

Purpose and Need of Proposed Federal Action

The proposed federal action continues to supply irrigation water to Helena Valley and Toston IDs and M&I water to the City. The purpose of the proposed federal action is to provide for the continued beneficial use of federally-developed water supplies.

The proposed federal action is needed because long-term water service contracts held by these entities expire December 31, 2004. The Reclamation Acts of 1956 and 1963 require Reclamation to provide IDs and municipalities, respectively, holding such contracts a first right to renew those contracts to a stated share of the available water supply while complying with applicable laws and policies. Through the contract renewal process, Reclamation intends to honor existing contractual obligations while attempting to balance the needs of the IDs and the City with the needs of power generation, fish and wildlife, recreation, and other beneficial uses.

Proposed Federal Action

The proposed federal action contains the following components:

- Renewing Part A of the water supply contracts for Helena Valley and Toston IDs with a term up to 40 years or conversion to a repayment contract;
- Entering into O&M agreements with both IDs and renewing the power contract with Toston ID;
- Changing district boundaries at both IDs to incorporate irrigated lands currently being served through temporary contracts;
- Renewing of the long-term water service contract with the City with a term up to 40 years;
- Increasing the maximum quantity of water provided to the City from 5,680 af to 11,284 af per year on a “ramped” basis; and
- Changing the operation of the Helena Valley Pumping Plant to provide for extending the delivery of water to the City from seasonal (April October) to all year.

Preliminary Alternatives Considered for Contract Renewal at Canyon Ferry Reservoir

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative is the basis by which effects associated with the action alternatives are determined. Predicted conditions resulting from the action alternatives are compared to conditions that would exist if no action was taken. The difference between the two conditions is considered to be the effects of a particular action alternative.

The Council on Environmental Quality provides two interpretations of no action one for “new” actions and another for ongoing actions. For situations where ongoing actions are proposed to be continued or changed, no action should be viewed as no change from current management direction or intensity. In the case of Helena Valley and Toston IDs, the No Action Alternative represents conditions that would exist in the future if the same quantities of irrigation water were delivered and used in the same manner similar. Temporary contracts for water delivered by the IDs outside of district boundaries would not be renewed.

The City would continue to seasonally pump similar quantities of water from the Helena Valley Regulating Reservoir as a supplemental source of M&I water. Tenmile Creek would likely continue to serve as a major source of water for the City. Other sources of water may be developed. Under the No Action Alternative, Canyon Ferry Reservoir would be operated in a manner similar to current conditions.

Preliminary Alternatives Considered for Contract Renewal at Canyon Ferry Reservoir

Contract Renewal with Inclusion Alternative

This alternative constitutes the Proposed Action and contains the following components:

- Renewing Part A of the water supply contracts for Helena Valley and Toston IDs with a term up to 40 years or conversion to a repayment contract;
- Entering into O&M agreements with both IDs and renewing the power contract with Toston ID;
- Changing district boundaries of both IDs to reflect lands currently being served through temporary contracts;
- Renewing the long-term water service contract with the City with a term up to 40 years;
- Increasing the maximum quantity of water provided to the City from 5,680 af to 11,284 af per year on a “ramped” basis based on population growth and demand;
- Changing operation of the Helena Valley Pumping Plant to provide for extending delivery of water to the City from seasonal (April October) to all year.

Preliminary Alternatives Considered for Contract Renewal at Canyon Ferry Reservoir

Contract Renewal without Inclusion Alternative

This alternative includes all of the components of the Contract Renewal with Inclusion Alternative except that irrigation district boundaries would not be changed to include lands receiving water through temporary contracts. In this alternative, temporary contracts would not be renewed.

No Contract Alternative

This alternative would not renew the long-term water service contracts with Helena Valley and Toston IDs and the City nor would it renew the power contract with Toston ID. The water previously contracted to these entities would be put to other beneficial use in accordance with water laws in the State of Montana.