

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**FLOODPLAIN HABITAT RESTORATION
AT THE
WALTER WALKER
AND
BUTCH CRAIG
BOTTOMLAND SITES**

Prepared by

**Bureau of Reclamation
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for

**Upper Colorado Endangered Fish Recovery Program
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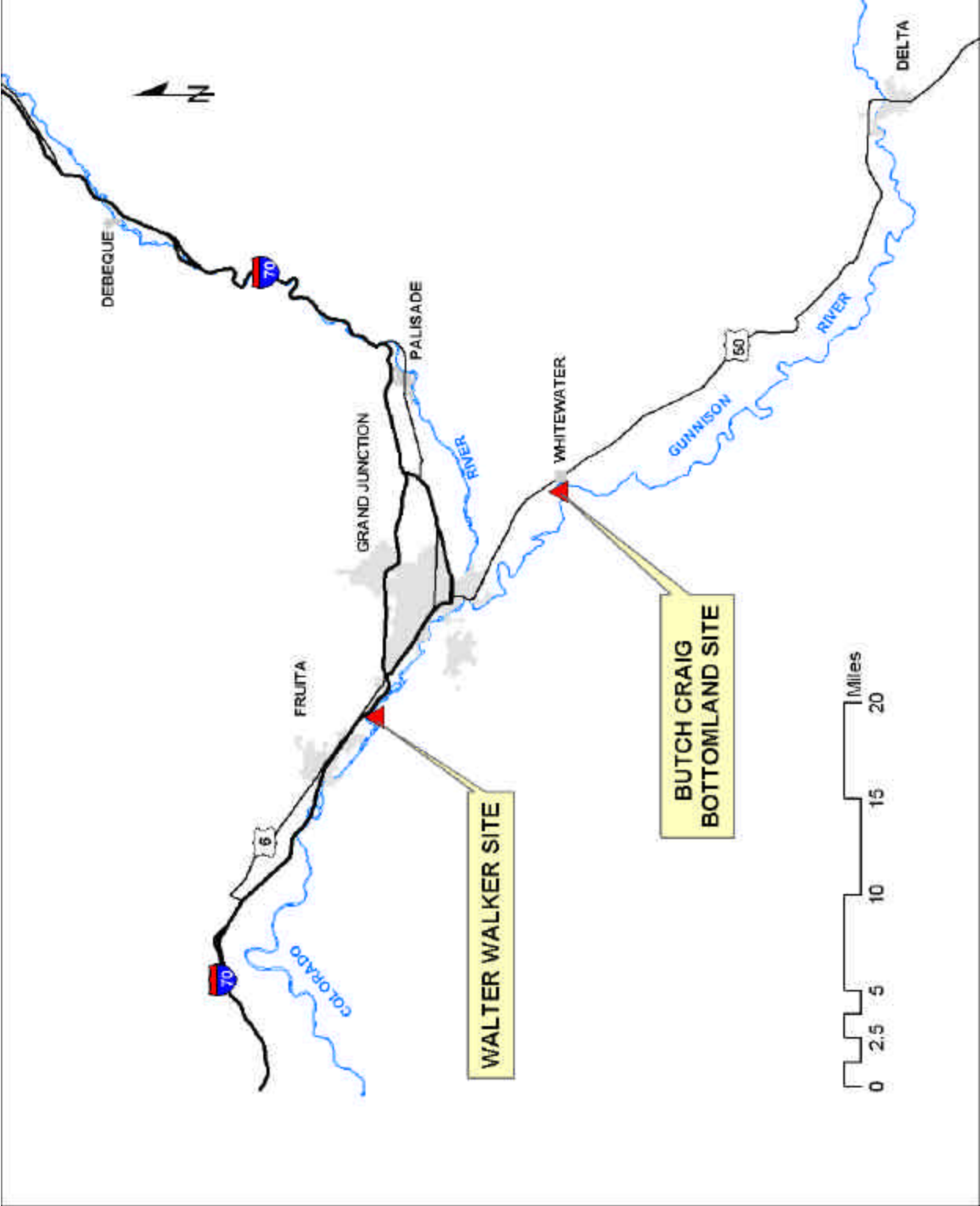


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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Proposed Action

The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program (Recovery Program) is proposing to conduct floodplain habitat restoration at bottomland sites at the Walter Walker State Wildlife Area (SWA) adjacent to the Colorado River and the Butch Craig Bottomland (BL) Site on the Gunnison River. The proposed action would increase the frequency of inundation (flooding) of these bottomland sites by removing and/or lowering constructed earthen levees, which separate the bottomland habitat connections with the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers.

Need for and Purpose of Action

This Final Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluates effects on the human environment from removing of earthen levees to increasing the frequency of bottomland habitat inundation at the Walter Walker SWA Site and the Butch Craig BL Site. Both sites are located in Mesa County, near Grand Junction, Colorado (Frontispiece Map). The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) prepared this EA in cooperation with other federal and state agencies to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act, and related U.S. Department of the Interior policies and regulations. If, based on this analysis, Reclamation concludes the proposed action would have no significant impact on the human environment; preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement would not be required before the action could be implemented.

In 1988, the Governors of Colorado, Utah and Wyoming; the Secretary of the Interior; and the Administrator of Western Area Power Administration entered into a cooperative agreement to initiate the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program. The Recovery Program is an interagency partnership created to recover the endangered Colorado pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus lucius*), razorback sucker (*Xyrauchen texanus*), humpback chub (*Gila cypha*) and bonytail (*Gila elegans*).

Recovery Program elements include:

- Habitat management including identifying and acquiring instream flows, changing operations of Federal dams, and operating other reservoirs in a coordinated manner to benefit endangered fish.
- Habitat development including restoring floodplain/wetland habitats, and constructing fish passageways around dams and other barriers in the river.
- Native fish propagation and genetic management involving establishing facilities to hold adult brood stock to prevent extinction of these rare fish and maintain their genetic

resources; develop growout ponds; conduct research to improve survival of endangered fish raised in captivity and stocked in the wild; and support appropriate stocking and reintroduction efforts.

- Nonnative species and sportfishing entailing managing detrimental nonnative fish species in habitat considered “critical” to endangered fish. This also involves educating and distributing information to anglers to reduce accidental capture of endangered fish.
- Research, monitoring and data management provides information about what these fish need to survive, grow, and reproduce in the wild. Efforts include compiling data on the number, sizes, and locations of endangered fish; monitoring endangered fish population trends; and making river flow recommendations.

Need: The Recovery Program has identified a need to increase the frequency of inundation of bottomland habitats at the Walter Walker SWA and the Butch Craig BL Sites to create and enhance habitat for Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker including larval drift habitat (nursery habitats).

Purpose: The purpose of the proposed action is to implement Recovery Program elements to enhance critical endangered fish habitat and assist in recovery of the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.

