

# RECLAMATION

*Managing Water in the West*

## Environmental Assessment

Fontenelle Community Renovation, Seedskaadee Project

Lincoln County, Wyoming



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation  
Upper Colorado Region and Power Office

July 15, 2010

## **Mission Statements**

The U.S. Department of the Interior protects and manages the nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provides scientific and other information about those resources; and honors its trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska natives, and affiliated island communities.

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American Public.

## **Environmental Assessment for Fontenelle Community Renovation**

Proposed agency action: Fontenelle Community Renovation, Seedskadee Project, Lincoln County, Wyoming

Type of statement: Environmental assessment

Lead agency: Bureau of Reclamation, Upper Colorado Regional Power Office

Cooperating agencies: None

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## **SUMMARY**

The Power Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Upper Colorado Region proposes to build new housing for employees working at the Seedskadee Project, which consists of Fontenelle dam, powerplant, and reservoir. The project area is located on the west bank of the Green River in southwestern Wyoming, about 24 miles southeast of La Barge, Wyoming.

In terms of changes to the environment compared with taking no action, the proposal to build new housing in the Seedskadee Community may result in slight improvements in weed control and a slight increase in air pollution and noise during construction, but these changes would be offset by decreased driving of employees over the long-term. The other environmental effects would be either negligible or there would be no effects.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the Power Office manager will decide whether to issue one or more contracts to build the housing and then maintain it.

# INTRODUCTION

## Document Structure

Reclamation has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and state laws, regulations, and policies. This EA discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action. The document is organized into four parts.

- *Introduction:* The section includes information on the history of the project proposal, the need for the project, and the agency's proposal for meeting that need.
- *Proposed Action:* This section describes the agency's proposal. This discussion also includes possible mitigation measures. Finally, this section provides a summary table of the environmental consequences associated with the proposal.
- *Environmental Consequences:* This section describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action. This analysis is organized by resources.
- *Agencies and Persons Consulted:* This section provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the EA.
- *Appendices:* The appendices provide more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the environmental assessment.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Power Office of Reclamation.

## Background

The Seedskafee Project is a participating project in the Colorado River Storage Project. Principle features of the project are the Fontenelle Dam, Powerplant, and Reservoir. The project is located on the Green River some 24 miles southeast of LaBarge, Wyoming in Lincoln County. The dam is located at latitude: 42.0285593 - longitude: -110.0604315. The project features, along with worker housing, were built beginning in 1961 and completed in 1964. The houses and associated infrastructure (road) are in need of extensive renovation. Reclamation conducted a value engineering study to review options to meet the need for improved employee housing, and this resulted in the proposal described here.

## Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this initiative is to improve living and working conditions for employees at the Seedskafee Project. This action is needed because there is insufficient housing for employees working at the Seedskafee Project and the extant housing is not up to current building and energy efficiency standards.

## Proposed Action

Reclamation proposes to build four new houses and a 3-plex within the existing Seedskafee Community in Lincoln County, Wyoming. Other work includes restoring a road with curb and gutter. Also, a new sewage disposal system, including a septic tank(s) and drain field, will be developed.

## Decision Framework

Given the purpose and need, the Power Office Area Manager will review the alternatives to decide whether to proceed with the project and issue contracts for the construction of the new housing or to select the no action alternative.

## Public Involvement

This EA and a draft finding of no significant impact will be posted on Reclamation's website and public comments will be accepted for 15 days. If there are no substantive comments or concerns, the finding of no significant impacts will be finalized and the project will proceed as planned. Implementation of the project is contingent upon funding availability.

## Issues

Reclamation separated the issues into two groups: relevant and non-significant issues. Relevant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in 40 CFR 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..." A list of non-significant issues and reasons regarding their categorization as non-significant may be found in the project record.

As for relevant issues, the Reclamation identified 5 topics which required detailed analysis. These issues include:

- Construction and use of the new buildings could adversely affect wildlife.
- Construction and use of the new buildings could result in an increase in noxious weeds.
- Construction could result in discharges or otherwise result in adverse effects to water quality in the Green River.
- Operation of the construction vehicles could result in adverse impacts to air quality.
- Construction of the new buildings could affect historic properties.

