

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Planning for the Future at the New Melones Lake Area

The Bureau of Reclamation is preparing an integrated Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) for the New Melones Lake Area. New Melones Lake is managed by the Central California Area Office, part of Reclamation’s Mid-Pacific Region.

Public Participation Milestones	
Notice of Intent published in the Federal Register December 18, 2006	
Public Scoping Period December 18, 2006, to February 16, 2007 Comment period extended to March 19, 2007	
Public Scoping Meetings January 29, 30, and 31, 2007	
Scoping Summary Report available Spring 2007	
Alternatives Workshops September 28 and 29, 2007	
Draft Alternatives available for public review Fall 2007	
Revise alternatives and prepare Draft RMP/EIS November 2007 to August 2008	
Draft RMP/EIS with plan alternatives available for public review and comment Fall 2008	
Prepare Final RMP/EIS Fall to Winter 2008	
30-day public review for Final RMP/EIS Spring/Summer 2009	
Record of Decision and approved RMP/EIS Spring/Summer 2009	

Shading indicates steps completed. Subsequent project updates will be distributed throughout this planning process.

Resource Inventory Report

The Resource Inventory Report (RIR), when combined with other reports describing current conditions, uses, or management, is designed to describe the planning area’s current conditions, resource trends, and current uses/activities and management.

The RIR will serve as a tool for describing the baseline conditions and evaluating the effects of the alternatives. The analysis in the report describes the status or present characteristics and condition of Reclamation-administered lands and resources, including physical and biological processes; recreational, cultural, social, and economic conditions; and facilities.

The RIR is broken down into resource areas:

- Physical Resources – includes discussions of the non-organic physical resources of the site. Resource categories under this heading include climate, topography, air quality, noise, hydrology, geology and aesthetic, visual, and scenic resources.
- Natural Resources – includes discussions of fish and wildlife, vegetation, special status species, and weeds.
- Cultural Resources – includes discussions of archeological and historical resources.
- Land Management, Planning, and Ownership Influences – includes discussions of commercial services, concessions, facilities, fire management, transportation and travel, trespass, utilities, and range management.

Scoping Summary Report

The scoping period ended March 19, 2007. Reclamation received 402 comments from 148 submissions. Of these, 29 were submitted by government agencies, 109 were submitted by nongovernmental organizations, and 264 were submitted by members of the public. All comments will be considered in developing the alternatives and project planning.

Reclamation is the largest wholesale water supplier and the second largest producer of hydroelectric power in the United States, with operations and facilities in the 17 Western States. Its facilities also provide substantial flood control, recreation, and fish and wildlife benefits.

Reclamation’s Mission Statement: *The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.*



Fluctuating Water Levels: Fluctuating water levels are an inherent problem on virtually all reservoirs, particularly those like New Melones Lake which are located in areas with hot, dry summers. Problems associated with fluctuating water levels include diminished surface area, which leads to more crowded boating conditions, increased distance from the water to campsites and boat ramps, increased boating hazards as submerged obstacles are exposed, more difficult access for wildlife to the lake, and an affected visual landscape.

Use Fees: New Melones Lake management has been authorized to keep a portion of use fees for enhancement of facilities and natural resources. The RMP/EIS may propose options for fee structures, while stating clearly that fees will be used for facility and resource improvements.

- Visitor Use and Recreation Resources – includes discussions of the visitor center and interpretive services, aquatic and land recreation, and special uses.
- Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice – includes discussions of use fees, barriers to use, and economic contributions of New Melones Lake to the local economy.

Problem Statement

The Problem Statement is intended to portray the issues that have been identified by Reclamation, the public, and involved agencies that may be addressed during preparation of the RMP/EIS. The purpose of creating this Problem Statement is to ensure that all participants in the planning process are addressing the same issues and agree on the scope of those issues. Reclamation has compiled a list of issues to be addressed in the RMP/EIS. This list is based on institutional knowledge of resources and management, the results of public comments given during the scoping process, and regulatory requirements. These issues are summarized as follows:



User Conflicts: Relative to the large number of users, user conflicts appear to be minimal, and various uses seem to be well managed. If the number of user conflicts increases in the future despite new management actions to be implemented in the RMP, this may indicate that the carrying capacity has been reached. Specific points or suggestions made in regards to user conflicts included setting up zones for non-motorized boating use; ensuring that trails are shared by bicyclists, hikers, and equestrians; and ensuring adequate distance between areas where hunting is allowed and other areas where other types of recreation occur.



Public Health and Safety/Law Enforcement: Public health and safety and law enforcement concerns include ensuring adequate emergency response, boating use and speed zones, and illegal drug use. Local law enforcement agencies have limited resources to provide adequate patrol or emergency response.

Recreation: New points of access or rehabilitation of old access points have been major concerns expressed by many members of the public. Other access issues include ensuring Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance, seaplane landing rights, and concerns about access to the lake and launch facilities under low water conditions. Reclamation has prepared a Water Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (WROS) report which, when formally adopted, will prescribe zones for various levels and types of use. Recognized problems that may be partially alleviated by zoning include crowding, shoreline erosion, incompatible uses, and excessive noise.

Natural and Cultural Resources: Constantly increasing visitorship and new types of recreational activities make it difficult to protect these resources, some of which are also vulnerable to looting, vandalism, trespassing, or inappropriate motor vehicle use. Meanwhile, Reclamation must comply with natural and cultural resource protection laws, including the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act.

Mark Your Calendars

Do you have an opinion on what Reclamation should include in the RMP/EIS?

Reclamation is holding Alternatives Workshops at the New Melones Visitor Center, 6850 Studhorse Flat Road, Sonora, CA, on Friday, September 28, from 1-4 p.m. and on Saturday, September 29, from 9 a.m. to noon. The objective of the two workshops is to gather public input on the management opportunities Reclamation has identified for each planning area. Your input will help Reclamation to formulate the management alternatives, so your participation in these workshops will give you, the public, the opportunity to influence management direction for the resources you care about most. Come to either the September 28 or 29 Alternatives Workshop to find out what issues, constraints, and opportunities Reclamation has identified for each planning area and share your ideas.

Visit the project website at: http://www.usbr.gov/mp/ccaof/field_offices/new_melones/rmp.html



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Mid-Pacific Region
Central California Area Office

Sample Planning Area: Mark Twain

Sample Issues:

- Limited access – general visitation and special needs
- Aging infrastructure and facilities
- Underdeveloped facilities
- Incompatible activities
- Illegal activities
- Lack of long-term planning
- Management inconsistent with visitation patterns

Sample Constraints:

- One access road
- Limited level ground
- Limited drinking water
- Adjacent land use – Hwy 49 and Stevenot bridge

Sample Opportunities:

- Develop car-top launch area
- Block off ramp-to-trailer launching
- Improve facilities to comply with ADA
- Improve and increase parking
- Upgrade visitor center facility
- Develop a loop trail from headquarters

Please mark your calendars to come join us at one of the following workshops and share your vision of what opportunities should be considered in the RMP/EIS!

Alternatives Workshops at the New Melones Visitor Center
Friday, September 28, 2007, from 1-4 p.m.
Saturday, September 29, 2007, from 9 a.m. - noon

For more information on the Alternatives Workshop, please visit the project website at: http://www.usbr.gov/mp/ccaof/field_offices/new_melones/rmp.html

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New Melones Planning Areas