Background Information

Walter Walker State Wildlife Area (SWA)

The Walter Walker SWA is located in Mesa County, Colorado, about five miles WNW of Grand Junction, south and west of the intersection of Interstate 70 and US Highway 6&50 (see Frontispiece Map). The area was acquired by the Colorado Division of Wildlife in 1973 and totals approximately 450 acres along the Colorado River. The primary purpose, or goal for managing the SWA is to provide wildlife habitat, production, and protection. The SWA provides the largest protected resting area for wintering waterfowl in the Grand Valley. A secondary purpose is to provide recreational opportunities (unpublished CDOW Report, 2002). The property was historically mined for gravel, prior to its establishment as a SWA. A levee along the east edge of the SWA was constructed during mining to protect the area from seasonal flooding. High flow events in the early 1980s damaged the lower portion of the levee, and converted the gravel pit lake into a more natural backwater. In 1996, the Recovery Program built a diversion structure in the levee to divert Colorado River water into a backwater channel with the goal of diluting selenium levels in the backwater and to attempt to reduce selenium levels in sediments and biota (Bulter, 2001).

The SWA provides wildlife habitat for numerous wildlife species including the endangered Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. Winter resting areas for waterfowl is a major use.

Butch Craig Bottomland (BL) Site

The Butch Craig BL Site contains a 55-acre gravel pit pond adjacent to the Gunnison River about 14 miles upstream of the confluence with the Colorado River at Grand Junction, Colorado. The pond is located on the left riverbank (when facing downstream) and is protected by a constructed levee considered adequate to contain the 100-year flow event in the Gunnison River. The levee protects the north and east portions of the pond from the River. The Recovery Program acquired the site in 2000.

Public Scoping

A public scoping letter was mailed to various agencies and adjoining landowners on December 2, 2002. Reclamation requested assistance in identifying issues and concerns associated with the proposed projects. Reclamation requested comments to be received by December 20, 2002.

Only one comment letter was received. Whitewater Building Materials, which leased the Butch Craig BL Site from its former owners to mine sand and gravel, identified two issues. The first issue is that Whitewater Building Materials holds a permit (M-77-129) with the Mined Land Section of the Colorado Minerals & Geology Division (DM&G), which oversees the reclamation of mined sites. The DM&G will require an amendment to the permit before changes can be made. The second issue identified the need to finalize an access agreement. Whitewater currently provides access through its lease control but this will end and permanent access needs to be addressed.

CHAPTER 2 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives

Alternatives evaluated in this environmental assessment include a No Action, and two Proposed Actions.

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, the Recovery Program would not take action to enhance floodplain bottomland habitats at Walter Walker SWA and at the Butch Craig BL Sites. Critical endangered fish habitats would not be improved.

Proposed Actions: The Proposed Action is broken into two separate actions, one for each bottomland site. These actions are separate and not interdependent regarding selection and implementation. Proposed Actions developed for the Walter Walker SWA and the Butch Craig Sites are described in greater detail below.

Walter Walker SWA Site: An Analysis was performed by Tetra Tech ISG utilizing surveyed cross sections and topographic mapping conducted between July 12 and July 15, 2000. To determine the starting water surface elevations for the model, a rating curve was developed. Elevations from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Flood Inundation Study for unincorporated Mesa County (FEMA, 1992) and water surface elevations observed during the field data collection were used to develop the curve and the water surface elevations at different flows were derived from the curve (Tetra Tech ISG, 2002A).

Utilizing the analysis, it was determined that lowering the spill structure portion of the levee at the Walter Walker SWA Site to an elevation of 4,513 ft. would allow the bottomland to begin flooding when flows in the Colorado River exceed approximately 9,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). This flow corresponds roughly to the 1.02-year flood event. Lowering other sections of the levee to an elevation of 4,514 ft. would promote increased flooding when flows exceed 13,600 cfs, or the 1.11-year flood event (Tetra Tech ISG, 2002A).

The Action Alternative developed for the Walter Walker SWA Site would remove the lower ~1,200-foot section of the existing levee to elevation 4,513 ft. and the remove the existing shotcrete spillway. The levee would be removed to allow seasonal flooding of the riparian bottomlands at Walter Walker. An estimated 9,000 cubic yards of material would be removed and hauled off-site.

Reclamation and the Colorado Division of Wildlife are working with the United Sand and Gravel Company (United) to remove the material at no cost to the U.S. Government. United would remove the material and would be allowed to process and sell the material prior to the 2003 spring runoff. United has a sand and gravel operation adjacent to Walter Walker SWA. To haul the material from Walter Walker to the gravel operation site, permission would be needed to use

an existing road that crosses property owned by Mesa County. United Sand and Gravel Company would obtain permission prior to implementing the project.

The river would be allowed to naturally meander through the lower portion of Walter Walker SWA. Scouring and the creation of secondary river channels and depressions would likely occur, which could enhance endangered fish habitat. The Recovery Program would monitor river changes, and in the future consider removing additional portions of the existing levee and excavating areas to create shallow ponds to provide additional enhancement of endangered fish and waterfowl habitat. The CDOW also has plans to enhance waterfowl habitat with tamarisk removal projects (Yamashita, 2003). The Recovery Program's proposed action complements CDOW's current and future management objectives for Walter Walker SWA.