# **ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION**

This chapter describes the no action alternative and the proposal for new housing. The proposal was developed in response to the purpose and need and considered issues raised by the interdisciplinary team.

## **Alternatives**

### **Alternative 1, No Action**

Under the No Action Alternative, contractors and employees would continue to commute from towns in southwestern Wyoming and those currently living on site would continue to live in substandard housing. Figure 1 shows the regional setting of the project. Figure 2 shows a plan map of the existing housing area.



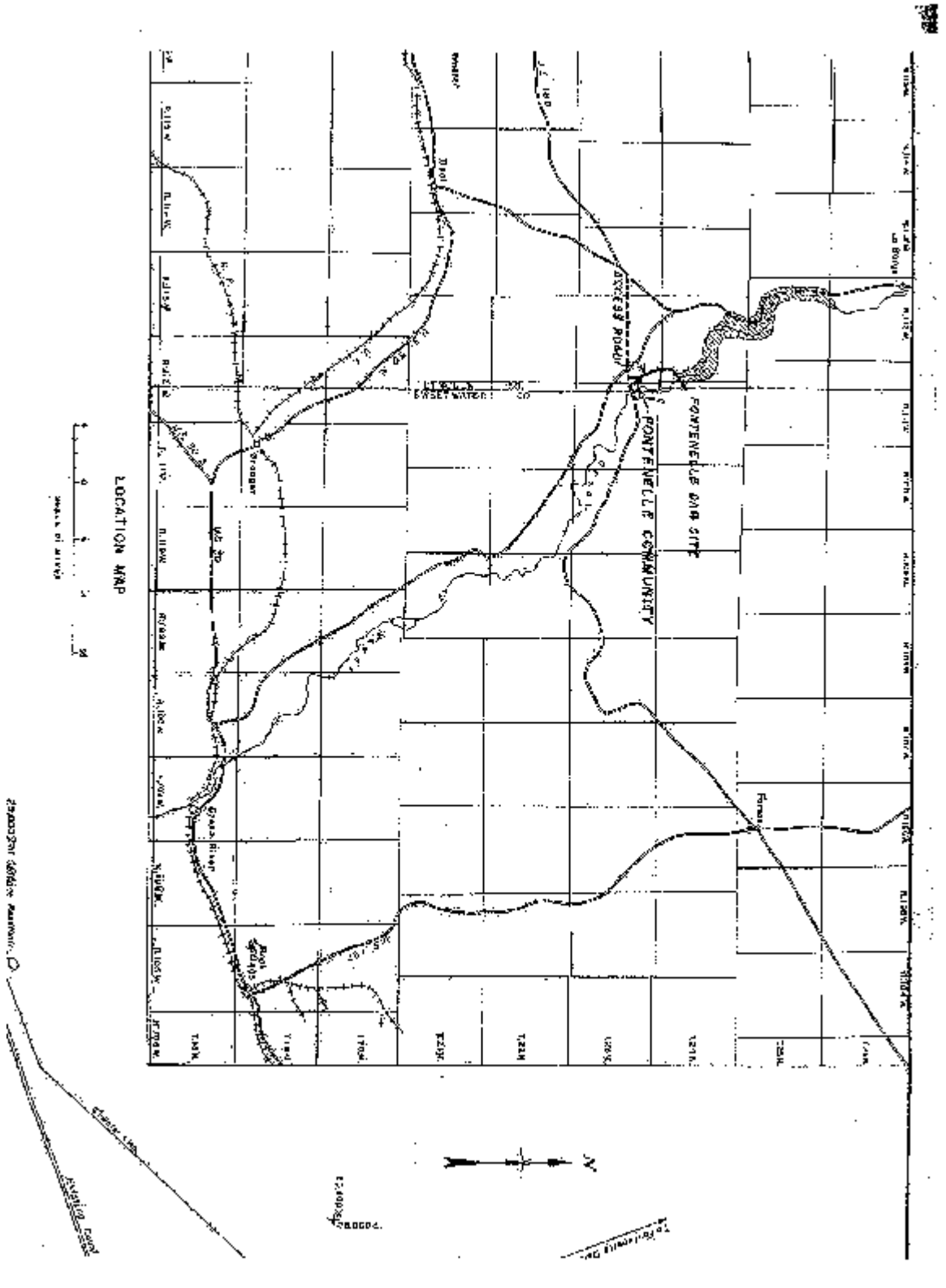


