

Appendix E

Responses to Public Comments

E.1 Summary of Public Comments

The comment period for the Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan (RMP), Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) extended from December 13, 2000, to February 12, 2001. Reclamation thanks all of those who provided comments. The public comments, along with responses, are provided in Section E.2, *Public Comments and Responses*. Overall, comments focused on four main subject areas: wildlife habitat, safety, the scuba dive park, and overcrowding at recreation facilities and areas of the reservoir. Several other subjects were also addressed, as listed on Table E-1.

Wildlife habitat comments came primarily from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), although other commentors also addressed wildlife habitat. Two primary areas of concern emerged: closure of the Pipe Creek Road and the bald eagle nest at the Willow Creek Arm. Of those who mentioned the Pipe Creek Road, commentors wanted to close the road to protect wildlife. Closures at the Willow Creek Arm for bald eagle protection received more frequent comments, ranging from closing the area entirely to not closing the area at all. Reclamation plans to implement a monitoring program for three consecutive nesting seasons to determine the potential effects of boating activity on the eagles. The monitoring will be developed and conducted in cooperation with Tribes, FWS, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), and local boating organizations. Allowable activities at Willow Creek Arm will be determined by the results of this study.

Safety issues generally concerned traffic and congestion at the ramps and conflicts among user groups. Particularly, Blacktail was reported to be already overcrowded and unsafe because of the number of vehicles at the parking areas and using the ramp. The Preferred Alternative includes provisions to expand parking and either expand or create a new swimming area to increase safety. Reclamation will also conduct a carrying capacity and demand study to determine if the boat ramp, dock, and other facilities need to be expanded for recreation during the next 10 years and if the expansion can be accomplished without damaging existing natural and cultural resources. To resolve conflicts among user groups, one commentor suggested that increased enforcement of no-wake zones was needed. Reclamation does not have enforcement authority at the reservoir; this is under the jurisdiction of the Bonneville County Sheriff's Department. Nevertheless, Reclamation will continue to work with the County in efforts to increase enforcement at Ririe Reservoir.

The scuba dive park is important to many area users. Most of the comments addressed the location of the park and asked for assurance that the rest of the reservoir not be off-limits to scuba divers. Reclamation has not yet determined the exact location of the scuba dive park. This will be decided as an action undertaken in the RMP. However, upon further investigation and consultation with Reclamation's regional dive master and dam safety experts, it has been decided that the dam will not likely be considered as one of the locations because of safety issues. As has been the case in the past, the remaining areas of the reservoir will remain open to scuba divers.

Finally, many commentors had general concerns about overcrowding on this finite water body. Commentors felt that such overcrowding contributes to resource degradation, and, as noted earlier, was cited as the cause of conflicts among users. One commentor suggested that use limits should be applied to the reservoir through a permit system. Other commentors suggested that expanding facilities only encourages more use, and that facilities should not be

expanded. In some cases, facilities must be expanded to provide additional safety. However, extensive expansions are not planned. Instead, reconfiguration and more efficient use of existing Recreation sites is proposed.

Table E-1. Ririe Reservoir Draft EA—Comment Summary

T = Tribal comment, A = federal, state, or local agency comment

Issue	No. of Comments	Summary of Comments
Scuba park	17 (1A)	Current access is inadequate. Do not restrict diving use elsewhere. Isolate dive park from boat traffic. Desire 30-foot depth for the dive park. Location near the dam is preferred.
Scuba park	1 (T)	Would there be any adverse effects on the fishery?
Juniper/eastside trails	1 (T)	Trails cause riparian habitat fragmentation.
Safety at Blacktail boat ramp	3	The ramp is too narrow for today's wider boats. A breakwater is needed. No wake zone/enforcement is inadequate and better law enforcement is needed. Improve facilities.
Blacktail	1	Limit the number of vehicles at Blacktail. Move mooring area south of swimming area. Night lights on the ramp would help.
Blacktail	2	Overcrowded and will get worse; don't bring in power as this will only make it worse.
Blacktail area trail	2 (1T)	Trails cause habitat disruption over a large area. Close trails in winter to avoid wildlife conflicts.
General access concern	1	Continue access as it is currently allowed.
Native vegetation and wildlife	1	Protect resources, like the plan.
Creekside Park opening	1	Control deer flies if this area is to be used. Better security needed to control parties.
Creekside	1 (T)	Consider impacts of reopening Creekside on riparian vegetation and erosion.
Cultural resources	1 (A)	Support BMPs and Goals and Objectives and development of cultural resources management plan.
Cultural resources	3 (T)	Develop a cultural resources management plan.
Sailing/kayaking/swimming	1	There is a big conflict between these uses and jet skis. Large no-wake zone around swimming, picnic, and fishing areas needed to control motor boats and jet skis.
Water-based recreation	6	There is a severe conflict between finite supply and increasing demand that will only get worse.
Willow Creek Arm closure	1	Don't close this area to boating.