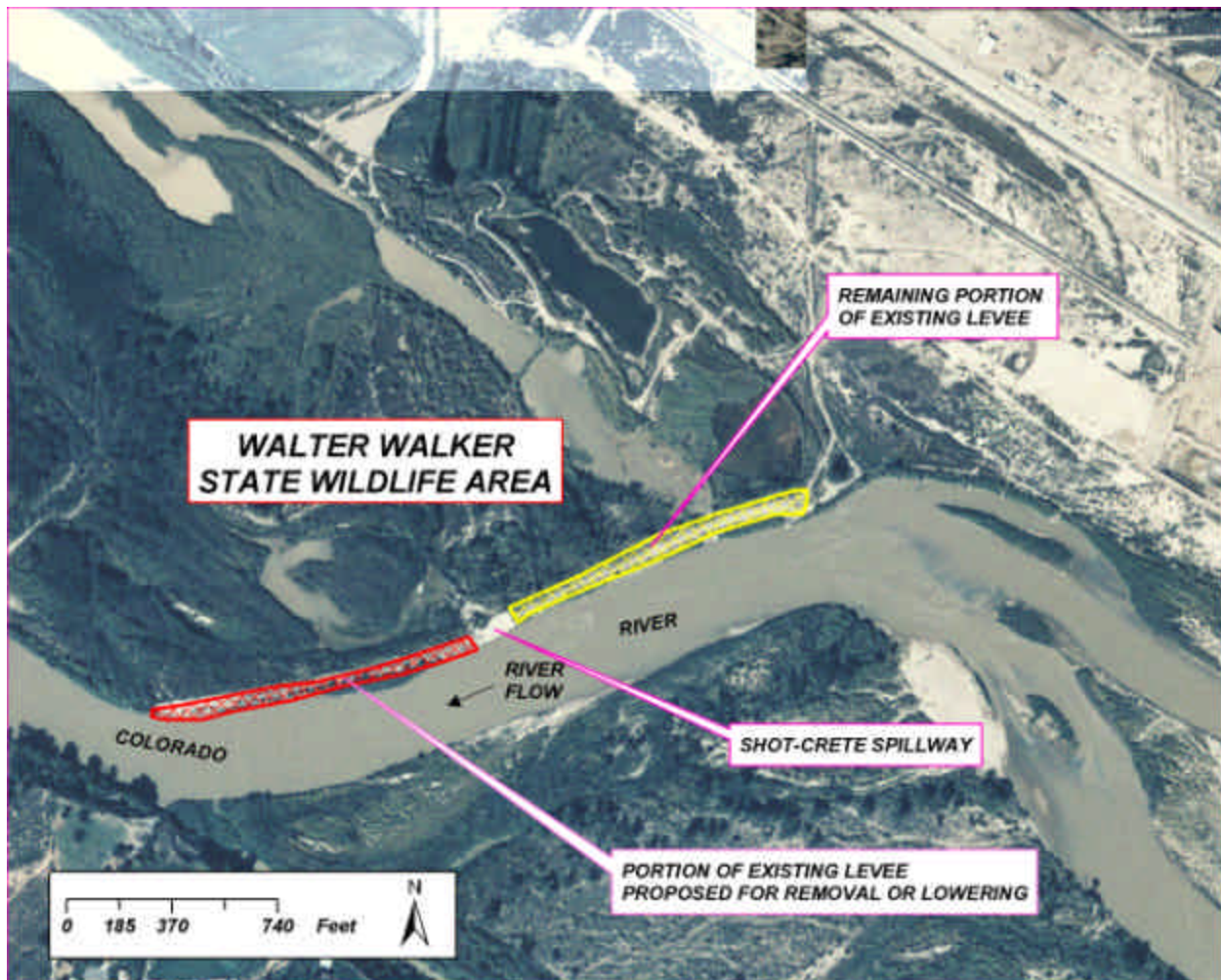


Figure 1-Walter Walker SWA Site Photo

Butch Craig BL Site: Hydrologic analyses were conducted by Tetra Tech ISG (Tetra Tech ISG, 2002B) to help assess frequency and duration of bottomland inundation for various Gunnison River flows. A flood frequency analysis was performed using data from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) gage located on the Gunnison River near Grand Junction, Colorado (#09152000).

To develop a Gunnison River flow that would represent a duration of 2 to 8 weeks per year, a flow duration analysis was performed on years with peak flow less than the 5-year peak (14,500 cfs) to determine an average flow that would be sustained for 10% of the moderate flow year period. This 10% moderate flow duration and target flow was determined to be 4,500 cfs.

The Gunnison River at the Butch Craig BL Site was modeled using five surveyed cross sections. A levee that would contain the 100-year flow was assumed at the right overbank of the proposed mine site. Design flow input for the hydraulic model was based on the 1.11 year return frequency peak flood of 4,160 cfs, the target flow of 4,500 cfs and the 100-year of 35,000 cfs.

The proposed action for the Butch Craig BL Site would allow moderate and high Gunnison River flows into the site by constructing two notches in the existing levee. The approximate dimensions of the notches would be 50 feet wide along the left riverbank, with a 2.5:1 side slope.

The invert of the upstream notch would be set at 4,625.8 feet. The 4,625.8 ft. elevation is reached by the 1.11 year recurrence peak flow of 4,160 cfs.

The invert of the downstream notch would be set at 4,623.8 ft.; this elevation is also the 1.11-year recurrence flow elevation at the downstream location. Because of this configuration, the pond would connect to the river. The river would flow through upstream notch into the pond and through the downstream notch back to the river.

The recommended notches set at the 1.11 year- elevation provides the highest percentage of flow at lower discharges while restricting the 100-year event from diverting a major portion of the flows. The 100-year peak flow may pass as much as 5,700 cfs through the Pond and connecting notches. The side slopes of the notches include a vehicle ramp at a 10% slope on the downstream notch, which would make the entire levee accessible by vehicle.

The upstream notch would require the excavation of 2,500 cubic yards of the existing levee, and the downstream notch would require 2,950 cubic yards. Additionally, 865 cubic yards would be excavated at both notches in order to place the structures, riprap and bedding below the grade. All excavated materials would be used to shape and grade shorelines of the Pond to a 10:1 or less slope in a sinuous, random pattern to mimic a natural shoreline.

The upstream and downstream notches would require rock riprap for construction of the bed and, side slopes. In addition, riprap would be required to hold the invert elevation of the notch. Bedding material and non-woven filter fabric would also be needed. At both notches, about 0.1 acres inside the notch would be planted with willows. The upstream notch would be aligned in a



Figure 2-BUTCH CRAIG BL SITE PHOTO

portion of the levee that has significant riprap in place and would be constructed in a manner to preserve and augment this stable material. Reclamation's Provo Area Office Force Account Crew would likely perform the needed work at the Butch Craig BL Site. Construction would be completed after the 2003 spring runoff. Reclamation is currently working with an adjacent landowner to obtain permission to cross their property for construction access. Construction access agreements would be needed prior to initiating construction activities.

Preferred Alternative(s)

The Recovery Program has identified the action alternatives as the preferred alternatives for floodplain habitat restoration at each site. There are no direct costs associated with removing the 9,000 cubic yards of levee at Walter Walker. Costs would be limited to Reclamation and CDOW staff time to oversee the levee removal. At the Butch Craig BL Site, the action alternative is

estimated to cost about \$186,000 for excavation of 5,450 cubic yards of levee, and the hauling and placement of riprap, bedding material and non-woven filter fabric.

Other Alternatives Considered

Total levee removal at Walter Walker SWA was also considered. Reclamation, Service and CDOW evaluated total levee removal and identified concerns with this alternative, including: 1) the potential for the main channel of the river to cut to the north making the SWA an island and 2) the potential loss of backwater habitat currently used by adult Colorado pikeminnow. It was determined that it would be prudent to remove only the lower portion of the levee and monitor changes before considering total levee removal.

CHAPTER 3 – AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

General

This chapter discusses resources that may be affected by the proposed action of levee modification at the Walter Walker SWA and the Butch Craig BL Site. During the preparation of this Draft EA, information on issues and concerns was received from resource agencies, private interests, recreational interest groups, citizens and other parties (see Chapter 4, Consultation and Coordination, for further details).

For each resource, the potentially affected area, and/or interests are identified, existing conditions are described, and impacts expected under the No Action and Action Alternatives are discussed. This chapter concludes with a summary comparison of the alternatives and a list of mitigation measures.

The project area is located in Mesa County, Colorado along the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers, which includes the Walter Walker SWA and the Butch Craig BL Site. Mesa County has a population of about 119,281 (U.S. Census, 2001). Grand Junction, founded in 1881, is the largest city in the area with a population of about 41,986. Although agriculture remains important in Mesa County today, some light manufacturing and service industries influence the economy. Tourism is also a significant source of economic activity for the area. The project area is within a major transportation corridor, with the Union Pacific's railroad tracks along the right bank of the river and the Interstate 70 Highway on the left bank of the Colorado River.

The streamflow and floodplain habitat of both the Colorado and Gunnison River has been significantly altered by water diversions and uses, infringement by railroads, gravel operations, highways and bridges, and by the operation of upstream storage reservoirs, flood control levees, and channelization.

