

# FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

PN FONSI-01-03

## RIRIE RESERVOIR

### RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

#### Introduction

Reclamation has completed a multi-year planning and public involvement program for the purpose of preparing a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for Ririe Reservoir and surrounding Reclamation lands. This RMP program is authorized under Title 28 of Public Law 102-575. As part of the planning process Reclamation has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the program in conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

The purpose of the RMP is to manage natural and cultural resources, facilities, and access on Reclamation's lands at Ririe Reservoir, the Ririe Outlet Channel, Ririe and Teton mitigation lands within the Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA; Tex Creek), and Ririe and Teton mitigation lands within the Cartier Slough WMA (Cartier Slough).

#### Alternatives Considered

The National Environmental Policy Act requires Reclamation to explore a range of reasonable alternative management approaches and the environmental effects of these alternatives. Three alternatives are evaluated and compared in this document, including a No Action Alternative and a Preferred Alternative. The impacts of each alternative were evaluated for the affected resource areas: water quality and contaminants; soils; vegetation; wildlife; threatened and endangered species; aquatic biology; recreation; land use; facilities, public utilities, and services; environmental justice; cultural resources; sacred sites; Indian Trust Assets (ITAs); and transportation and access. Air quality, water resources and hydrology, topography, geology, and visual resources were not evaluated in the EA because no impacts occur to these resources.

- # **Alternative A—No Action: Continuation of Existing Management Practices.**  
Reclamation 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: Recreation Development Compatible with Increased Natural Resource Protection Emphasis.** The focus of this alternative is to allow

a limited amount of expansion and development of recreation sites and facilities, and to increase efforts of protecting and managing natural and cultural resources on Reclamation's lands.

- # **Alternative C—Recreation Development/Maintain Natural Resource Emphasis.** The focus of this alternative is to maintain current levels of protecting and managing natural and cultural resources on Reclamation's lands and allow for a moderate level of expansion and development of recreation sites and facilities.

Although the alternatives differ in several ways, the following actions are common to all:

- , Continue to operate and maintain Reclamation lands and facilities in conjunction with existing management partners.
- , Adhere to existing and future Federal, state, and county laws and regulations.
- , Authorize special recreation events on a case-by-case basis.
- , Access and erosion control measures continue as currently managed at Cartier Slough.
- , Bonneville County continues to manage the Ririe Reservoir recreation sites under an agreement with Reclamation.
- , IDFG continues to manage Tex Creek and Cartier Slough under an agreement with Reclamation.
- , For recreation development and management aspects, follow the principles contained in Public Law 89-72, Federal Water Projects Recreation Act of 1965, as amended by Title 28 of Public Law 102-575. Basically, if a non-Federal government entity has agreed to manage recreation on Reclamation lands, Reclamation may share development costs for up to 50 percent of the total cost.
- , Management actions on Ririe and Teton Mitigation Lands are consistent with IDFG's Management Plans for Tex Creek and Cartier Slough.
- , Use and management of the Ririe Outlet Channel would remain basically the same.

## **Recommended Alternative**

Reclamation proposes to implement Alternative B which would allow limited expansion and development of recreation sites and facilities, and would increase protection and management of natural and cultural resources on Reclamation's lands.

Under Alternative B, all existing recreation areas would be upgraded to meet Federal accessibility requirements whenever possible. Additional signs would be posted to inform the public of property boundaries and pertinent rules and regulations. Orientation kiosks would be situated at several key

locations to provide visitors with useful information pertaining to the use of the area, including educational materials, maps, and interpretive displays of the area's landscape and biological features. In general, the existing recreation sites at Ririe Reservoir would be modified to better accommodate current and expected future demand and use. This includes creating and expanding swimming areas, developing non-motorized trails, adding parking, enhancing park landscaping, and adding more floating platforms on the reservoir. Except for meeting accessibility requirements, recreation facilities would be upgraded or expanded only after documentation of increased demand. Most of the non-active recreation lands at Blacktail Park would be changed to non-mitigation lands managed as WMA lands.

