

United States Department of Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Western Colorado Area Office

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

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

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and based on the following, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has determined that the proposed floodplain habitat restoration at the Walter Walker and Butch Craig bottomland sites will not result in a significant impact on the human environment.

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

The need for the proposed actions is to increase the frequency of inundation of bottomland habitats at the Walter Walker SWA and Butch Craig BL sites to create and enhance habitat for the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. The purpose of the proposed actions is to implement Recovery Program elements to enhance critical endangered fish habitat and assist in recovery of the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.

Reclamation identified issues and concerns with participation from individuals, agencies, and organizations who may be affected by the project. On December 2, 2002, a scoping letter was mailed to local, state, and federal agencies, water users, environmental organizations, recreationist, adjoining landowners obtained from Mesa County GIS data, and other interested parties.

A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared and distributed for public comment on January 31, 2003. Comments from the public and agencies and organizations were used to prepare a final EA in March 2003. Comments received and responses are included to in the final EA. Coordination on the project included consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) under the Endangered Species Act and Army Corps of Engineers.

The EA evaluated No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives.

Conclusions:

Under the No Action Alternative, Reclamation would not take action to restore and enhance bottomland habitats at the Walter Walker SWA and Butch Craig BL sites. Habitats would not be enhanced to assist in recovery efforts of the Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker. The no action alternative does not meet the purpose and need of the proposed action.

In terms of environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action, there will be no change in water use or diversions. In addition, recreation resources, land use, water rights, historical and cultural resources, Indian trust assets, and environmental justice will not be affected by the recommended action.

The proposed actions would result in positive benefits for fish and wildlife resources, threatened and endangered species, vegetation resources, water quality and health and safety/disease vectors.

During Section 7 consultation with the Service (ES/CO:BR MS 65412 GJ), the Service concurred with determinations that the proposed actions may affect, not likely to adversely affect Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker and bonytail. The Service also concurred with a no effect determination for bald eagle and determined that the southwestern willow flycatcher was no longer considered listed in the area of concern, and stated that additional surveys for southwestern willow flycatcher are not required. All construction contracts and work plans will have stop work clauses that will require the contractor and Reclamation to stop dredging activities and consult with appropriate agencies if 1) threatened or endangered species were encountered or affected or cultural resources were encountered.

Written authorization would be obtained from the Colorado Division of Wildlife to remove the lower portion of the levee at Walter Walker SWA.

Authorization would be obtained to cross property owned by Mesa County via an existing road to access and haul material to and from Walter Walker SWA.

Authorization from adjoining landowners to use an existing road to cross their property would be obtained prior to initiating construction activities at the Butch Craig BL Site.

Section 404 authorization would be obtained from the Army Corps of Engineers prior to initiating construction activities at the Butch Craig BL Site. Removed material would be discharged in upland sites above the ordinary high waterline (OHW).

Construction and levee removal activities would be limited to before and after the spring runoff period when river levels are low.

Levee removal activities at Walter Walker SWA would be coordinated with CDOW and would occur outside the normal nesting and migration seasons to protect nesting water fowl and

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

The Recovery Program would evaluate and monitor changes in floodplain habitat at Walter Walker SWA and Butch Craig BL sites. Additional activities, including but not limited to additional levee removal and excavation of ponds, that may be considered by the Recovery Program would be future actions not analyzed under NEPA and would require additional compliance measures.

Based on a review of comments received, analysis of environmental impacts, and coordination with the Service under the Endangered Species Act, Reclamation concludes that implementation of the recommended floodplain habitat restoration at Walter Walker SWA and Butch Craig BL sites would not have significant impacts on the quality of the human environment or the natural resources in the project area, and therefore further NEPA compliance in the form of an environmental impact statement will not be required.

This Finding of No Significant Impact has, therefore, been prepared and is submitted to document environmental review and evaluation of the proposed action in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

Prepared By:

signed Terence L. Stroh
Terence L. Stroh, General Biologist

03/31/03
Date

Concurred By:

signed Stephen K. McCall
Stephen K. McCall, Environmental Specialist

04/03/03
Date

Approved:

signed Carol S. DeAngelis
Carol DeAngelis, Area Manager
Western Colorado Area Office

04/14/03
Date