Walter Walker SWA

The Walter Walker SWA is located about five miles west of Grand Junction, Colorado along the Colorado River (See Figure 3). The area totals about 450 acres in size, including approximately 90 acres of the Colorado River. The Walter Walker Foundation donated a portion of the property and sold adjoining parcels to the Colorado Division of Wildlife in 1973. The SWA is comprised primarily of riparian, upland shrub and desert vegetation types. However, the Colorado River is the primary feature on the property. Historically, much of the area was excavated for gravel. A large pond resulting from the gravel operation was the main feature of the property until the spring flood of 1984 breached the levee between the pond and the river. The levee was partially repaired, but the large pond was not replaced. The flood deposited considerable silt, filling the pond. Fremont-leaf cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), willow (*Salix*

sp.), tamarisk (*Tamarisk sp.*), and Russian olive (*Eleganus angustifolia*) have grown in since the 1984 event.

The CDOW manages the SWA to provide wildlife habitat, production and protection with an emphasis on wintering waterfowl resting and loafing habitat. The SWA is a major concentration area for waterfowl and enhances waterfowl hunting opportunities throughout the Grand Valley. A secondary management emphasis is on providing recreational opportunities. Human activities are managed to meet the primary objective, while allowing wildlife-oriented activities such as fishing, wildlife watching and conservation (CDOW, 2002). Hunting is not permitted in the SWA.

The primary objective for the property is to develop riparian vegetation and wetlands by taking advantage of the presence of the Colorado River. The intended outcome is to increase native species diversity and abundance. This objective has three components (CDOW, 2002):

- a. Restore native riparian vegetation
- b. Provide/restore appropriate native fish habitat
- c. Restore and develop floodplain wetlands

The proposed action of removing the levee is consistent with CDOW's management objectives for Walter Walker SWA.

Butch Craig BL Site

The Butch Craig BL Site is located on the Gunnison River about 14 miles upstream of the confluence of the Colorado River at Grand Junction, Colorado (See Figure 4). Like the Walter Walker SWA, the Butch Craig BL Site was excavated for gravel during the 1970s and 1980s. As a result, a 55-acre pond was created adjacent to the Gunnison River.

In 2000, the Recovery Program purchased the site as part of the Recovery Program's flooded bottomland acquisition program. A levee separates the pond from the Gunnison River. The levee is of sufficient height to protect the pond from river flow events higher than the 100-year event. Vegetation on the levee is scarce, consisting primarily of scattered cottonwood trees, greasewood, and sagebrush.

The property was purchase by the Recovery Program specifically to enhance endangered fish habitat by creating larval drift habitat for razorback sucker. Colorado pikeminnow are also expected to benefit from the habitat enhancement.

Recreation Resources

The Colorado and Gunnison Rivers provide various recreational opportunities including hunting, fishing, rafting, hiking, and sightseeing. Recreation activities are managed primarily by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Waterfowl hunting

in the Grand Valley is primarily limited to the river islands and flooded river bottomlands.

At Walter Walker SWA, wildlife habitat management is the highest priority with recreation being secondary. Recreation activities are limited to hiking on existing trails and hunting is prohibited. A river access for rafting is located directly upstream of the SWA. Walter Walker SWA serves as an important protected area for winter waterfowl, which enhances waterfowl hunting throughout the Grand Valley. Under the proposed action, recreational uses at Walter Walker would not change, hunting would continue to be prohibited by regulation, and the river access would remain.

The Butch Craig BL Site is accessible to the public only from the river or hiking along the adjacent Bureau of Land Management's Bangs Canyon Trail, which limits recreational opportunities. The proposed action would not change public access and recreational use would continue to be limited. Improved or developed access roads would remain closed to the public and used only for management activities.

Land Use and Vegetation

Both Walter Walker State Wildlife Area and the Butch Craig BL Site are characterized as river bottomland sites. The Walter Walker Site is owned by the State of Colorado and managed for wildlife with an emphasis on migrating waterfowl. The Butch Craig BL Site was recently purchased by the Recovery Program and will be managed for endangered fish habitat. Vegetation resources common to both bottomland sites include Fremont cottonwood, willow, tamarisk, Russian olive and other wetland and riparian species.

Species composition is not expected to change at Walter Walker SWA, however, the distribution will likely change as a result of river scouring and deposition. CDOW has plans to remove and control tamarisk and Russian olive at the SWA and the proposed action will complement CDOW's activities. No vegetation changes are predicted to occur at the Butch Craig BL Site.

Temporary construction access will be needed at both sites to allow heavy equipment to remove the levees. At Walter Walker SWA, United Sand and Gravel will need to obtain permission from Mesa County for temporary use of an existing road between the SWA and United's gravel operation. At the Butch Craig BL Site, Reclamation will either obtain temporary construction access through Whitewater Building Material's gravel pit and an adjoining landowner, or improve an alternate access (existing jeep trail) on the UnawEEP Charolais Ranches property. The Recovery Program purchased the Butch Craig BL Site from UnawEEP Charolais Ranches in 2000.

In consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), the levee removal at Walter Walker SWA would not require authorization under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Because no fill material will be placed below the ordinary high water line (OHW) or within wetlands, the activity would not be within the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act. However, fill

is required at the Butch Craig BL Site. Because the desired outcome is to provide seasonal connectivity between the pond and the Gunnison River, the exposed sides of the notches in the levee will need protection. The proposed action would protect the notches with riprap material. This would discharge fill material below the ordinary high waterline (OHW), resulting in the need for authorization under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Reclamation will request authorization from the Corps under Regional General Permit No. 57, Projects Beneficial to the Recovery of the Upper Colorado Endangered Fish Species. This regional permit expired on December 22, 2002 and is in the process of being renewed. Once the permit has been renewed, Section 404 authorization will be obtained. Construction activities at the Butch Craig BL Site will not begin until authorized by the Corps.

Fish and Wildlife Resources

Fish and Wildlife resources are diverse at Walter Walker SWA and the Butch Craig BL sites. Terrestrial and aquatic species are similar at both sites.

Common terrestrial species at Walter Walker SWA include Northern sagebrush lizard (*Sceloporus graciosus graciosus*), Northern whiptail (*Cnemidophorus tigris septentrionalis*), gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer*), great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*), Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*), mallard (*Anas platyhynchos*), rock dove (*Columba livia*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*), common nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), black-chinned hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*), tree swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*), black-billed magpie (*Pica pica*), American robin (*Turdus migratorius*), European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), Western meadowlark (*Sturnella neglecta*), Brewer's blackbird (*Euhagus cyanocephalus*), house finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), masked shrew (*Sorex cinereus*), Western small-footed myotis (*Myotis californicus stephensi*), long-legged myotis (*Myotis volans interior*), hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus cinereus*), desert cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*), black-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*), white-tailed jackrabbit (*Lepus townsendii*), least chipmunk (*Tamias minimus*), Northern pocket gopher (*Thomomys talpoides*), Ord's kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys ordii sanrafaeli*), deer mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), house mouse (*Mus musculus*), common muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*), striped skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*), Woodhouse's toad (*Bufo woodhousii woodhousii*), bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*), and Northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*) (CDOW 2002).

