

1. Introduction

The U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, herein referred to as Reclamation, Central California Area Office, is preparing a resource management plan and environmental impact statement (RMP/EIS) for the New Melones Lake Area (Figure R-1). Decisions directing management of Reclamation-administered lands in the planning area currently are based on the New Melones Lake Area Master Plan (Master Plan) approved in 1976 (USACE and Reclamation 1976) and subsequent amendments to that plan. The Master Plan is a land use plan that provides a set of land use allocations, development recommendations and objectives, and constraints to guide the management of each resource. A new RMP/EIS, which will replace the Master Plan, will facilitate public understanding of and provide consistent and integrated land use plan decisions for Reclamation-administered lands in the planning area. The draft and proposed RMP/EIS will be supported by a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis, which involves analysis of the environmental effects that could result from implementing different management alternatives. The completed document will support New Melones managers in fulfilling Reclamation's mission, which is "to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public."

1.1 Purpose of and Need for the Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement

Changes in resource management and recreation interest, changes in the types of use, and changes in the level of use, have occurred over the last several decades. The Reclamation Recreation Management Act of 1992 (Public Law [P.L.] 102-575, Title 28 [2805(c)(1)(A)]) directs Reclamation to "provide for the development, use, conservation, enhancement, and management of resources on Reclamation lands." These changes and requirements under the 1992 act have created a need for Reclamation to evaluate the contemporary resource and recreation management for the New Melones Lake Area.

The purpose of the New Melones RMP/EIS is to:

- Provide a framework to ensure that Reclamation plans and activities are in compliance with all appropriate Federal, State, and local laws, rules, regulations, and policies;
- Provide for the protection and management of natural and cultural resources;
- Provide for the protection and management of public health and safety;

- Provide for recreation management and development and other uses consistent with contemporary and professional resource management and protection theories, concepts, and practices; and,
- Be consistent with Reclamation fiscal goals and objectives.

1.2 Purpose of the Resource Inventory Report

Reclamation manages lands and waters covering approximately 28,000 acres in two counties, Tuolumne and Calaveras. Due to its location in a transitional zone between the low-lying Central Valley and the high peaks of the Sierra Nevada, the planning area contains a unique diversity of resources that must be carefully inventoried, planned, and managed. This Resource Inventory Report (RIR), when combined with other reports describing current conditions, uses, or management, is designed to sufficiently describe the planning area's current conditions, resource trends, and current uses and activities. When combined with planning and impact criteria that will be developed in later stages of the project, the RIR will serve as a tool for evaluating the effects of the alternatives. The analysis describes the status or present characteristics and condition of Reclamation-administered lands and resources, including physical and biological processes, recreational, cultural, social, and economic conditions, and facilities.

1.3 Specific Mandates and Authority

Reclamation's authority to operate water project is vested in the broad authority of the Reclamation Act of 1902 (Chapter 1093, 32 stat. 388) and the Reclamation Project Act of 1939 (Chapter 418, 53 Stat. 1187). Construction of New Melones was authorized by the Flood Control Act of December 22, 1944. The original authorization was subsequently modified by the Flood Control Act of 1962 (Public Law 87-874). The authorized purposes of the project included flood control, irrigation, power generation, general recreation, water quality, and fish and wildlife enhancement.

The Flood Control Act of 1962 describes the responsibilities of the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of the Interior at the New Melones project. In 1976, the Master Plan for the reservoir was developed by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) with an associated EIS. This plan included thirteen separate recreation areas from a walk-in campground at Clarks Flat in the Camp Nine vicinity to large recreation areas at Tutletown and Gloryhole. Some of the facilities were to be constructed immediately and the remainder at some future date. During construction in 1979, a Memo of Understanding (MOU) for transfer of the New Melones dam and reservoir to Reclamation from the Army Corps of Engineers was executed. Though USACE retained construction responsibility, the MOU granted Reclamation management responsibility for the New Melones project including operations of the reservoir as part of the Central Valley Project, management of recreation, and enhancement and protection of fish and wildlife resources.

The building and filling of New Melones Reservoir became controversial and ultimately litigious. During the period between when the Master Plan was complete in 1978 until the reservoir first filled in the winter of 1982-83, the construction of the recreation facilities was postponed due to the on-going litigation. At that time, a cost sharing requirement for recreation and fish and wildlife as outlined in Public Law 89-72 was applied by USACE. Efforts to find a cost share for recreational facilities ultimately were unsuccessful and only “minimal facilities” as defined by USACE were built. The USACE constructed facilities beyond the “minimum” facilities described in P.L. 89-72, but were not as extensive as originally described in the Master Plan.

For the intervening period from 1979 to the present, Reclamation has managed the recreation facility at New Melones Lake. Replacement and upkeep of the recreation facilities has been completed on an as-need basis to protect public health and safety and, at times, to realize savings in operations and maintenance through updating the ‘minimal’ structures. Additionally Reclamation has, through the efforts of county legislators and federal representatives, been successful in obtaining moneys to fund additional piecemeal facilities including a sewage treatment facility and an additional well (see Conference Report on H.R. 2311 Energy and Water Development Appropriations Act 2002).