This alternative would promote management actions that focus on increasing the protection and enhancement of native fish and wildlife and their habitat (vegetation, wetlands, riparian areas, water quality), as well as proactive measures to protect cultural resources and ensure that Tribal treaty rights are protected. For Reclamation's lands not within Tex Creek or Cartier Slough, this would entail implementing strategies to better monitor and control noxious and invasive weeds and survey for protected plants, monitor and address erosion problems, designate buffers and limit access and construction within riparian areas and wetlands, and institute time of year restrictions in areas harboring Federal and state designated species of special concern (including Federally listed rare, endangered, or threatened species). On Reclamation lands within Tex Creek and Cartier Slough, management actions would be implemented to increase support of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) in carrying out their respective management plans. Under Alternative B, native vegetation, fish, and wildlife protection and enhancement on Ririe and Teton mitigation lands at Tex Creek and Cartier Slough and on non-mitigation lands that are not used for recreation facilities would involve a variety of actions, including the following:

- , Designing and constructing facilities within existing disturbed areas to the greatest extent feasible to minimize impacts on native species
- , Minimizing disturbance of all native plant communities during design and construction of all facilities
- , Keeping all new trails and facilities at least 20 feet from wetland and riparian zones except where trails must cross riparian areas
- , Increased efforts to control noxious and invasive weeds including actively searching for and mapping infestations, developing an integrated pest management control program, and increased control efforts involving the use of measures appropriate to the site and situation including herbicides, hand-pulling, spraying, and the use of parasitic or defoliating insects
- , Planting riparian vegetation as needed for habitat improvement or erosion control
- , Actively work with IDFG to identify opportunities to improve habitat conditions for wildlife and native aquatic species

A coordinated effort would be executed under this alternative to work with Bonneville County and IDFG to close Pipe Creek Road during the winter season to better protect wintering big game. This alternative would also support IDFG's efforts to improve non-motorized public access to and use of Tex Creek and Cartier Slough.

## Consultation and Coordination

### Public Involvement

Reclamation's approach to the RMP and EA was to develop a dialogue with local stakeholder groups and agencies. The goal of the public involvement process was to make sure that all stakeholders, including the general public, had ample opportunity to express their interests, concerns, and viewpoints, and to comment on the plan as it was developed. By fostering two-way communication, Reclamation was also able to use the talents and perspectives of local user groups and agencies during the alternatives development process.

Reclamation's public involvement process involved four key components:

- , **Newsbriefs**—A mailed newsletter was initially sent to more than 600 user groups, nearby residents, and agencies. The mailing list was continuously expanded as more stakeholders were identified.
- , **Public Meetings/Workshops**—Three public meetings were included in the process, two of which were held prior to the release of the draft EA. The final public meeting was held during the public review period of the draft EA.
- , **Ad Hoc Work Group**—This group consisted of approximately 20 representatives from interested groups, Tribes, and agencies. They met throughout the development process to identify issues, and assist with RMP and alternatives development.
- , **Project Web Site**—The newsbriefs, draft materials, and meeting announcements were regularly updated at <http://www.pn.usbr.gov>.

Prior to the release of the draft EA, Reclamation provided five newsbriefs, held two public meetings, and held six Ad Hoc Work Group workshops.

### Fish and Wildlife Service Coordination

Coordination on fish and wildlife issues to meet the requirements of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (FWCA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was accomplished by consulting with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Information about this consultation is provided in Appendix B. FWS concurs with the following conclusions.

The evaluation of endangered species contained in the EA is Reclamation's biological assessment of effects to Ute ladies'-tresses orchids, Canada lynx, gray wolf, and whooping crane as required under the ESA. Reclamation has determined that no effects to the Ute ladies'-tresses orchid or Canada lynx would occur due to the implementation of the preferred alternative. For the nonessential experimental populations of gray wolf and whooping crane, Reclamation has determined that the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the gray wolf and whooping crane. The biological assessment also analyzed that existing recreation management of the reservoir may be having an effect on bald eagles. Reclamation will collect additional information to determine long term effects to bald eagles from recreation use of the Willow Creek Arm on Ririe Reservoir. Based on a 3-year, bald eagle nest monitoring plan of the Willow Creek Arm nest developed with FWS, Reclamation has determined that implementation of the Preferred Alternative may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle. As required by ESA, Reclamation will consult with FWS prior to implementing the bald eagle nest management plan. Additionally, Reclamation will enter into consultations with FWS if any actions taken under this RMP will affect any listed species.

## **National Historic Preservation Act**

Reclamation has completed Class I existing data inventories of the Ririe Reservoir/Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area. That information will facilitate subsequent compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 800). Coordination with the Idaho SHPO and the Shoshone-Bannock and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes over cultural resources and sacred sites aspects of the RMP have occurred in conjunction with public review of the draft Environmental Assessment. (It is understood that specific, future undertakings in response to RMP prescriptions will require specific consultations with the SHPO and Tribes pursuant to the 36 CFR 800 regulations).