Common fish species in the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers include blue head sucker (*Catostomus discobolus*), flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*), roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*), common carp (*Cyprinus carpio linnaeus*), fathead minnow (*Pimephales promelas*), red shiner (*Cyprinella lutrensis*), sand shiner (*Noptropis stamineus*), and channel catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*) (Burdick, 2001).

Riparian and wetland dependent wildlife species (waterfowl, neo-tropical migrants, etc.) are predicted to benefit from the increased frequency of river inundation and the creation of

additional habitats. Fish species are predicted to benefit from increased access to existing habitats and by habitat enhancements.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified six threatened or endangered species that could be directly affected by the proposed action. These include: 1) Colorado pikeminnow, 2) razorback sucker, 3) humpback chub, 4) bonytail, 5) southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax trailii estimus*), and 6) bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*).

For purposes of Section 7 Compliance with the Endangered Species Act, this EA also serves as the biological assessment for federally listed species.

Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker are known to occur in backwater habitats near both sites and the proposed project is designed to enhance designated critical habitat. Both Walter Walker SWA and Butch Craig BL sites occur within designated critical habitat for the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. Walter Walker SWA has been identified by the Service as one of the backwater or bottomland areas in the Grand Valley most heavily used by Colorado pikeminnow (Osmundson et al, 1997). In 2002, the Service documented larval razorback sucker in the Gunnison River upstream and downstream of the Butch Craig BL Site (McAda, 2002).

Humpback chub and bonytail have not been documented at either site. However, bonytail may be stocked in the area by the Recovery Program. If stocked, the proposed actions would benefit bonytail. The proposed actions are predicted to have a may affect, but not likely to adversely effect (Beneficial Effect) on Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, and bonytail; and is predicted to not adversely modify designated critical habitat. Incidental take of endangered species is not predicted to occur as a result of the proposed actions. The proposed project is predicted to have no effect on humpback chub.

Preferred habitats for bald eagle and southwestern willow flycatcher occur on or adjacent to both project sites. Mature cottonwood trees and willows will not be affected by the proposed actions. In addition, construction activities will occur outside the nesting seasons. Therefore, the proposed actions are predicted to have no affect on bald eagle and southwestern willow flycatcher.

The Service during Section 7 Consultation concurred with Reclamation's determinations and a copy of the Services concurrence memorandum dated March 21, 2003 (USFWS, 2003) is attached in the appendices.

Water Quality

Elevated salinity and selenium levels occur in both the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers and resulted in the implementation of federal programs to address water quality issues. Reclamation

and the Natural Resource Conservation Service have implemented salinity control projects in both the Grand and Uncompahgre Valleys to reduce salt loads in the Colorado mainstem as part of the Colorado River Salinity Control Program. Projects have been limited primarily to lining of irrigation canals, piping laterals, and on-farm efficiency improvements. The proposed projects are predicted to have no effect on salinity concentrations in the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers, or affect the Colorado River Salinity Control Program's ability to meet targeted salinity reductions in the lower Colorado River.

The National Irrigation Water Quality Program (NIWQP) evaluated selenium levels in selected backwater sites along the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers. Elevated selenium levels are known to adversely affect waterfowl, fishes and other wildlife. The Walter Walker SWA was evaluated by the NIWQP as part of the Grand Valley/Gunnison reconnaissance investigations. Selenium sampling in 1995-96 and for the Recovery Program since 1995 have indicated that parts of Walter Walker SWA are highly contaminated with selenium and that the source of high selenium concentrations was shallow ground-water discharge, much of which is probably irrigation induced. Detailed water quality data for Walter Walker SWA can be found in [USGS Open File Report 99-453](#) (Butler and Osmundson, 1999) and [Synopsis of Ground-Water and Water Quality Data Collected by USGS at Walter Walker SWA, 1997-2000](#) (Unpublished Butler, 2001).

The proposed actions may result in improved water quality at both sites with increased flushing reducing the tendency for pollutants to concentrate.

Water Rights

The proposed action does not affect the amount of water or ability to divert water for consumptive uses in the Colorado and Gunnison Rivers. Therefore, the proposed action is predicted to have no effect on water rights.

Historical and Cultural Resource Properties

Culture resource inventories were conducted in 2002 by Reclamation staff, and it was determined that the proposed projects would have no effect on historical or cultural resource properties. In the unlikely event that cultural or historic resource properties are encountered during construction, activities will be halted and consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer initiated.

Indian Trust Assets

Indian trust assets are legal interests in property held by the United State for Indian Tribes or individuals. Reclamation and other Federal agencies share the responsibility to protect these assets. There have been no trust assets identified in the project area, and therefore no impact on these assets is predicted.

Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice provides that Federal agencies analyze programs to assure that they do not disproportionately adversely affect minority or low income populations or Indian Tribes. There are no potentially affected minority or low income populations in the project area, and no adverse effects related to environmental justice are predicted.

Health and Safety/Disease Vectors

Standing water provides breeding habitat for mosquitoes and other biting flies. These insects can serve as potential disease vectors. The proposed action at Butch Craig BL Site would likely reduce the amount of standing water by introducing river flow into and out of the Butch Craig Pond. At the Walter Walker Site, the natural river scouring and deposition would likely result in no net increase in standing water. Therefore, the proposed actions are predicted to have no effect on health and safety/disease vectors.

Socioeconomic

There is no direct socioeconomic affect to implementing the proposed actions other than some limited employment opportunities during construction. Indirectly, the proposed projects are designed to enhance fish habitat to increase the likelihood of endangered fish recovery, allowing continued water development in the Colorado and Gunnison River basins as identified in the Recovery Program Goals.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts are impacts on the environment, which result from the incremental impact of the action, when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.

Past and present activities that have affected river-related resources in the area include irrigation, urban development and recreational activities associated with construction and operation of the Aspinall Unit and the Uncompahgre Project, Grand Valley Project, and activities associated with the Recovery Implementation Program for Endangered Fish Species in the Upper Colorado River Basin.

Implementation of all or any of these projects has affected and continues to affect the human environment including but not limited to water quality, water rights, socioeconomic and wildlife resources. Incremental cumulative impacts associated with the implementation of the proposed action are anticipated to be too small to measure.

Summary and Environmental Commitments

In summary, the primary effect of the proposed actions would be to improve and create suitable habitats for the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker at Walter Walker SWA and the Butch Craig BL Sites.

The proposed actions would have no effect on land use, water quality, water rights, Indian trust assets, and historical and cultural resources. The proposed actions would also have no effect on the bald eagle, southwestern willow flycatcher, bonytail or humpback chub. The proposed actions may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. In addition, the proposed actions would not adversely modify designated critical habitat.

Wildlife would be impacted by increased noise and activity during construction, however this would be short-term. Impacts associated with construction would be mitigated by restricting construction activities to outside the normal nesting season. Riparian and wetland dependent wildlife and fish species would benefit for additional habitat created by the increased flooding.

Vegetation resources impacts at the Butch Craig BL site would be limited to temporary construction disturbances. Vegetation resources at the Walter Walker SWA site would convert some upland sites created by the levee to more floodplain dependant riparian and wetland habitat types. Clean Water Act Section 404 authorization would be obtained to discharge riprap material to protect the newly created notches in the levee at the Butch Craig BL Site.