Table E-1. Ririe Reservoir Draft EA—Comment Summary

T = Tribal comment, A = federal, state, or local agency comment

Issue	No. of Comments	Summary of Comments
Fire rehabilitation	1	Re-seed burned areas quickly to reduce erosion. Erosion is a big problem in this area.
Cartier Slough	1 (A)	Groomed X-C track will attract too many people and conflict with wintering wildlife. Nature trail—area under water with strong currents for 1-2 months—expect erosion and will require annual maintenance.
Threatened and Endangered Species	1 (A) 1 (T)	Inadequate coverage for bald eagle, lynx, and tress; grazing conflicts and predator control conflicts not adequately addressed.
Close Pipe Creek road	2 (1A)	Close the road in winter to protect wildlife, which is the purpose for the WMA.
Project authorization documents	1 (T)	Add Ririe project authorization documents to the EA.
Water management	1 (T)	Address reservoir water management in the EA.
RMP implementation	1 (T)	Include Tribes in this process.

E.2 Public Comments and Responses

Letters of comment received as a result of the review of the Draft EA and Reclamation's response to specific comments are included in this appendix. All of the letters received are listed below. Letters that required a response follow, along with the responses. Letters that did not require a response are not attached.

Comments Requiring a Response	Page
Tribes (T)	
T1—Carol C. Perugini, Shoshone-Paiute Tribes, Owyhee, Nevada	7
T2—Chad Colter, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Fort Hall, Idaho	11
Federal Agencies (F)	
F1—Deb Mignogno, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chubbuck, Idaho	14
State and Local Agencies (A)	
A1—Susan Pengilly Neitzel, Idaho State Historical Society, Boise, Idaho	20
A2—Lee Staker, Bonneville County Board of Commissioners, Idaho Falls, Idaho	21
A3—David Christiansen, City of Idaho Falls Parks and Recreation Division, Idaho Falls, Idaho	22
A4—Kim Ragotzkie, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Falls, Idaho	23
A5—Karl Caspersen, Bonneville County Sheriff, Idaho Falls, Idaho	25
Organizations and Businesses (O)	
O1—Dr. Roger Tall, Bonneville County Waterways Committee, Idaho Falls, Idaho	26
O2—Gary E. McConnell, AquaNutz Dive Club, Idaho Falls, Idaho	27
O3—Keith Christensen, Inland Scuba, Inc., Idaho Falls, Idaho	31
Individuals (I)	
I1—Jeff and Pam Shearer, Idaho Falls, Idaho	32
I2—Harry Reilly, Idaho Falls, Idaho	34
I3—Harold Winther, Idaho Falls, Idaho	35
I4—Shane Olson, Idaho Falls, Idaho	37
I5—Tom Rowley, Idaho Falls, Idaho	38
I6—Lynn Shearer, Idaho Falls, Idaho	40

Comments that Did Not Require a Response

Organizations and Businesses

Jen Woodie, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Bozeman, Montana
 Garth Nelson, Ricks College Scuba Club, Rexburg, Idaho

Individuals

Anthony K. Perkins

The following individuals commented on the scuba dive park. All of these comments were captured in comment letter O2, Gary E. McConnell, AquaNutz Dive Club; letter O3, Keith Christensen, Inland Scuba, Inc.; and letter A5, Karl Casperson, Bonneville County Sheriff. Individuals below are referred to those letters for responses to comments on the scuba dive park.

- Michael Adams, Idaho Falls, Idaho
- Carol Baldwin, Rigby, Idaho
- Karla Bryan, Idaho Falls, Idaho
- Steven Bryan, Idaho Falls, Idaho
- Doug Conway, Rexburg, Idaho
- Garn Herrick, Roberts, Idaho
- Michael Jensen, Paris, Idaho
- Paul McCarthy, Idaho Falls, Idaho
- Allen and Lynn Moore, Idaho Falls, Idaho
- Garth Nelson, Rexburg, Idaho
- Kathy Parker, Idaho Falls, Idaho
- Perry Solis, Idaho Falls, Idaho
- Chris Trubl, Idaho Falls, Idaho
- Georgina Zatylny, Tempe, Arizona

**Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan:
Draft Environmental Assessment
December 2000**

Page #	Area	Topic	Proposed Action	Concerns		
2-5 3-45	Creekside Park and vicinity	Creekside Park	<p>Reopen and renovate area for day use/camping recreation use, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Allow for the development of loop trail from park to Willow Creek *Day use facilities *Group tent camping, as demand warrants *Upgrade facilities/structures *Provide orientation kiosk, interpretive displays, and regulatory signs *Enhance park vegetation 	<p>Have issues that led to closure of park been adequately addressed and/or corrected? Another concern is that development of the area for concentrated use may increase occurrence/severity of soil erosion, degradation of riparian area and sediment dumping into stream below dam. Per NRCS (p. 3-45) predominant soil series in Willow Creek drainage area is one of most erosive in U.S.</p>	<p>T1-1</p> <p>T1-2</p>	<p>T1-1: These issues will be addressed more thoroughly in the RMP. Reclamation understands that these issues include facilities and vandalism. Because these issues do not affect the overall intent and impact of the proposed action, addressing them in more detail in the RMP is considered sufficient for this analysis.</p> <p>T1-2: Erosion as a result of building trails will be offset by enhancing the park vegetation surrounding the trails. Best Management Practices (BMPs), listed in Chapter 5 of the Final EA, will be used to minimize erosion and avoid and reduce potential impacts on riparian vegetation.</p>
2-7	Juniper Park and vicinity	Boat launch and vicinity	<p>Explore use of and provision for allowing materials to be submerged in reservoir south of the boat launch ramp for scuba divers</p>	<p>What types of materials will be submerged and how large of an area will be affected? Have impacts on fishes been considered?</p>	<p>T1-3</p>	<p>T1-3: The types of materials to be submerged would be evaluated for their compatibility with environmental concerns. This EA concluded that facilities enhancement near Juniper Park would not significantly impact fisheries (Section 3.7.2). Submerged materials would not include any items that would degrade water quality and would, most likely, improve fish habitat.</p>