Figure 1. Fontenelle Community Project Location in Southwest Wyoming

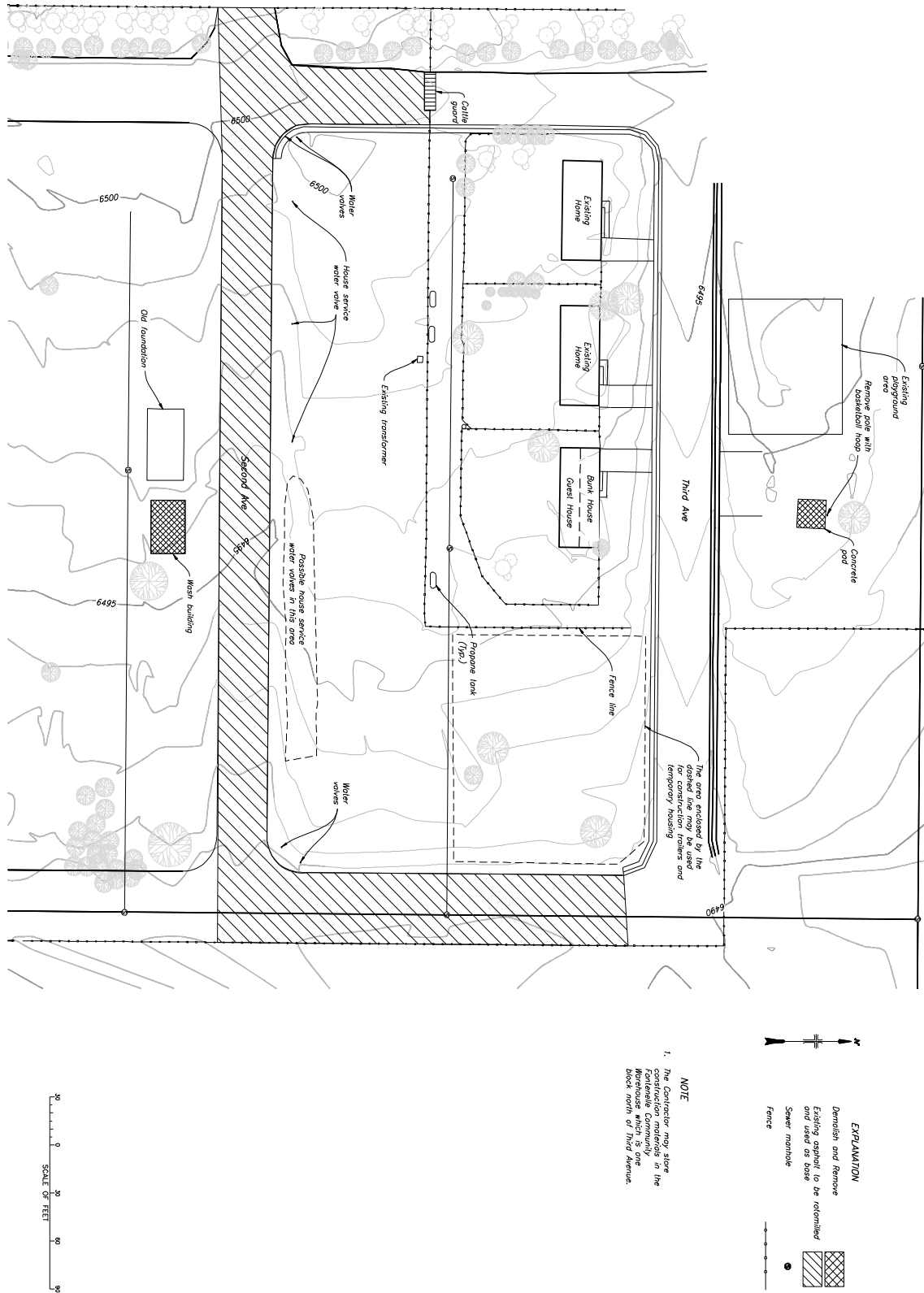


Figure 2. Existing Fontenelle Community Plan Map

### Alternative 2, the Proposal

Reclamation proposes to build four new houses and a 3-plex within the existing fenced area of the Seedskaelee Community. Two existing homes, the bunk house or guest house, and a small building will be either relocated or torn down. The road into the complex will be upgraded, resurfaced and a curb and gutter added. Figure 3 shows the proposed changes within the Seedskaelee Community. Both the proposed new houses and the footprints of the extant houses that will be removed are depicted.