Permission to use existing roads cross adjoining private land would also be needed prior to construction.

Mitigation Measures

- 1). Authorization would be obtained from CDOW to remove the lower portion of the levee at Walter Walker SWA.
- 2). Authorization would be obtained to cross property owned by Mesa County via an existing road to access and haul material to and from Walter Walker SWA.
- 3) Authorization from adjoining landowners to use an existing road to cross their property would be obtained prior to initiating construction activities at the Butch Craig BL Site.
- 4). Section 404 authorization would be obtained from the Corps prior to initiating construction activities at the Butch Craig BL Site. Removed levee material would be discharged in uplands sites above the ordinary high water line.
- 5). Construction and levee removal activities would be limited to before and after the spring runoff period when river levels are low.

6) Levee removal activities at Walter Walker SWA would be coordinated with CDOW and would occur outside the normal nesting and migration seasons to protect nesting waterfowl and migratory birds.

7) Areas disturbed during construction would be revegetated with appropriate plant species (i.e. willows, grasses).

CHAPTER IV – CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

General

On December 2, 2002, a scoping letter was mailed to local, state, and federal agencies, water users, environmental organizations, recreationist, adjoining land owners obtained from Mesa County GIS data, and other interested parties. Issues, comments and concerns were requested by December 20, 2002. A draft EA was distributed for public review and comment on January 31, 2003. Comments on the draft EA were requested by February 14, 2003. A total of seven written comments on the draft EA were received. Four responders supported the partial levee removal (one supported total removal as well), one commenter who support total levee removal, and one responder opposed the levee removal. Copies of the comment letters are included in the administrative record and listed below are comment summaries received on the draft EA, along with comment responses.

February 7, 2003-Email from Mr. Paul Bird

Comment 1. ‘If the dike is removed, will this just allow the tamarisk to have a good watering a couple times a year?’

Response 1. The proposed action would remove the lower portion of the existing levee, allowing seasonal flooding in the lower portion of the property. The river would scour and remove some tamarisk, however, other areas would not be affected. The CDOW has implemented tamarisk removal projects and has plans to treat additional areas unrelated to the proposed project.

Comment 2. “...will the removal of the dike let the river change course and not allow access to the south side of Walter Walker for future maintenance problems (like tamarisk removal)?”

Response 2. This concern was discussed with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW). The lower portion of the levee would be removed and the area monitored before considering removing additional parts of the levee.

Comment 3. “Walter Walker gave this property for a resting area for waterfowl. Could United Companies take a little more gravel in exchange for building some small ponds and knocking down some tamarisk to make a loafing area for waterfowl?”

Response 3. United companies could take additional gravel with CDOW’s approval, but would not be part of the Recovery Program’s proposed action. Gravel mining would require additional permitting from the Army Corps of Engineers and Service.

February 8, 2003-Email from Mr. Paul Brenner

Comment 1. “I applaud you planned improvements to Walter Wildlife. My concern is that you could do so much more to improve Walker at little or no additional cost.”

Response 1. The proposed property is owned and managed by the CDOW. While the primary objective of the proposed action is to restore the natural flood frequency of the river floodplain at Walter Walker, other species besides endangered fish will likely benefit from the proposed action. The Colorado Division of Wildlife also has plans to enhance wildlife habitats and has concurred that the proposed action will not limit CDOW’s ability to manage and enhance the SWA for other wildlife species.

Comment 2. “...removing the dike may well-create improved habitat for the humpback chub and bonytail, assuming your high-water scouring predictions are accurate.unless you expand United’s contract to remove a couple million cubic yards of gravel and overburden (including the overgrown tamarisks, salt cedar and Russian olive jungle), your project will do nothing for the ducks and geese seeking to find refuge in Walker Wildlife.”

Response 2. As stated in Response 1, the property is owned and managed by CDOW. CDOW manages the property for a variety of wildlife species including endangered fish, waterfowl, and other riparian dependent species. The property was historically gravel mined and a large pond was created by a levee separating the mined gravel area from the river. Over time, the area has filled with material and has become more of an upland site. The proposed action would allow a portion of the property to be converted back to river floodplain/bottomland habitat. CDOW has plans to implement tamarisk control measures and enhance waterfowl habitats, independent of the proposed action. CDOW has predicted that the proposed action will have no negative effect on waterfowl habitat and will not affect their ability to manage the SWA for waterfowl.

Endangered fish species predicted to benefit from the proposed action are the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker, the bonytail and humpback chub would likely be unaffected.

Comment 3. “...in return for clearing the overburden, let United create a half-dozen ten acre ponds and remove the gravel all the way to bedrock, creating numerous shallow and deep water ponds. Turn Walker Wildlife into a refuge again.”

Response 3. This type of action would require approval from CDOW because they own the property. Additional permits from the Army Corps of Engineers and Service would be also be needed.

Comment 4. “...The only obstacle I can foresee is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”

Response 4. Reclamation consulted with The Service under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act on the proposed actions. The Service provided written concurrence stating that the proposed actions may affect, not likely to adversely affect the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker, and will not result in adverse modification of designated critical habitat. Because the SWA is within designated critical habitat, Reclamation would need to consult on any additional Federal action.

February 10, 2003-Letter from Mr. Alan Pennington

Comment 1. "...after walking the Walter Walker area with you on February 5, 2003, it seems the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service could come up with a better plan than just taking out a dyke since they seem to have unlimited funds...."

Response 1. The alternative for floodplain/bottomland habitat restoration at Walker Walker SWA was developed in consultation with CDOW and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Comment 2. "I think removing the dyke will only change the flow of water, which may or may not help the fish, not benefiting other species using the area."

Response 2. Removing the lower portion of existing levee would increase seasonal flooding to restore the floodplain/bottomland habitat. There are numerous riparian species listed in the EA that would benefit from the enhancement.

Comment 3. "I feel the dyke should be left in, get a gravel company to go in below the dyke and dig out holdings ponds, remove tamarisk, and terrace the bank."

Response 3. This would not meet the purpose and need as described in the EA.

Comment 4. "The US Fish and Wildlife Service has a great opportunity to work with the Division of Wildlife to improve waterfowl habitat and resting area, which is what Walter Walker was intended for...."

Response 4. The proposed action would benefit waterfowl and other riparian dependant species. Additional improvements for waterfowl using funds from sources other than the Recovery Program could be requested by CDOW. However, this would be at the discretion of CDOW.

Comment 5. "There is a tremendous amount of waterfowl hunting done along the Gunnison and Colorado Rivers. No one has addressed this issue."

Response 5. Additional information and discussion on waterfowl was added to Chapter 3-Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences.

Comment 6. “If your proposed project is done correctly, waterfowl habitat, your fish, and hunting areas would all benefit. Taxpayer dollars should be spent for all species not just the fish...”

Response 6. The proposed action would benefit floodplain/bottomland dependant species.

February 14, 2003 Comment Letter from Mr. Eric Noble

Comment 1. “We totally support the removal of the levee, which in our opinion was a bad idea to begin with, it effectively channelized the river into a narrow, swift and not very biologically productive segment of the river.”