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Page #	Area	Topic	Proposed Action	Concerns		
2-8	Juniper Park and vicinity	Juniper area trails and shoreline access	Allow for the development of a 4-6 mile long trail beginning at Juniper Visitor's Center for non-motorized (hike, bicycle) use along the rim and shoreline of the east side of the reservoir	Construction of "looping" trails may cause fragmentation of riparian habitat which could negatively impact birds and small mammals	T1-4	T1-4: The impact of trails on wildlife habitat is described in Section 3.5.2. Because of BMPs and mitigation measures, the trail was found to not have a significant impact. Habitat fragmentation was considered to be a minor impact because of the large size of the Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and the small area affected by trails. Furthermore, trails might cross riparian areas at a few locations but would not run parallel to and within riparian areas.
2-9	Blacktail Park, Access Road, and Adjacent Reservoir Area	Blacktail Park Day Use Area, Trailhead, and Associated Parking	Allow for the development of non-motorized trail that accommodates equestrians, hikers, and bicyclists, providing access to the south along Willow Creek and farther into Tex Creek WMA	Beyond issues of proximity to shoreline, erosion risk, horse dung inputs and soil compaction there is risk of disruption of riparian bird and mammal species over an extensive area	T1-5	T1-5: Please see response to comment T1-4. Trails and trail heads will only be maintained during the late spring, summer, and early fall season, thereby avoiding most impacts during the critical winter period for big game.
2-13	Teton Mitigation Lands - Tex Creek WMA	Access	Work with IDFG and Bonneville County to implement an ordinance to close Pipe Creek Road to motorized use, including snowmobiles, during the winter season	We support this proposal as it will reduce disturbance of wintering elk, deer, moose and other wildlife species		

Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan - Page 3

Page #	Area	Topic	Proposed Action	Concerns		
	Entire management area			The Ririe Reservoir area is historically and culturally important to the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. During the 2/7/01 meeting it was suggested that the Tribes collaborate with the BOR to draft an Integrated Cultural Resource Management Plan for the Ririe Reservoir Area. Culturally significant sites would be identified as well as a protocol established that would detail how cultural artifacts, sacred sites, etc. should be treated to ensure that the interests of the Shoshone-Paiute and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes will be adequately protected	T1-6	T1-6: Reclamation will prepare a draft cultural resources management plan (CRMP) and coordinate its review with the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, and the State Historic Preservation Office, among others. The CRMP would include discussions of the consultation process, resource protection actions, actions to deal with adverse effects to sites, and procedures addressing NAGPRA issues of burial protection and custody of cultural materials. To craft a credible plan, Reclamation will solicit suggestions and information from the tribes at the early stages of plan development.

February 20, 2001

Ms. Carolyn Burpee Stone,
PN 3902, Bureau of Reclamation
1150 N. Curtis Road, Suite 100
Boise, ID. 83706-1234

RE: Comments to the Draft Environmental Assessment for the Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan

Dear Ms. Burpee Stone:

After a review of the Draft Environmental Assessments (EA) for the Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan I have the following technical comments and questions that need to be addressed. Overall, I thought the EA was well written, but heavily driven by the needs of recreation. My comments on some issues involve multiple sections of the EA. However, I have attempted to make specific comments on specific sections where possible.

- T2-1** I would recommend that the BOR initiate a formal Government to Government Consultation with the governing body of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes before the Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan is allowed to be finalized. The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), as well as other federal agencies, have a long history of implementing projects without consulting and addressing the negative impacts that these projects have on the tribes.
- T2-2** 1.4.1 Historical Overview
I would suggest that the Dams Authorizing language and mitigation plans be an appendix to the EA and be reference in the overview.
- 1.4.2 Need to Action Pg.1-5;
"A plan is needed to address current and anticipated future issues to permit the orderly and coordinated development and management...".
- T2-3** The language "development" implies that further development is what is needed, it should be struck out and replaced with "use".
- 2.3.2 Summary of Features Pg. 2-29;
Last sentence of 2nd paragraph: "Except for meeting accessibility requirements, recreation facilities would be upgraded or expanded only after documentation of increased demand."
- T2-4** I would suggest having some discussion pertaining to Tribal participation in the decision making process when determinations are being made to expanded or modified recreation facilities to better accommodate demand and use.

