings must (1) bear in all capital letters the title "PROTEST", "MOTION TO INTERVENE", "COMMENTS," "REPLY COMMENTS," "RECOMMENDATIONS," "PRELIMINARY TERMS AND CONDITIONS," or "PRELIMINARY PRESCRIPTIONS"; (2) set forth in the heading the name of the applicant and the project number of the application to which the filing responds; (3) furnish the name of the person protesting or intervening; and (4) otherwise comply with the requirements of 18 C.F.R. §§ 385.2001 through 385.2005. All comments, recommendations, terms and conditions,

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or prescriptions must set forth their evidentiary basis and otherwise comply with the requirements of 18 C.F.R. 4.34(b). Agencies may obtain copies of the application directly from the applicant. A copy of any protest or motion to intervene must be served upon each representative of the applicant specified in the particular application. A copy of all other filings in reference to this application must be accompanied by proof of service on all persons listed in the service list prepared by the Commission in this proceeding, in accordance with 18 C.F.R. §§ 4.34(b) and 385.2010.

For public inquiries and assistance with making filings such as interventions, comments, or requests for rehearing, contact the Office of Public Participation at (202) 502-6595 or OPP@ferc.gov.

o. Final amendments to the application must be filed with the Commission **on or before 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time October 16, 2026.**

p. A license applicant must file no later than 60 days following the date of issuance of the notice of acceptance and ready for environmental analysis provided for in § 5.22: (1) a copy of the water quality certification; (2) a copy of the request for certification, including proof of the date on which the certifying agency received the request; or (3) evidence of waiver of water quality certification.

(Authority: 18 CFR 2.1)

Carlos D. Clay,
Deputy Secretary.

Document Content(s)

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