Response 1. No comment necessary.

Comment 2. “In Walter Wildlife area, the growth of nearly 20-year old cottonwoods is a testament to the 1984 flood that breached the levee....I believe that the species is *Populos deltoides* or *P. fremontii* at this altitude as *P. angustifolia* exists above 6,000 ft.”

Response 2. *P. angustifolia* was changed to *P. fremontii* on Page 9.

Comment 3. “We believe stronger consideration be given to the total removal of the levee while the opportunity exists, allowing the river to revert more to it’s natural “wild and free” state, which would be the highest and best use of that area. Effectively dealing with selenium flushing and refreshing the backwaters and enhancing the riparian habitat. A possible beneficial reduction in mosquito population may result from this flushing of the backwaters with a healthy small fish population.”

Response 4. As stated in the draft EA, total levee removal was considered during the development of the proposed action. It was determined that the removal of the lower portion of the levee would allow the Recovery Program to monitor and document river changes, prior to considering total levee removal. The proposed actions does not prevent total levee removal, and additional levee removal would be considered a 2nd Phase of the project if habitats objectives are met with partial levee removal.

February 19,2003 Comment E-Mail from Mr. Fred Boyle

Comment 1. “... I cannot speculatively foresee any problems with removing the entire levee all at once. Positive possibilities include the greater and more immediate availability of habitat favorable to utilization by endangered species....”.

Response 1. Partial levee removal was selected primarily because it provides more protection to a backwater at the lower end of the SWA that is currently used by adult Colorado pikeminnow. Partial removal would allow the Recovery Program to monitor river

changes as a result of the partial removal. If desired conditions are met, the Recovery Program would then consider removing additional portions of the levee. In addition, CDOW has concerns that total levee removal would prevent access to the SWA for planned habitat enhancements (i.e. tamarisk removal, willow and cottonwood planting and shallow pond construction).

Comment 2. “Possible problems with the plan as proposed include, in my judgment, a kind of possible double jeopardy as far as the possible negative impacts of the levee removal process, siltation, and other possible negative effects resulting from erosion at the west end of the remaining upstream levee during high water and the likelihood that segmented relief can overly prolong transition to a reasonable stable natural equilibrium.”

Response 2. Discussed in Response 2 above.

Comment 3. “Another danger of not clearing the entire levee lies in the realm of shifting political currents...I believe that in the near future past decisions to remove such artifacts will be viewed as having been wise as well as prudent.”

Response 3. No comment necessary.

Comment 4. “I know of no narrow-leaf cottonwoods (*Populus angustifolia*) at Walter Walker SWA.”

Response 4. Narrow-leaf cottonwood was changed to Fremont cottonwood on Page 9.

February 14, 2003-Letter from Mesa County Department of Planning and Development

Comment 1. “Mesa County requires a floodplain permit for any construction activity that take place in the Colorado or Gunnison River floodplain. The *Mesa County Land Development Code 2000*, section 7.13 through 7.13.11 contains specific criteria necessary to obtain this permit.”

Response 1. Reclamation, CDOW or their contractors will obtain all required permits prior to the start of construction activities.

Comment 2. “You are also responsible for obtaining written permission (from applicable landowners) to access the project sites prior to any activity.”

Response 2. This is already stated in the EA and will be completed prior to any construction activity.

Comment 3. “We request that you work with the County to develop a weed management plan (including follow-up control measures) as an element of the reclamation plan for the

dike removal and residual, reclaimed haul road.”

Response 3. Site reclamation including noxious weed control is a standard contract specifications included in all Reclamation construction contracts.

February 24, 2003 – Letter from Grand Valley Anglers Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Comment 1. “The proposed actions covered by the EA should improve general riparian conditions and, hopefully, habitat for the endangered fish.”

Response 1. No response necessary.

Comment 2. “Both projects offer opportunities to expand riparian vegetation such as cottonwood and willow. More emphasis should be placed on this, particularly at the Craig Site where competition with invading Salt cedar will be needed.”

Response 2. The Recovery Program and Reclamation will explore funding opportunities as the land manager for enhancing riparian habitats at the Butch Craig BL Site separate from the proposed action. Potential funding sources include Central Utah Project Completion Act funding. CDOW through its Master Management Plan has identified riparian habitat restoration as one of its goals.

Consultation with other Agencies

Reclamation staff continues to informally coordinate and consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and the Bureau of Land Management. A complete list of Agencies is included in the Distribution List.

Distribution List

Appendix A contains the mailing list for this draft EA. The list includes all individuals, agencies, and organizations to which Reclamation sent the scoping document on December 2, 2002. In addition, others who have specifically requested a copy of the draft EA are included on the list.

References:

Burdick, B.D. 2001. Five-year evaluation of fish passage at the Redlands Diversion Dam on the Gunnison River near Grand Junction, Colorado: 1996-2000. Recovery Program Project Number CAP-4b. Final Report prepared for the Recovery Implementation Program for Endangered Fishes in the Upper Colorado River Basin. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado River Fishery Project, Grand Junction, CO. 57 pp + appendices.

Butler, D.L. and B.C. Osumundson. 1999. Physical, Chemical, and Biological Data for the Uncompahgre Project Area and the Grand Valley, West-Central Colorado, 1993-1998. U.S. Geological Survey, Open File Report 99-453, Denver, CO, 216 pp.

Butler, D.L. 2001. Synopsis of Ground-Water and Water-Quality Data Collected by USGS at Walter Walker SWA, 1997-2000. Unpublished Report, U.S. Geological Survey Report, Grand Junction, Colorado

Colorado Division of Wildlife. 2002. Master Management Plan, Walker State Wildlife Area. Colorado Division of Wildlife, Area 7, Western Habitat Section, Grand Junction, CO. 37 pp.

McAda, C. W., 2002. Personal communication with Chuck McAda, Project Leader, Colorado River Fishery Project, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on December 31, 2002, Grand Junction, CO.

Osumundson, D. B., Tucker M. E., Burdick, B.D., Elmblad, W.R., and T.E. Chart. 1997. Non-spawning movements of sub adult and adult Colorado squawfish in the upper Colorado River; Grand Junction, Colo., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, variously paged.

Tetra Tech ISG, 2002A. Floodplain Habitat Restoration, Walter Walker (WW) Site, Colorado River Near Grand Junction, Colorado, Flood Inundation Study, Final Report. Contract No. 1425-6-CA-40-1730A, Tetra Tech ISG Project No. 10600.31, Breckenridge, CO.

Tetra Tech ISG, 2002B. Floodplain Habitat Restoration, Butch Craig (BC) Bottomland Site, Gunnison River Near Delta, Colorado, Flood Inundation Study, Final Report. Contract No. 1425-6-CA-40-1730A, Tetra Tech ISG Project No. 10600.9, Breckenridge, CO.

USFWS, 2003. Memorandum from Assistant Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, Grand Junction, Colorado to Deputy Area Manager, Bureau of Reclamation, Grand Junction, Colorado dated March 21, 2003.