T2—Chad G. Colter, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Fort Hall, Idaho

- T2-1:** Reclamation has sought to include the Tribes in the development of the RMP by communicating with Tribal Governments and staff through letters, meetings, a field trip, and involvement in the Ad Hoc Working Group. (See EA Appendix D.) Reclamation will continue to work with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in the implementation of the RMP through meetings and an annual field trip and in other specific management actions as described in the RMP.
- T2-2:** The Project Authorizations have been added as Appendix F and referenced in the overview in response to your comment. Mitigation plans for the Ririe and Teton Projects consist of the agreements between Reclamation, IDFG, and the Corps of Engineers. These agreements reference a Master Plan, dated 1974, prepared by Reclamation in conjunction with the Corps of Engineers. These documents are too lengthy to include in the EA. Copies of the agreements have been made available previously to the Tribes and additional copies can be provided. Copies of the Master Plan can also be made available.
- T2-3:** The text has been changed in section 1.4.2 according to your suggestion.
- T2-4:** Reclamation, the Tribes, IDFG, and Bonneville County will be involved in the recreation carrying capacity and demand study to determine if recreation facilities will be expanded over the next 10 years and if the expansion can be accomplished without damaging the existing natural and cultural resources. Tribal involvement will be noted as a specific management action in the RMP.

- 3.2.1 Affected Environment Pg. 3-9, last Paragraph
 "The Ririe Reservoir Outlet Channel is dry for most of the year and does not support aquatic life. Therefore, high sediment loads in the channel would have no impacts."
- T2-5** | I would not agree with this statement. Seepage through the dam and the possibility of other springs contributing to the channel below the dam would lead me to believe that aquatic life of some form does exist in the area and high sediment loads may have negative effects.
- T2-6** | Furthermore, there is no discussion of cumulative impacts due to management of the reservoir and its possible affects on downstream cold water aquatic biota (e.g., Federal Columbia River Power System Biological Opinion).
- 3.5.2 Environmental Consequences
 Alternative B- Preferred Alternative: Recreation Development...
 Mitigation Pg. 3-37
 "Big Game winter range habitat losses would be mitigated by replacing impacted winter range habitat value through enhancement of existing winter range in Tex Creek."
- T2-7** | Although, enhancement of existing winter range should continue to be completed, it is difficult to assess proper crediting levels for habitat improvement that can take many years to be realize. Other alternatives for replacing lost habitat be should assessed, such as the conversion of lands designated for recreation to wildlife habitat. Losses to wildlife habitat should be replaced on at least a 1:1 basis through out the mitigation area.
- 3.6.2 Environmental Consequences
 Wildlife Alternative B- Preferred alternative...
 Scientists have provided sufficient research to establish that human presence does effect Bald Eagle nesting and foraging patterns. It is unclear as to how further study will provide us with any different management solutions than those already required. The plan needs to address the required enforcement of management actions.
- T2-8** |
- 3.11.2 Environmental Consequences
 "Adverse impacts would be limited to potential fee increase, but this would be offset by enhancement of low-cost recreation opportunities and improved access."
- T2-9** | The opinion viewed in this sentence appears to be a very narrow view of what is expected of Executive Order 12898. It is clearly being expressed as an issue that revolves around currency, and the assumption that Tribal members would be better served by low-cost recreational opportunities than they would by subsistence gathering, hunting and fishing. At a time when Tribal unemployment rates reach 70% and the change in Tribal member diets over a relatively short time have caused disease such as diabetes to be present on the reservation in numbers higher than the national average. It is important that we maintain a currency that is important to
- T2-5:** Reclamation believes the statement in the document to be correct. You may be referring to the natural streambed of Willow Creek, between the dam and the Outlet Channel, which is on private lands and Reclamation does not manage. We do recognize there are aquatic resources in this stream segment.
- T2-6:** Water operations of the reservoir is outside the scope of the RMP. No actions taken in the RMP will change the reservoir water management.
- T2-7:** The management designation of most of the non-mitigation lands at Blacktail Park has been converted from non-active recreation to non-mitigation lands that will be managed in conjunction and consistent with WMA lands. This is referred to in section 3.5.2.
- T2-8:** The monitoring plan that will be implemented in the RMP will determine if the nest on Willow Creek is a productive nest. Currently, there is no information available on this nest. Eagles have highly individualistic behavior patterns and nest management plans need to be designed specifically for each nest. Authority available to enforce whatever actions necessary will be part of a nest management plan, based on the outcome of the monitoring.
- T2-9:** You are correct in stating that the analysis reflects the economic impacts. We are not assuming that the low cost recreational opportunities would substitute for impacts to subsistence, hunting, gathering, and fishing for the Tribes. While it is apparent from your comment any impact to resources would affect these items, no information is available to document that the Tribes depend upon these resources for subsistence. However, Reclamation recognizes the importance of all the natural and cultural resources to the Tribes and the one of the purposes of the

RMP is to protect these resources.

T2-9
(cont)

the Tribes. This includes the restoration of component resources to conditions which most closely represent the ecological features associated with a natural riverine ecosystem.

T2-10

3.12 Cultural Resources
I did not get an official Tribal definition of Cultural Resources, but as I understand it, the Tribes hold a much larger view of the definition of "Cultural Resource". It includes not only those tangible remains of occupation, but also the natural resources that supported the occupation. The air, water, land, plants, and animals are all view as components of "Cultural Resources".

