



Executive Summary

Initial Appraisal Report of Optima Lake

North Canadian River, Texas County, Oklahoma

The Initial Appraisal of Optima Lake was conducted under Section 216 of the River and Harbor and Flood Control Act of 1970 (Public Law 91-611), as amended.

The purpose of the study was to investigate changes to physical and environmental conditions at the project that are affecting current operations and the ability to fulfill its authorized purposes. Predicted future project conditions, in the absence of federal actions, were also assessed. All authorized purposes were evaluated including flood control, water supply, recreation, and fish and wildlife conservation. Preliminary alternative plans were developed, with stakeholder input. These alternatives employ a range of management measures involving modifications to the ways in which project lands are managed. Improvement of the quality of the environment and associated social values in the overall public interest were also considered.

The construction of Optima Lake began in 1966 and was completed in 1978. It is a multipurpose project authorized for flood control, water supply, recreation, and fish and wildlife conservation.

The Flood Control Act of 1950 required that Optima Lake be designed so as not to interfere with the conservation storage capacity in Canton Lake, as authorized by existing law. Optima Lake was to be operated in conjunction with Fort Supply and Canton Lakes for optimum flood control benefits on the North Canadian River downstream to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The authorized purposes that Optima Lake was built for have never been fully realized.

An American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Project was completed at the Optima Project during the course of this study. The ARRA Project consisted of the demolition of unsafe recreational structures, the closing of the dam embankment road with gates and locks, and addition of signage and speed bumps due to unsafe guardrails. This ARRA Project is a separate project from this initial appraisal study.

Optima Dam was completed in 1978 and the water level has never risen to the bottom of the conservation pool. The highest water level recorded was May 31, 1980, but it fell a few feet short of conservation pool level. A flood event in May 1996 raised the elevation to a few feet below the conservation pool and the project operated as designed. There were no water releases made from the dam and the water elevation decreased over the next two years.

The flood control pool for Optima has never held water and to date never fully functioned as it was authorized to do. The inactive pool has partially filled a few times, but the project has never had any water in the conservation pool or functioned as a water supply source as it was authorized.

Without a sustained lake (conservation pool), the recreation and fish and wildlife conservation features for the project have not been fully functional as authorized. The project lands that have agreements with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) have been successfully managed.

The measures developed for Optima offer very preliminary possible alternatives. The initial appraisal study was intended to determine if further studies are warranted. There were potential measures developed for the study that led to potential alternatives. Not all measures were used in the potential alternatives developed. These measures and alternatives ranged from the "No Action Plan", in which everything remains the same, to an array of alternatives. Several of the initial appraisal measures and alternatives met with favorable public opinion, but their feasibility is yet to be determined.

All potential measures and alternatives identified in the study were developed without consideration of the protocol that the Corps, the Department of Defense and the General

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Services Administration require if government property is to be sold to other federal agencies, state agencies, public agencies or the public. Any measure or alternative which includes the selling of project lands, and found feasible in future studies, would have to be screened and declared as excess by the Corps and DoD, and follow the GSA's guidelines for sale of property as promulgated in the Public Building, Property and Works Act of 2002, as amended.

The conclusion of this initial appraisal is that the purposes that Optima Lake was designed and constructed for have not been fully realized due to changes in the upstream hydrology which reduced flows into the lake.

Optima lake has never filled to conservation pool capacity, and it is unlikely that future conditions upstream of the lake will change significantly enough to allow Optima to provide the benefits for which it was intended. The flood risk management benefits provided by the project have been minimal and the water supply benefits have never been realized. However, the lands acquired for Optima Lake have been effectively managed by the ODWC and the USFWS, and public access to the project lands is seen as a critical need by local stakeholders.

The initial appraisal study identified alternatives for consideration in future studies, however, it is inconclusive as to the best plan of action for the project and requires further analysis to develop potential alternatives.

The initial appraisal report recommends that a reconnaissance study be initiated for Optima Lake. The study would provide more detailed information about the project and the preliminary plans being considered. Federal interest in pursuing applied actions at Optima Lake would be assessed and non-federal cost sharing sponsor(s) would be identified for feasibility and implementation phases. Reconnaissance studies are 100-percent federally funded and take about one year to complete. Public involvement and inter-agency coordination strategies would be integrated throughout the reconnaissance effort so stakeholder interests are fully understood and incorporated.

If the reconnaissance study finds a potentially feasible alternative at Optima Lake, federal interest in further work, and a local sponsor, a feasibility study could then be recommended. The feasibility study phase would evaluate alternative plans in greater detail, develop them into their most beneficial forms, and recommend that the most advisable solution(s) be implemented. Feasibility studies are cost shared 50/50 between the federal government and local sponsor(s) and take about three years to complete. At the end of the feasibility study, if an advisable alternative plan has been developed, and there is federal interest and a local sponsor, the alternative plan may be implemented subject to applicable policies, authorization and funding by Congress.

Optima Lake - Initial Appraisal Report Information

This Optima initial appraisal study is separate from the Optima American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) project.