## **Consultation with Tribes**

Reclamation met with Council members and staff of both the Shoshone-Bannock and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes to discuss the preparation of the RMP and to identify ITAs, TCPs, and Indian Sacred Sites.

A representative from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes participated in the Ad Hoc Work Group, which facilitated close coordination with the Government and helped assure that Tribal interests were integrated with the RMP.

Several meetings were held and correspondence was exchanged between Reclamation and the Tribes.

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.

## **Public Comment Summary**

The comment period for the Ririe Reservoir Resource Management Plan, Draft Environmental Assessment extended from December 13, 2000, to February 15, 2001. 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 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 to vehicles and snowmobiles during the winter and the bald eagle nest at the Willow Creek Arm. Of those who mentioned the Pipe Creek Road, commentors wanted to close the road during the winter months 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.

As discussed in the Final EA, 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. Future 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. To resolve conflicts among user groups, one commentor suggested that increased enforcement of no-wake zones was needed.

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 the existing natural and cultural resources. 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-limit to scuba divers.

Reclamation has not yet determined the exact location of the potential 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 related to submerging materials adjacent to the dam. Reclamation will continue to work with diving interests to identify a suitable location to submerge materials for a dive park. As has been the case in the past, the remaining areas of the reservoir will remain open to scuba divers.

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 based on the results of the carrying capacity study.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game expressed concern that grooming a cross country ski trail at Cartier Slough would increase the current level of human use during the winter to the point where wintering wildlife would be disturbed and displaced from the area.

Reclamation shares this concern and the groomed cross country ski trail at Cartier Slough has been eliminated from the final EA Preferred Alternative. Cross country skiing will continue to be allowed, but groomed trails will not be developed.

## **Changes to the Final Environmental Assessment**

The final EA was changed to note that any winter closure of the Pipe Creek Road would be subject to cooperation by Bonneville County. Table 3.1.1 in Chapter 3 has been changed to indicate that if the road is not closed, current impacts on wintering elk would continue. Section 3.5.2 has been changed to indicate that the benefits of the proposed road closure would only occur if the closure is implemented.

The final EA has been changed to indicate that areas in the immediate vicinity of the dam will most likely be removed from further consideration for a dive park because of safety and liability considerations.

The groomed cross country ski trail at Cartier Slough has been eliminated from the final EA Preferred Alternative. Cross country skiing will continue to be allowed, but groomed trails will not be developed.

The draft EA showed a large area designated as non-active recreation surrounding Blacktail Park. This area is essentially managed as are adjacent Wildlife Management Area (WMA) lands. Except for a small area to the south of the current active recreation area, these lands will not be developed for recreation in the future. Therefore, those lands formerly designated as non-active recreation and that will not be developed as recreation lands in the future have been changed to a designation of “non-mitigation lands managed as WMA lands”.

Additional minor changes to the final EA include:

Clarification concerning wildlife use, noxious weed occurrence, and the location of the bald eagle nest and associated access closure at the Cartier Slough WMA.

- , Addition of information regarding annual seasonal flooding and the one-time deposition of sediment on Cartier Slough as Teton flood waters receded.
- , Addition of information regarding recreational use of Cartier Slough and facilities at Beaver Dick Park.
- , Addition of information describing proactive actions that will be taken to protect and enhance endangered species.
- , Addition of an Appendix with Project Authorization.

## **Finding**

Reclamation's analysis showed that the implementation of the RMP will not affect any threatened or endangered species listed under ESA. However, since a bald eagle nest exists on the Willow Creek Arm of Ririe Reservoir, but no information is available on the nest, Reclamation has embarked on a three year monitoring program to determine if the nest is affected by recreation on the reservoir. If the nesting pair is affected then Reclamation will consult with the FWS and work with Bonneville County to close the Willow Creek Arm or other areas where affects are occurring.

Implementation of the RMP will cause minimal short term impacts on existing resources and in the long term will enhance natural and recreation resources. Reclamation and its contractors and management partners will use "best management practices" when constructing recreation facilities or managing vegetation and habitat and all environmental commitments identified in the final EA will be implemented.

Based on thorough review of the comments received, analysis of the environmental impacts as presented in the final EA, ESA Section 7 consultation, coordination with the various agencies, and implementation of all environmental commitments identified in the final EA, Reclamation has concluded that implementation of the recommended alternative would have no significant impacts on the quality of the human environment or the natural resources of the area. Therefore, this FONSI has been prepared and is submitted to document environmental review and evaluation in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. An environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

**Approved:**

**Date:**

**Snake River Area Manager**