3.12.1 Affected Environment Pg. 3-73
3rd paragraph; "These two groups spoke mutually unintelligible Numic Languages, but lived together in bilingual winter villages..."

T2-11

The Tribes would suggest striking the words "mutually unintelligible and bilingual" from this sentence. It does not add anything and gives perception that the Tribes were not intelligent enough to communicate through anything other than the spoken language.

T2-12

I would like to suggest that the RMP be inclusive of a process to involve the Tribes with decision making and implementation of the plan. I would also like to express our support for the Shoshone-Paiute's technical comments on both the Ririe and Cascade Reservoirs RMP.

Sincerely,

Chad G. Colter
Fish & Wildlife Coordinator

cc: Fort Hall Business Council (7)
Billie Appenay, SBT Adm. Sec.
files

T2-10: Reclamation's use of the term "cultural resources" (as it appears in the glossary to the EA) is governed by specific historic preservation statutes and regulations under which Federal agencies must work. The Federal Government addresses "cultural resources" in a more restrictive way than the Tribes do, with Federal management and protection of archaeological, historic, and traditional cultural properties being integrally tied to the more restrictive definition of cultural resources. We are aware that the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes incorporate resources such as land, water, air, plants, and animals into their definition and that this more inclusive definition is culturally more meaningful to the Tribes. In recognizing the larger Tribal view of "cultural resources," Reclamation is agreeable to inserting an official Tribal definition in an appendix to the EA, if you so desire and can provide us with appropriate wording.

T2-11: The text has been changed in section 3.12.1 according to your suggestion.

T2-12: Reclamation will continue to work with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in the implementation of the RMP through meetings and an annual field trip and in other specific management actions as described in the RMP.



United States Department of the Interior

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February 5, 2001

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F1—Deb Mignogno, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
Chubbuck, Idaho

CONTRACT NO 1-1304

GOLDEN... 18174

Ms Carolyn Burpee Stone
Regional RMP Coordinator
PN-3902
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
1150 N. Curtis Road, Suite 100
Boise, Idaho 83706-1234

Subject: Draft Environmental Assessment for the Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan
FWS Ririe 546; File # 111.1008; FWS # 1-4-01-1546

Dear Ms Burpee Stone:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) reviewed the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan (RMP). The Draft EA, dated December 2000, was received by the Service on December 14, 2000. The Service, under authority of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act and the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, provides the following comments on the proposed project.

We have found the document to be well written. However, we believe the draft document is incomplete in it's assessment of threatened and endangered species (bald eagle, Canada lynx, and Ute ladies'-tresses) and that all alternatives considered are not adequately protective of listed species. We realize this document is an evolving process and we are anxious to discuss any of these proposals to help mitigate future impacts to fish and wildlife resources.

General Project Description

The Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) is responsible for the administration and management of those lands acquired or withdrawn for the initial construction and operation of the Ririe Reservoir. The proposed BOR RMP will serve as a blueprint for the future use, management, and site development of BOR lands at Ririe Reservoir, Outlet Channel, Ririe and Teton mitigation lands within the Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), and Ririe and Teton mitigation lands within the Cartier Slough WMA, which combine to provide flood control, irrigation, recreation, and habitat for fish and wildlife. Ririe Reservoir is approximately 12 miles long and covers 1,560 acres of surface area. Tex Creek is a 34,269 acre reserve on the southern part of the reservoir which includes lands owned by BOR, Idaho Department of Fish and Game,

Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and private entities. Cartier Slough consists of approximately 1,026 acres of the BOR's Ririe and Teton mitigation lands adjacent to the Henrys Fork of the Snake River. These lands occur in Madison, Jefferson, and Bonneville counties.

The purpose of the subject EA is to assist the BOR in finalizing a preferred RMP and to determine whether to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Currently, the BOR does not have a RMP for its lands around Ririe Reservoir.

Proposed Alternatives

The BOR began the public involvement process to develop reasonable alternatives in January 1999, in conjunction with an Ad Hoc Working Group (interested groups, Tribes, and agencies). Three Alternatives were developed for the RMP. Alternative A (No Action) is a continuation of existing management practices, in which the BOR would adopt no additional measures to provide management direction to meet future demand, facility needs, or natural and cultural resource improvements. Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) would focus to allow a limited amount of expansion and development of recreations sites and facilities, and to increase efforts of protecting and managing natural and cultural resources on BOR lands. Alternative C (Recreational Development / Maintain Natural Resource Emphasis) would focus to maintain current levels of protecting and managing natural and cultural resources on BOR lands and allow for a moderate level of expansion and development of recreation sites and facilities.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Bald Eagles. The bald eagle is listed as threatened. Two bald eagle nests are located in the proposed RMP area. One nest is located in the Willow Creek Arm, which is a tributary to Ririe Reservoir near the north end of Tex Creek. The nest is about 500 feet from the reservoir. The eagle pair produced eggs, but did not fledge any young in 1998. Nest productivity data for 1999 are not available. The nest was active in 2000, but no data are available regarding success. Another bald eagle nest is located near the south end of Cartier Slough. The Cartier Slough pair fledged one young in 1998. Nest productivity for 1999 and 2000 are not available.