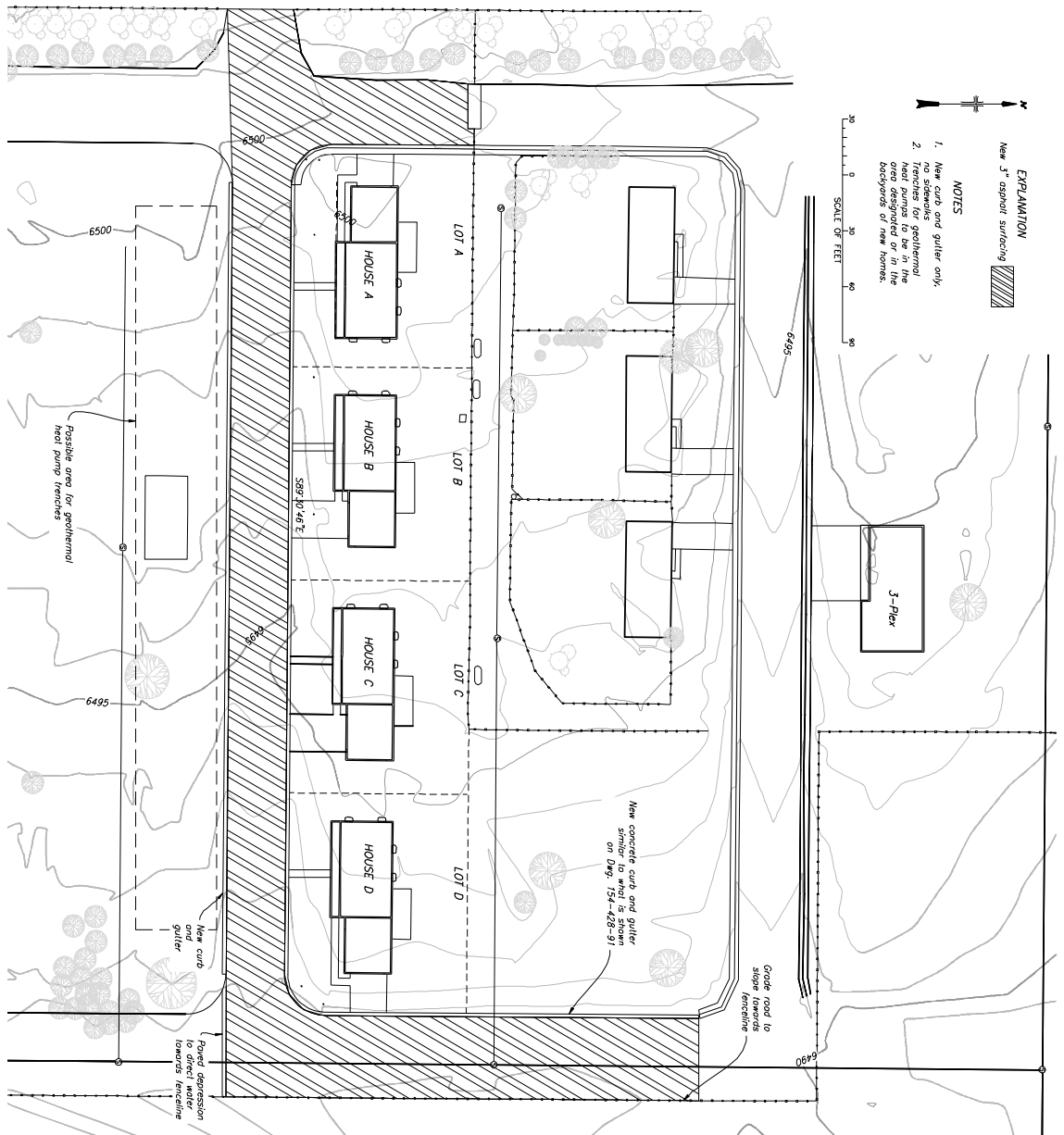


Figure 3. Proposed Changes to the Fontenelle Community

The sewer system at the Fontenelle Community is in need of repair and although not part of housing project it is important that the sewer get repaired before or soon after the houses is constructed. The sewer has a history of backing up into the basements of the existing homes and as a result making it almost impossible to stay in the basement of these homes for any extended length of time. Reclamation wants to prevent a similar occurrence on the new homes. The current plan is to connect the new homes into the existing sewer system; however, this may change if investigations indicate that an entire overhaul of the system is required.

To remedy the current situation the following options are being considered.

- Keep the sewage lagoon to the east of the community and repair broken or obstructed sewer lines as needed.
- Abandon the sewage lagoon and install a new septic tank and drain field sized to handle the capacity of the community plus any improvements in the near future. The drain field will be located east of the community between 100 and 500 feet outside the fence line and will be approximately 300 feet by 300 feet in size. Repair broken or obstructed sewer lines as needed.
- Abandon and replace the existing sewer system within the fence line and either keep the existing sewage lagoon or replace with a septic tank and drain field as described above. Repair or replace any sewer lines or manholes outside the fence line as needed.
- Install a septic tank outside the fence line and allow it to discharge into the existing sewage lagoon below. Perform the replacements or repairs as described above.
- Perform repairs or alterations to the sewage lagoon as needed to improve operations along with any repairs or replacements to the current sewage system as described above.

## Mitigation

Mitigation measures were developed to ease some of the potential impacts the construction and use of the housing might cause. Mitigating measures include a review of all contractor-submitted engineering and designs prior to approval by Reclamation engineers.