Resource Management Plan

Reclamation’s authority to prepare RMP’s is derived from the broad authority of the Reclamation Act of 1902 (Chapter 1093, 32 stat. 388); the Reclamation Project Act of 1939 (Chapter 418, 53 Stat. 1187); the Federal Water Project Recreation Act (Public Law [P.L.] 89-72, 79 Stat. 213); and more specifically, in the Reclamation Recreation Management Act of 1992 (P.L. 102-575, Title 28 [2805©(1)(A)]). The Reclamation Recreation Management Act authorized the preparation of RMPs to “provide for the development, use, conservation, protection, enhancement, and management of resources of Reclamation lands in a manner that is compatible with the authorized purpose of the Reclamation Project associated with the Reclamation lands.”

1.4 Format of the RIR

The RIR is broken down into the following seven resource areas:

- **Physical Resources**, which includes discussion of the non-organic physical resources of the site. Resource categories under this heading include climate, topography, air quality, noise, hydrology, geology, and aesthetic, scenic, and visual resources;
- **Natural Resources**, which includes discussion of fish and wildlife, vegetation, special status species, and weeds;
- **Cultural Resources**, which includes discussion of archeological and historical resources;
- **Indian Trust Assets**, which includes discussion of tribal lands;

- **Land Management, Planning, and Ownership Influences**, which includes discussion of commercial services, concessions, facilities, fire management, transportation and travel, trespass, utilities, and range management;
- **Visitor Use and Recreational Resources**, which includes discussion of visitor center and interpretive services, aquatic recreation, land recreation, and special uses; and
- **Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice**, which includes discussion of use fees, barriers to use, and economic contributions of New Melones Lake to the local economy.

Each of these broad resource categories is further broken down into subcategories that describe various resource types in greater detail. To the degree possible, resources are described in relation to their proximity to various planning units (Figure R-2). Resources are described at a level of detail appropriate to an RMP/EIS, which is a programmatic planning document that requires fairly broad descriptions of resources. In cases where special management actions may be required, such as the locations of known populations of listed species, the RIR may provide greater detail in terms of location or population estimate.

1.5 Existing Management Documents

Management guidance for the New Melones Lake Area comes primarily from the following sources:

- **Reclamation Manual.** The Reclamation Manual (RCD TRMR-15) consists of a series of Policies, Directives, and Standards and Delegations of Authority. Collectively, these assign program responsibility and authority and document Reclamation-wide methods of doing business. All requirements in the Reclamation Manual are mandatory and constitute official Reclamation policy. The Reclamation Manual also serves as a link to Reclamation's supplements to the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) and government-wide regulations, such as the Federal Acquisition Regulations; and
- **New Melones Lake Area Master Plan (1976) (USACE and Reclamation 1976).** This document contains decisions concerning land use allocations and basic resource management guidelines for public lands and resources at New Melones Lake. Although no life span was indicated for this document, much of the guidance is outdated and does not reflect current Federal policy. For many resource categories, this document does not provide specific management guidance. Instead, it provides a very broad framework from which Reclamation resource managers determine specific management guidance.
- **New Melones Lake EIS (1972) (USACE 1972).** This document analyzes environmental impacts resulting from the filling of New Melones Lake and associated facilities. The EIS also documents baseline conditions at the time of dam construction.

Other documents that provide management guidance include the following:

- **Final Peoria Wildlife Management Area Environmental Assessment (EA) (2007) (Reclamation 2007).** The Peoria Wildlife Management Area lies at the southern end of New Melones Lake, and is managed by Reclamation as mitigation for habitat lost when New Melones Dam and Lake were built. The EA discloses environmental impacts from implementation of an interim resource management plan for this area as well as a road closure in this area; and
- **Draft New Melones Lake Fire Management Plan (2006) (Reclamation 2006).** This document identifies resource values and conditions pertaining to fire management at New Melones Lake.
- **New Melones Lake Draft Resource Management Plan (1995) (Reclamation 1995).** This document proposes sound management practices and principals at the New Melones Lake Area to provide a balanced stewardship of the natural, cultural, and recreational resources and the economic vitality of the surrounding communities.
- **Draft Vegetation Management Plan (1997) (Reclamation 1997).** This document expands on the Vegetation element within the draft Resource Management Plan (Reclamation 1995), in order to document the plant communities within the Plan Area. It also recommends specific management of vegetative communities to help Reclamation achieve its vegetation goals at the New Melones Lake Area.
- **Revised Cave Management Plan (1996) (Reclamation 1996).** This document identifies ways to manage and protect caves within New Melones Lake Area, and updates information presented in the draft Cave Management Plan of 1978 (BLM 1978).