Currently, we are aware of no bald eagle management plan that exists for these nest sites. The Draft EA presents deficient and sporadic survey data for occupancy and productivity. Detailed information about the nest trees, eagle pairs, occupancy dates, fledgling dates, habitat use, home range, foraging habits, perch trees, nest failures, and direct or probable reason for nest failures has not been provided.

The Draft EA, under Environmental Consequences, Sect. 3.6.2, Alternatives, Wildlife, presents the following information under Alternative A - No Action: "The effects of current boating activities on the nesting bald eagles are not known. Future use of the reservoir is expected to increase." No access restrictions or monitoring of potential effects are included in Alternative A. Further, the document recognizes that BOR's existing management practices may impact nesting bald eagles by reducing productivity or causing nest abandonment.

F1-1: No management plan has been prepared for the Willow Creek Arm nest because nest occupancy and productivity has been sporadic. Planned monitoring efforts will result in preparation of a management plan if the nest is occupied by a nesting pair. The bald eagle nest at Cartier Slough is actually on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land and is subject to a public lands closure from February 1 to July 31.

F1-1

Alternative B - the Preferred Alternative states, "Shoreline access would be restricted under Alternative B by signage within 1/4 mile of an active bald eagle nest from April 1 to July 15 to reduce disturbance. However, enforcement capabilities are limited so the effectiveness of the closure would depend largely on the public's willingness to voluntarily adhere to its conditions. If the public adheres to the shoreline access restriction, it should be effective in reducing disturbance of this nesting pair of bald eagles." "Alternative B does not include boating restrictions in the Willow Creek arm of Ririe Reservoir near the bald eagle nest. Whether boating activities near the nest disturb nesting activity and reduce productivity is unknown. A 3-year monitoring program would be implemented to determine if boating or other human activity is the cause of the low productivity at this nest. A seasonal boating closure would be pursued if boating is shown to disrupt normal eagle behavior." Alternative C effects are described as the same as for Alternative B.

Human activities are known to disrupt eagle activity patterns and in some cases can cause reproductive failure as described in the Bald Eagle Management Plan for Greater Yellowstone (1996). Ririe Reservoir and the BOR's Draft EA proposal area fall within the Snake Idaho Management Unit of the Bald Eagle Management Plan for Greater Yellowstone. This plan was finalized on January 31, 1996. The Snake Idaho Unit includes the Snake River watershed from the Wyoming line downstream to Idaho Falls. Interstate 15 comprises the entire western boundary, the southern boundary is the Bonneville-Bingham County line, and the eastern boundary is the Idaho - Wyoming line. The Snake Idaho unit contains portions of the Snake, Henry's Fork, Teton, and Falls Rivers, and Grey's Lake Outlet. Major reservoirs are Palisades, Ririe, and Grey's Lake.

For the Greater Yellowstone bald eagles, the Service recommends the following guidelines for bald eagle nest sites to restrict human disturbance at eagle use areas. Though many types of human disturbances are compatible with eagles, regulation of human activity near the nest site is a critical part of eagle habitat management. The Service recommends that the BOR establish buffer zones around the nest sites from land and water access points. These buffer zones should be established for individual nest territories based on the location of nest trees, perch trees, and flight paths, as well as stand characteristics, known individual tolerances, and weather patterns. The recommended buffer zones are described below.

Zone 1: Occupied Nesting Zone. Zone 1 is an area within a 400 meter radius of an occupied nest. Critical nesting periods vary throughout the recovery area, but generally fall between 1 March and 31 August. Human activity should not exceed minimal levels during the period from first occupancy of the nest site until two weeks following fledging. Habitat alterations should be restricted to projects specifically designed for maintaining or enhancing bald eagle habitat and conducted only during September through January. Human activity restrictions for Zone 1 may be relaxed during years when a nest is not occupied. During the nesting period, exclude all activities such as logging, construction, habitat improvement, and others which may negatively impact critical periods of nest use. Traffic by boats that continue travel at the rate of the main current and at a frequency which results in no boat traffic for at least 30% of the daylight hours (fishing from boats with such movement rates and frequency is acceptable). Jet ski or excessive motor boat disturbance is not acceptable. These activities should also be regulated up to 800 meters from nests and roosts where eagles have line-of-sight vision.

F1-2: Boating restrictions may be implemented pending the findings of the planned monitoring program. Monitoring results would be discussed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in determining the need for boating or other access restrictions.

F1-2

Zone II: Primary Use Area. Zone II includes the area within an 800 meter radius of the active nest and of all known alternate nests. Intensive study of a nesting pair for several years should allow for the boundaries of this zone to be altered to include the area where over 75% of adult foraging and loafing activity occurs during the nesting season. Habitat alterations should be carefully designed and regulated to insure preferred nesting habitat characteristics and foraging habitat are not degraded. Developments that may increase human activity levels and use patterns should not be allowed. Structures that have the potential for increasing mortality due to collision should not be constructed (power lines and telephone lines). Existing lines should be modified to minimize collision or electrocution.