- Other mitigating measure are that the site will be landscaped with native vegetation or otherwise appropriate water-wise plants to conserve water and to reduce visual impacts and reduce the spread of noxious or invasive weeds.
- Development will occur on lands already disturbed to minimize effects to wildlife and vegetation.
- Stormwater runoff will be minimized through best management practices and development of a stormwater pollution prevention plan.

- Contracts will comply with all relevant Federal, state and local laws and regulations.
- Contractors will provide dust control and abatement during performance of work. They will provide air pollution control noise control, light control, water pollution control including a spill prevention control and countermeasure plan and a stormwater discharge permit for construction, as well as a pollution prevention plan, monitoring and water treatment, if necessary, to achieve compliance with applicable water quality standards.
- For pollution controls they will apply sediment and erosion controls, wastewater and stormwater management, turbidity prevention measures, petroleum product storage management.

The following are some of the specific mitigating measures taken directly from the proposed contract.

**REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS**

- A. Comply with Federal, State, and local laws and regulations.
- B. Comply with RSHS.
- C. Conform to most stringent requirement in cases of conflict between specifications, regulatory requirements, and RSHS.
- D. Contractor shall be responsible for damages resulting from dust originating from Contractor operations in accordance with clause at FAR 52.236-7, Permits and Responsibilities.
- E. The CO may stop any construction activity in violation of Federal, State, or local laws and additional expenses resulting from work stoppage will be responsibility of Contractor.