Yamashita, S. 2003. Personal Communication on February 25, 2003 with Steve Yamashita, Area Manager, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Grand Junction, CO.

ATTACHMENT A
Distribution Mailing List

Ms. Laura Wachler
2127 Sequila Ct
Grand Junction, CO 81503

Mr. Danial Calvert
2130 Sequila Ct
Grand Junction, CO 81503

Mr. Brent Ogden
2128 Sequila Ct
Grand Junction, CO 81503

Mr. Edwin Noble
11407 Great Meadow Dr.
Reston, VA 20191

Panorama Improvement District
PO Box 2554
Grand Junction, CO 81502

Mr. Hans Brutsche
18549 N 71st, Unit 245
Scottsdale, AZ 85254

Ms Ellen Madden
2015 Tiara Ct.
Grand Junction, CO 81503

Lake Mirage LTD
2065 Blue Water Dr.
Fruita, CO 81521

Ms Deanna Fowler
2121 River Rd.
Grand Junction, CO 81505

Mr. Roger Beaudoin
2123 River Rd.
Grand Junction, CO 81505

Mr. Martin Azcarraga
2155 River Rd.
Grand Junction, CO 81505

Mr. Scott Murdock
3550 S County Rd. 5
Loveland, CO 80537

United Companies of Mesa County
2273 River Rd.
Grand Junction, CO 81505

Mr. Richard Pennington
782 23 7/10 Rd.
Grand Junction, CO 81505

Whitewater Building Materials
P.O. Box 1769
Grand Junction, CO 81502

Unaweep Charolais Ranches, INC
P.O. Box 40
Grand Junction, CO 81502

Mr. John Toolen
Colorado Division of Wildlife
711 Independent Ave.
Grand Junction, CO 81505

Mr. Larry Abbott
Colorado Department of Transportation
222 South Sixth St.
Grand Junction, CO 81501

Mesa County Department of Planning and
Development
P.O. Box 2000
Grand Junction, CO 81502

Mr. Pat Nelson
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
P.O. Box 25486, DFC
Denver, CO 80225

Mr. Al Pfister
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
764 Horizon Dr., Bldg. B
Grand Junction, CO 81506

Mr. Marian Atkins
Bureau of Land Management
2815 H Rd.
Grand Junction, CO 81506

Mr. Steven Glazer
High Country Citizen's Alliance/Sierra Club
P.O. Box 459
Crested Butte, CO 81224

Mr. Dave Kanzer
Colorado River Water Conservation District
P.O. Box 1120
Glenwood Springs, CO 81602

Ms Dianna Leinberger
Club 20
P.O. Box 550
Grand Junction, CO 81502

Mr. Ken Jacobson
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
400 Rood Ave., Room 142
Grand Junction, CO 81501

Mr. Chuck McAda
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
764 Horizon Dr., Building B
Grand Junction, CO 81506

Mr. Pat Oglesby
Trout Unlimited
3095 Evanston
Grand Junction, CO 81504

Mr. Randy Seaholm
Colorado Water Conservation Board
1313 Sherman St., Room 721
Denver, CO 80203

Ms. Penny C. Starr
Western Colorado Congress
124 Bristlecone Dr.
Ridgway, CO 81432

Mr. Evertt Sunderland
Upper Colorado River Commission
355 S 400 E
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Mr. Greg Trainor
City of Grand Junction
250 North Fifth St.
Grand Junction, CO 81501

Mr. Paul Von Guerard
U.S. Geological Survey
764 Horizon Dr., Rm 125
Grand Junction, CO 81506

Susan Grabler
Union Pacific Railroad
1400 W 52nd Ave
Denver, CO 80221

Mr. Paul Bird
660 Rood Ave.
Grand Junction, Colorado 81501

Mr. Paul Brenner
5210 Singer Road
Las Cruces, N.M. 88007

Mr. Carl Noble
2755 CR 207
DeBeque, CO 81630

ATTACHMENT B
US Fish and Wildlife Service Concurrence Memorandum



IN REPLY REFER TO:
ES/CO-BR
MS 65412 GJ

United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Ecological Services
764 Horizon Drive, Building B
Grand Junction, Colorado 81506-3946

SPECIAL DELIVERY RECEIVED FOR RECORD NORTHWEST DIVISION	
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WALTER WALKER STATE WILDLIFE AREA BUTCH CRAIG FLOODPLAIN	
LIST OF AFFECTED SPECIES	
BUTCH CRAIG FLOODPLAIN	

March 21, 2003

Memorandum

To: Deputy Area Manager, Bureau of Reclamation, Grand Junction, Colorado

From: *John P. Jones*
Assistant Field Supervisor, Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, Grand Junction, Colorado

Subject: Comments on Proposed Remediation and Habitat Restoration Activities at Colorado River Wildlife Area Backwater, Adobe Creek Backwater, Walter Walker State Wildlife Area and Butch Craig Floodplain

This responds to your recent request dated February 4, 2003, for work proposed under the National Irrigation Water Quality Program (NIWQP) to reduce selenium concentrations at Colorado River State Wildlife Area and Adobe Creek and your request on behalf of the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program dated February 26, 2003, to restore floodplain habitat at Walter Walker State Wildlife Area and the Butch Craig property. All of these projects are within the 100-year floodplain of the Colorado and Gunnison rivers, which is designated as critical habitat for the Colorado pikeminnow (*Psychocheilus lucas*), razorback sucker (*Xyrisuchen texanus*) and bonytail (*Gila elegans*). You asked for concurrence that the projects, as proposed, "may affect, but are not likely to adversely affect (beneficial)" these listed species. We agree with your assessment that your proposed projects will have a beneficial affect on the listed fish through habitat improvement by allowing access to more river bottom floodplain and reducing selenium concentrations in areas that are accessible to the listed fish. Therefore, the Service concurs with your "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" determination for the three listed Colorado endangered fish in the area of concern.

In addition, you requested the Service to evaluate whether the projects would adversely affect the southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) or if the southwestern willow flycatcher would no longer be listed in the area of concern. The Service recently revised the range of the southwestern willow flycatcher in accordance with the final recovery plan (USFWS 2003). Although the specifics of these revisions have not been officially distributed, we recognize your projects are outside the area that will be delineated in the plan, and therefore, additional surveys for southwestern willow flycatchers will not be required.

You also stated you believe the projects will have no affect on the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) because construction of the projects would occur outside of the time frame when bald eagles are known to use these sites. We concur with your determination that the bald eagle will not be affected by your proposed projects.

If new information becomes available, if a new species becomes listed, if incidental take occurs, or if any other project element changes which alters the operation of the project from that which is described in your correspondence and which may affect an endangered or threatened species in a manner or to an extent not considered in this informal consultation (see 50 CFR 402.16), section 7 consultation should be reinitiated.

If the Service can be of further assistance, please contact Rick Krueger at the letterhead address or (970) 245-3920 or 243-6209, extension 17.

PC: FWS/ES/FO, Lakewood

RKrueger:BB/Remediation/Proposed/Man doc:032103

LITERATURE CITED

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2002. Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Recovery Plan. Albuquerque, New Mexico. I-IX + 210 pp., Appendices A-O.