F1-2
cont)

Zone III: Home Range. Ideally, the home range should be delineated by monitoring eagle movements during nesting and brood rearing for several years. Lacking such data, this zone should include all potential foraging habitat with a 4 km (2.5 miles) radius of the center of Zone II. The primary purposes of this zone are to maintain adequate foraging conditions and aid in maintaining the integrity of Zones I and II. This zone encompasses the area that should be protected through purchase, easements or cooperative agreements.

Nest management plans for the Ririe Reservoir bald eagle nests (Willow Creek arm and Cartier Slough) should be developed to account for all life history needs, including nest and roosting habitat, foraging, and protection from disturbances.

Bald Eagle Winter Use

The Ririe Reservoir, Tex Creek, and Cartier Slough areas are important wintering areas for bald eagles. The Draft EA only describes bald eagles as being common all year in the Cartier Slough area. The EA should be expanded to discuss management of bald eagle seasonal habitat and winter use areas. This should focus on the following three habitat components and human disruptions of each. Presence and abundance of food usually associated with open water, availability and distribution of foraging perches, and availability of secure night roost sites and freedom from human harassment dictate amount and extent of use of specific wintering grounds and areas used during migration. Wintering elk and mule deer in the Tex Creek area provide bald eagles with winter forage associated with late ungulate harvests and big game wintering grounds. Closure of Pipe Creek Road during the winter season would further protect bald eagles from motorized disturbances.

F1-3

Gray Wolves

Ririe Reservoir and Tex Creek are included in the Yellowstone Management Area for gray wolves. Within this area, wolves are classified as an, "experimental / non-essential population." At this time, wolves are not known to occupy the area near Ririe Reservoir. The closest known pack, the Wild Horse Pack, currently occupies a range north and west of Mackay. However, because of large wintering herds of elk and deer in the Tex Creek area and the great success of wolf recovery in Idaho, the Tex Creek area may become occupied in the very near future.

F1-4

Alternatives B and C, offer the most protection for wolves, should they occur in the Tex Creek area, by closing winter access roads, such as Pipe Creek Road. Such road closures may offer

F1-3: According to Reclamation, Ririe Reservoir and Tex Creek are not known to winter bald eagles. While no consistent winter use areas have been identified eagles have been seen in the area during the winter months.

F1-4: Livestock grazing does not occur on Reclamation lands, and no predator control efforts occur or are planned. If predator control were to be proposed at a future date, Reclamation would require that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services conduct a full National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis of the action.

F1-4
cont)

protection from snowmobiles, incidental shooting, and accidental trapping and snaring of wolves.

If livestock grazing occurs on these BOR lands and federal predator control programs such as Wildlife Services (WS) become operational for livestock protection, BOR should develop management plans which include mitigating measures for protection of gray wolves. These plans are developed in conjunction with WS, BOR, and FWS.

Canada Lynx

The Draft EA should be updated to reflect the Service’s March 24, 2000 published final rule to list the Canada lynx as threatened in the contiguous 48 States. This rule became effective on April 24, 2000.

F1-5

The Draft EA characterizes the higher elevation lands in the southeast corner of Tex Creek and adjacent FS lands to the east as suitable lynx habitat based on the vegetative species present and the relatively undisturbed nature of those areas. Under Alternative B, the document concludes there would be no effect on the Canada lynx. This conclusion is not supported by information provided in the document.

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest mapped Lynx Analysis Unit (LAU) #36 directly adjacent to the BOR’s eastern boundary along the head of Tex Creek from Peterson Creek and north to Mount Baldy. LAUs are intended to provide the fundamental or smallest scale with which to begin evaluation and monitoring of the effects of management actions on lynx habitat. The BOR should take measures to identify vegetative types on BOR lands which may provide suitable lynx habitat. If lynx habitat or key linkage areas are identified, the BOR should coordinate with the FWS on approaches to conserve lynx. The Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) provides detailed descriptions and approaches to develop lynx conservation measures.

Whooping Cranes

Whooping cranes in eastern Idaho are classified as an, “experimental / non-essential population.” Whooping cranes are presently not known to use the Cartier Slough, Ririe Reservoir, or Tex Creek areas. Recently, the Gray’s Lake re-introduction efforts have been termed as “failure” in the Pacific flyway. Only one bird from these efforts is known to currently survive. However, the surviving whooping crane returned last spring to the Teton River area within 20 miles of Ririe Reservoir. Under the Draft EA’s proposals, Alternatives A, B, and C should have little to no potential impacts or adverse affects to whooping cranes.

Ute ladies’ - tresses

F1-6

The threatened Ute ladies’-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*) (SPDI) may occur in all three counties within which the proposed RMP would be implemented. SPDI was first discovered in Idaho in 1996 along the South Fork of the Snake River in eastern Idaho. All known occurrences of SPDI in Idaho are found generally from Palisades Dam downstream to the confluence with Henry’s Fork, which are near the proposed area. The Draft EA, under Wetlands and Riparian Cover Types, describes several species which are associated with SPDI, such as *Carex spp.* and *Salix*

F1-5: The EA concludes no effect on lynx because none of the lands that may provide suitable habitat would be altered in any way by actions addressed in this EA.