**DUST CONTROL**

- F. Provide dust control and abatement during performance of work.
- G. Prevent, control, and abate dust pollution on rights-of-way provided by Government or elsewhere during performance of work.
- H. Provide labor, equipment, and materials, and use efficient methods wherever and whenever required preventing dust nuisance or damage to persons, property, or activities.
- I. Provide means for eliminating atmospheric discharges of dust during mixing, handling, and storing of cement, pozzolan, and concrete aggregate.

**AIR POLLUTION CONTROL**

- J. Use reasonably available methods and devices to prevent, control, and otherwise minimize atmospheric emissions or discharges of air contaminants.
- K. Do not operate equipment and vehicles that show excessive exhaust gas emissions until corrective repairs or adjustments reduce such emissions to acceptable levels.

**NOISE CONTROL**

- L. Do not exceed noise levels of 40 decibels (nighttime) and 85 decibels (daytime), as measured from noise-sensitive areas such as residences and schools.
- M. Only construction activities approved by COR will be allowed during hours of 8:30 p.m. to 6:30 a.m.

**LIGHT CONTROL**

- N. Direct stationary floodlights to shine downward at an angle less than horizontal.
- O. Shield floodlights so that floodlights will not be a nuisance to surrounding areas.
- P. Direct lighting so that residences are not in direct beam of light.
- Q. Correct lighting control problems when they occur as approved by the COR.

**Comparison of Alternatives**

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in the table is focused on activities and effects where different levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

Table 2. Comparison of Alternatives.

Issue	No Action	Proposed Action
Wildlife	No changes	Minimal to no changes to wildlife
Vegetation and Weeds	No change	No change or slight improvement due to landscaping
Water Quality	No change	No change due to BMPs and stormwater pollution prevention plan
Air Quality	No	Minor increase during construction, but should be offset by reduction in employee and contractor travel once the

and Noise	change	project is completed
Historic Properties	None present	No change, no properties present

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section provides an overview of the affected environment and summarizes the environmental effects of the alternatives. It presents the scientific and analytical basis for comparison of alternatives. The project is not adjacent to a wilderness area, inventoried roadless area, research natural area, or any other uniquely designated area. Each resource issue or topic discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the proposed action. The NEPA (and its implementing regulations at 40 CFR 1508.7 and 1508.8) defines effects as:

- Direct effects, which are caused by the action and occur in the same time and place.
- Indirect effects, which are caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable.
- Cumulative effects, which are impacts which result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of which agency or person undertakes them.

### Wildlife, Including Birds

Wildlife, including birds, are a concern largely under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The ESA requires that Reclamation avoid an action that might jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or adversely modify designated critical habitat. The Executive Order 13186 requires Federal agencies to protect migratory birds by supporting the conservation intent of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Under this order, agencies must integrate bird conservation principles and practices into their planning and actions. Agencies should also avoid or minimize adverse impacts on migratory birds when conducting actions. Effects on these species are described by alternative below.

**No Action.** The project area is within an existing chain link fence was originally an upland sagebrush vegetation community, but it was disturbed with the construction of the community some 3 decades ago. The area is relatively barren, and provides little vegetation to support wildlife. Wildlife is also limited to some degree by a chain-link fence that borders the disturbed housing area. Nonetheless, staff reports that big game such as mule deer and the occasional moose do enter the housing area, along with small mammals such as jackrabbits.

A review of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website (<http://www.fws.gov/wyominges/PDFs/CountySpeciesLists/Lincoln-sp.pdf>) indicates there are 11 threatened and endangered species documented for Lincoln County, of

potential listed species under the Endangered Species Act, the sage grouse inhabits sagebrush so the local staff were interviewed to determine the potential for these birds in the housing area. According to the staff, no sage grouse have been observed in the housing area. The breeding grounds or “leks” that the sage grouse are dependent upon occur on ridge tops or grassy areas in Lincoln County, but these features are not present in the housing area. Nor are the wet meadows, riparian vegetation, or irrigated fields the birds use during the summer present in the housing area. Therefore, there is no likelihood of sage grouse entering the housing area now or in the future.