The initial appraisal study is the first step in a multi-study process, authorized by Congress and delegated to the Corps to see if changes are required at Corps completed projects. The initial appraisal study is authorized by law which Congress enacted in Section 216 of the Flood Control Act of 1970 and delegated to the Corps.

- All Corps lake projects are subject to an initial appraisal study of their authorized purposes if changes to these purposes have occurred or need to be made. Initial appraisal studies are undertaken if significant changes have occurred in physical or economic conditions at the project or can be required by Congressional or stakeholder request.
- The purpose of this initial appraisal study is to determine if the authorized purposes of the Optima project are being fully utilized.

This initial appraisal study looked at the historic conditions, existing conditions, future conditions, project problems and an array of potential alternatives at the Optima project. Then, the initial appraisal report made conclusions and recommendations for the Optima project.

The initial appraisal study was 100 percent federally funded from the Operations and Maintenance budget for Tulsa District.

- The Optima initial appraisal report was completed in September 2010. Several potential alternatives were suggested for the project.
- These potential alternatives are very general and very preliminary, and will require a more detailed study to determine their probability of becoming a recommended plan for Optima.

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The conclusion of the initial appraisal is that the Optima project is not currently maximizing all of its authorized purposes. The recommendation is that the project should have further studies to determine the proper alternative/changes to be made at this project.

- The potential alternatives developed in the initial appraisal study are not required, but are indicators that changes could be made. The outcome of the initial appraisal study is that the project requires further studies in accordance with the currently Congressionally-directed process of studies.
- The Tulsa District Corps of Engineers submitted the initial appraisal report to the Southwestern Division in Dallas, Texas, for review and approval in October 2010.
- The Southwestern Division Corps of Engineers approved the initial appraisal report October 29, 2010, and directed the Tulsa District to budget for further study.

The next phase of this project will be to budget for a reconnaissance study.

- The reconnaissance study when fully funded will take one year to complete.
- The reconnaissance study is 100 percent federally funded. The budget for a Reconnaissance study is \$100,000.
- The reconnaissance study will continue to study in more detail the Optima project.

- Potential alternatives formulated in the initial appraisal study will be developed in more detail.
- The reconnaissance study will determine if there is a federal interest in this project and if there is a local cost share sponsor for a feasibility study.
- One way the federal interest is measured is by the benefit to cost ratio, which answers the question, does the alternative recommended have more benefits than costs.

Without special Congressional authorization, the process to change activities at Optima will take approximately five to seven years of study before any recommended plan could be implemented at Optima.

- Both the feasibility study and the implementation phase have to have Congressional authorization and appropriation.
- Five to seven years is based on a "best case" scenario.

For the reconnaissance study to recommend further study at Optima, the reconnaissance study would have to show federal interest in the project by benefit to cost ratio justification and have a local cost share sponsor. Otherwise the reconnaissance study will not recommend further study of Optima.

- The feasibility study will have to have a local cost sharing sponsor willing to pay 50 percent of the feasibility costs.

Initial Appraisal of Optima Lake - Questions received from the public

Q: What are the authorized purposes of Optima Lake, and are they being met?

A: Optima Lake was authorized for the purposes of flood control, water supply, recreation, and fish and wildlife. The purpose of the initial appraisal study completed in September 2010 was to review the project and determine if the authorized project purposes are being met.

Q: When did the Corps last have an onsite staff at Optima?

A: 1995.

Q: Why did the Corps discontinue onsite operations?

A: Funding had declined to the point where the Tulsa District could no longer afford to keep a staff at Optima and keep the of-

fice open. Utilization of the facilities at Optima had also declined to the point where keeping the parks open and operating could not be justified.

Q: Who takes care of the dam and the land area at Optima?

A: The Corps staff at Fort Supply maintains the dam and oversees the land and real estate interests. Both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation have agreements with the Corps to manage most of the land area including the lake bottom for wildlife.

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Q: *Why can't the Corps fix up at least one of the parks and operate it again?*

A: There is insufficient funding appropriated to the Optima project to resume operation of any of the recreation areas. The Corps did attempt to operate Angler Point throughout the late 1990s up until 2002, when further budget cuts and very low usage forced the Corps to abandon operation of the park. Texas County requested and was granted permission from the Corps in 2003 to operate Angler Point, but they later discontinued operations of the park. Numerous attempts were made before and after this timeframe to locate another entity or agency to operate the park, but to no avail.

Q: *Lack of funding is repeatedly cited as a primary reason for cessation of the recreation program at Optima. How much does it cost to manage Optima?*

A: It costs approximately \$200,000 to minimally manage the Optima dam and its appurtenant structures. This also includes annual inspections of the facilities and a more detailed periodic inspection every 5th year. If the management of the parks were included this cost would rise substantially because you would have to include mowing, cleaning, trash pickup, utilities (electric and water), road and facility repair and maintenance, signage, fee collection, surveillance and security. All of this requires staffing support.