F1-6: A search for Ute Ladie's-Tresses Orchid is not warranted because no actions that would alter suitable habitat are proposed. The EA states that searches following established protocols would be conducted prior to any land disturbing activities in potentially suitable habitat and that land disturbance would not occur in areas where tresses are found, thereby avoiding direct impacts. Day use activities, such as picnicking, typically do not occur in wetlands so the potential for impacts is remote at best. Herbicide application is done on an as-needed basis by hand so suitable habitat is avoided. Permitted grazing does not occur on Reclamation lands.

F1-6
(cont)

spp. The Draft EA states that no searches for this species have been conducted on BOR lands. If appropriate habitat for SPDI occurs within the RMP, the Service recommends that the BOR conduct SPDI surveys during the blooming season, usually from early August through mid-September, depending upon microsite and climatic conditions. The Draft EA does not consider threats to SPDI under the proposed Alternatives. The effects to SPDI from grazing, hydrology changes, recreation, exotic species, herbicide and pesticide use, as well as, indirect impacts from day use activities such as picnicking, hiking, boating, rafting, and fishing should be considered in this document.

General Comments

F1-7

Grazing is not adequately addressed in the document. The RMP briefly discusses restricting livestock access along a portion of the Ririe Outlet Channel to increase vegetation cover and reduce soil loss. The document should discuss specific grazing locations, the number of acres and seasonal use patterns of current and proposed livestock grazing. The reader lacks information on developed watering sites and information addressing current and proposed livestock access to lake, stream, and channel banks. The document also does not address unique or sensitive areas and their relationship to livestock grazing.

F1-8

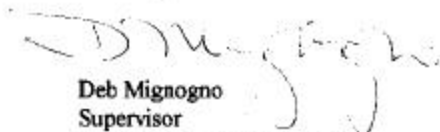
The Draft RMP should address predator control. If livestock operators have requested an ongoing predator control program on BOR lands, we recommend an analysis of predator density and an estimate of predator impacts on livestock, wild ungulates, or upland game bird species. Threatened and endangered species such as bald eagles, gray wolves, and Canada lynx may be injured or killed from traps, snares, or M-44 devices if used by WS employees. We recommend the BOR develop a predator management plan in conjunction with WS and the FWS, if these activities may occur.

F1-9

The above discussion outlines the potential for adverse impacts to listed species from present management practices and the proposed Alternatives: A, B, and C. We recommend that the BOR continue discussions with the Service through the Section 7 process to determine if the proposed RMP alternatives could be modified such that adverse impacts to listed species may be avoided and/or minimized.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the biological assessment and provide comments. If you have any questions, please contact Larry Dickerson at the Snake River Basin Sub-Office in Chubbuck at (208)237-6975.

Sincerely,



Deb Mignogno
Supervisor
Snake River Basin Sub-Office

cc: FWS-ES, Boise

F1-7: Permitted grazing does not occur on Reclamation lands at Tex Creek or Cartier Slough. The outlet channel consists of a ditch and ditch banks and does not provide suitable tress habitat.

F1-8: Please see response to comment F1-4.

F1-9: Reclamation believes that impacts have been avoided and will continue to coordinate with FWS concerning the bald eagle monitoring plan.



Our mission: to educate through the identification, preservation, and interpretation of Idaho's cultural heritage.

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January 31, 2001

Mr. Jerrold D. Gregg
Bureau of Reclamation
Snake River Area Office
214 Broadway Ave.
Boise, Idaho 83702-7298

RE: Draft Environmental Assessment for the Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan

Dear Mr. Gregg:

A1-1

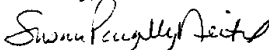
Thank you for requesting our views on the draft environmental assessment for Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan. We find that Section 3.12 is well prepared and accurately describes the types of cultural resources known to exist within the project area. All managing agencies should recognize, however, that only a small portion of the study area has been surveyed for archaeological and historical properties. Therefore, many additional sites may exist that have not been identified.

A1-2

With regard to the alternatives, we feel that Alternative B, the Preferred Alternative, will provide the best long term protection for historic properties. We also support the Best Management Practices and draft Goals and Objectives that relate to cultural resources. To achieve these goals, we strongly urge the Bureau of Reclamation to develop a cultural resource management plan, in coordination with other involved federal and state agencies, and initiate Section 110 efforts to identify and evaluate historic properties within the study area. We also advocate early integration of Section 106 Review during the planning stages for any proposed development. Finally, we recommend incorporating information on early EuroAmerican and Native American use of the area, as appropriate, in interpretive displays planned for several of the recreational sites.

A1-3

We appreciate your cooperation. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at 208-334-3847.

Sincerely,

Susan Pengilly Neitzel
Deputy SHPO and
Compliance Coordinator

cc: Ray Leicht, Bureau of Reclamation



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**A1—Susan Pengilly Neitzel, Idaho State Historical Society,
Boise, Idaho**

A1-1: As stated in Section 5.2.4 of the Final EA, BMPs will be used to avoid impacts to cultural resource sites.

A1-2: A cultural resource management plan will be developed. Please see response to T1-6, letter from Shoshone-Paiute Tribes.

A1-3: Such information will be included on interpretive displays and kiosks, as appropriate, when these displays are developed in accordance with other facilities improvements.