Black-footed ferrets are known for Lincoln County, but the ferrets are only found where there are prairie dogs, and these do not occur within the housing area. Thus, there are no listed species or critical habitat present in the housing area today and none are likely to enter the area in the foreseeable future.

As to birds, the project area within the fence has been previously disturbed and lacks adequate stands of vegetation to support nesting migratory birds.

**Proposal.** Under the proposed action, the fence and the lack of suitable sagebrush habitat will continue to limit the number or kinds of wildlife present. Large mammals such as deer will continue to enter the area, and there should be no change in their presence if the project goes forward.

As to birds, the natural sagebrush habitat that might have provided cover and foraging capabilities for sagebrush obligate bird species has been eliminated. Under the project, the habitat required by either sage grouse or sagebrush obligate bird species will not become established. Therefore, the project will have no effect on birds because suitable habitat will not become established.

## Vegetation and Weeds

The area is classified as sagebrush habitat, although it has been bladed and disturbed in the past. The greatest concern related to vegetation is with weeds. Reclamation uses county or state listings or determinations of noxious weeds. The area was surveyed, but the only weed of concern is cheatgrass or *Bromus tectorum*. Cheatgrass is widespread in the project area, as well as beyond its borders.

**No Action.** Under the No Action Alternative, there will continue to be cheatgrass in the disturbed area.

**Proposal.** Under the proposed action, the cheatgrass or other weeds that are currently on the site will be eradicated, and the landscaping that is proposed, along with maintenance, will prevent the growth and diffusion of weeds. The site landscaping will reduce visual impacts of the new housing and reduce the spread of noxious or invasive weeds.

## Water Quality

**No Action.** Under the No Action Alternative, there will continue to be storm water runoff that is generated when precipitation from rain or snowmelt flows over the housing area or impervious surfaces and does not percolate into the ground. As the runoff flows over the land and impervious surfaces it accumulated chemicals, sediment, and other pollutants that could adversely affect water quality in the Green River. Under the current housing



situation, there is relatively little storm water runoff because there is only one paved road which encircles the area. The runoff that occurs is not considered a point source discharge and a permit is not required under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System.

**Proposal.** Under the proposal, the contractor will have to prepare a stormwater pollution prevention plan and obtain the necessary permits from the state of Wyoming if their plans include disturbance of over 1 acre in their clearing, grading, building, and excavating activities. Stormwater runoff from the construction activities could have a significant impact on water quality unless the contractor implements stormwater best management practices. However, the plan and implementation of BMPs will be a condition of the construction contract, if the project is implemented.

### **Air Quality and Noise Pollution during Construction**

**No Action.** Under the No Action Alternative, there will continue to be contractors and employees driving to and from local communities due to the poor or absent housing opportunities. There would continue to be minor amounts of noise and air pollution from vehicles driving around the housing area.

**Proposal.** Under the proposal, construction would temporarily increase certain air pollutants. Construction would increase the volume of ambient noise in the area, although it will be limited to normal working hours, thus lessening any effect on residents of the community.

Dust abatement would be required of the contractor during construction, and it would be reduced during building occupancy by landscape maintenance.

### **Historic Properties**

An archeological inventory of the area of potential effect was conducted and no cultural resources were discovered. There is an existing structure located within the area that will be disturbed, but it was not over 50 years of age and is therefore not a cultural resource or an historic property. No further cultural resources work is necessary.

**No Action.** Under no action, there would be no effects to an historic property because none are present within the area of potential effects.

**Proposal.** The proposed action would have no effects on an historic property because none are present in the area.

## **CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

Reclamation consulted the following individuals, Federal, state, and local agencies, tribes and non-Reclamation persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

### ***ID TEAM MEMBERS:***

Mike Berry, regional archeologist

Jane Blair, deputy power manager

Jay Bytheway, civil engineer

Nancy Coulam, environmental protection specialist

C. Steve Hulet, facility manager

Mark McKinstry, zoologist

***FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES:***

The Lincoln County Building Department was consulted about local amendments to the International Building Code and the International Residential Code. Lincoln County did not have any changes also they advised that the State of Wyoming did not have any changes.