Q: *Is the Corps reopening the de-authorization of public lands issue that was the subject of so much debate almost 20 years ago?*

A: At the request of Senators Coburn and Inhofe, the Corps is evaluating the existing project to determine if operational changes should be recommended. The Corps performed an initial appraisal study which evaluates the existing conditions at the project to determine if further studies are warranted. The initial appraisal study includes a brief assessment of several alternative plans ranging from a "No-Action" Plan, which would result in no operational changes at the lake, to one which would include de-authorization of the project.

Q: *Does the Corps understand the importance of these lands to the citizens in the panhandle area?*

A: Yes. To those who live and work in the area, the public access at Optima is important. It is because of that importance we are interested in keeping that access and use safe for all, whether they reside in the panhandle area or not. We recognize that lands open to the general public in the area are minimal and that Optima is used regularly by residents from Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado and Texas for hunting and watching wildlife, and to stage field trials for various hunting dog groups and enthusiasts. We appreciate their contribution to the local economy, and we want all users to enjoy the area safely.

Q: *What is the initial appraisal study that the Corps did for Optima? When was it completed? Did the public have a chance to comment?*

A: The initial appraisal study is a study that the Corps of Engineers undertakes on existing projects to determine if the project is fully meeting all of its authorized uses or when authorized uses may be added or changed at a project. The Corps is given the authority to perform these studies by the U.S. Congress in accordance with Section 216 of the Flood Control Act of 1970. According to authorization from this statute, the Corps is to review the operation of completed projects to determine if changes in the physical, economic, or environmental conditions warrant changes in either the operation or the features of the project.

The initial appraisal study for Optima was completed in September 2010.

The public did have a chance to comment on the initial appraisal study on June 29, 2010, at a public workshop that was held at the Texas County Activity Center in Guymon, Oklahoma. At the public workshop, attendees were asked to submit comments then or take a comment form and a self addressed stamped envelope home with them and submit it later. Also, a local radio station posted the comment form on its website and asked their listeners to copy it and send comments to the Corps of Engineers. As the Optima study proceeds further, there will be other opportunities for the public to review and comment on future studies.

Q: *What was the conclusion and recommendation of the initial appraisal study?*

A: The conclusion of the initial appraisal is that the Optima project is not currently maximizing all of its authorized purposes. The recommendation is that the project should have further studies to determine the proper alternative/changes to be made at this project. The potential alternatives developed in the initial appraisal study are not required, but are just indicators that there are changes that could be made at the project. The outcome of the initial appraisal study is that the project requires further studies.

Q: *How is a lake de-authorized?*

A: The short answer is that de-authorization requires an Act of Congress. The long answer is that it takes several years of study, some of which also require Congressional authorization and appropriation. After a plan is recommended for the project, such as Optima, Congress then has to authorize and appropriate funds to implement the de-authorization actions.

Q: *Is Optima Lake going to be de-authorized? If so, how long would the process take, and what is the public comment process?*

A: We won't know if Optima will be de-authorized until all of the study phases have been completed.

The study process has multiple phases (reconnaissance and feasibility) and takes approximately 4 years of study time if funding is available for the next phase as the preceding phase is completed. Public involvement and comment will be an important part of each phase of the study process. The feasibility study phase has to follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 guidelines. Therefore an environmental impact statement (EIS) will have to be developed for the Optima project. The NEPA process requires that an initial scoping meeting (meeting for public comments) be held early on in the feasibility phase and then a 30 day comment period is mandatory for the draft EIS to allow the public as well as other state and federal agencies to review and comment before the EIS is finalized. Other public meetings and workshops may be scheduled on an as needed basis to inform the public and also receive their comments during the study process.

Q: *If Optima Lake is de-authorized, what happens to the existing agreements with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation?*

A: The two areas presently managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (4334 acres) and Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC) (8062 acres) have agreements from the Corps. The USFWS has a cooperative agreement and the ODWC has a license agreement. The USFWS and ODWC because of their

long standing agreements could make it known to the General Services Administration (GSA) that they would like to have the land and possibly could obtain the land permanently. This land transaction proposal could be overridden by Congressional legislation or GSA.

Q: *How much Operations and Maintenance funds are appropriated each year for Optima, and how are they used?*

A: Federal Operations and Maintenance appropriations from Congress for the Optima Lake project during the past five years have ranged from a low of \$55,000 in fiscal year 2006 to a high of \$214,000 in fiscal year 2008. In general, O&M funds for Optima Lake are used to pay for ranger patrols and surveillance of the project property, dam and flood gate equipment inspections and maintenance, and embankment maintenance which includes contracts for mowing and herbicide application. During years with higher appropriations, O&M funds have also been used to award contracts to conduct piezometer maintenance and cleaning, undertake repairs to a fire-damaged guardrail, repair erosion on the dam embankment, and clean out the discharge conduit.

Q: *How can we stay informed?*

A: Visit Tulsa District on the web at www.swt.usace.army.mil where the final initial appraisal report is located. All documents pertaining to the Optima Initial Appraisal study and released for public review will be located at the above website address. Tulsa District will continue to keep it updated as the Optima study progresses. Further questions may be sent to the Public Affairs Office at CESWT-PA@usace.army.mil.

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