

# 1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

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## 1.1 Introduction

This Environmental Assessment (EA) evaluates the proposed Black Canyon Reservoir and Montour Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Resource Management Plan (RMP). The RMP is being developed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to manage resources, facilities, and access on their lands and waters. Reclamation's lands in the Black Canyon Reservoir and Montour WMA RMP area are shown on Figure 1.1-1, *Regional Location Map*.

A Draft EA was prepared to determine whether to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). That analysis found no significant impacts; therefore, this FONSI and Final EA are being issued for this Federal Action. This is in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

NEPA requires Reclamation to explore a reasonable range of possible alternative management approaches and the environmental effects of these actions. Two alternatives are evaluated and compared in this document: a No Action Alternative and a Preferred Alternative. The impacts of each alternative were evaluated for the potentially affected resource areas, including water quality and contaminants, vegetation, wildlife, aquatic resources, threatened and endangered species, recreation, land use, socioeconomics, environmental justice, public services and utilities, cultural resources, Indian sacred sites, and Indian Trust Assets (ITAs). Geology, soils, visual quality, climate and air quality, water resources and hydrology, topography, and transportation and access were also evaluated, but are not included in this document because it was determined that no impacts would occur to these resources.

## 1.2 Authority

Title 28 of Public Law 102-575, Section 2805 (106 Stat. 4690; Reclamation Recreation Management Act of 1992) provides Reclamation with authority to prepare resource management plans.

## 1.3 Proposed Federal Action

The proposed Federal action is implementation of an RMP for Reclamation lands at Black Canyon Reservoir and the Montour WMA. The intent of the RMP is to serve as a blueprint for the future use, management, and site development of Reclamation lands and resources in the RMP Study Area for the next 15 years. The RMP contains goals and objectives for resource management, specifies desired land use patterns and resource management, and explains the policies and actions that would be implemented or allowed during the 15-year life of the plan to achieve these goals and objectives. In 1984, Reclamation prepared a management plan for the Montour WMA; where still relevant, this plan was used to assist in the preparation of this EA in

writing various affected environment sections in Chapter 3. Additionally, where still appropriate, specific actions in the 1984 management plan were carried forward into the EA alternatives. The selected EA alternative, which will become the basis for the RMP, is intended to replace the 1984 plan for the Montour WMA as well as covering Black Canyon Reservoir and surrounding Reclamation lands.

## **1.4 Purpose and Need**

The purpose of this Federal action is to prepare an RMP to effectively manage recreation use and natural and cultural resources at Black Canyon Reservoir and the Montour WMA. A plan is needed to address current and anticipated future issues to allow the orderly and coordinated development and management of lands and facilities under Reclamation jurisdiction. Several management pressures are coming to bear on Black Canyon and Montour. During the 1990s, Gem County's population grew 28.2 percent, reaching 15,181 in 2000. The population of nearby Ada County grew 46.2 percent, reaching 300,904 in 2000; and Canyon County grew by 45.9 percent, reaching 131,441 in 2002. As population has grown in southwest Idaho, reservoir facilities are increasingly filled to capacity and overflow during weekends and peak use times. Safety risks are heightened as more recreationists park along State Highway 52 when the parking lots are full. With the increased popularity of personal water craft (PWC), the shallow, upper end of the reservoir is being used much more frequently, and this use was not anticipated in 1984. The Montour WMA is becoming more crowded during each hunting season, and safety is becoming a concern. Continued growth of the region and the corresponding use of Black Canyon Reservoir and the Montour WMA require the development of an RMP to expand and update the current, outdated guidance and for resolving conflicts with natural resources and among user groups.

The purpose of the RMP process is to develop a comprehensive vision to guide future uses and define land and resource management objectives. The 15-year RMP will be used as the basis for directing activities on Reclamation lands in a way that maximizes overall public and resource benefits consistent with Reclamation goals and to the extent these are compatible with each other. The RMP will be reviewed, reevaluated, and amended to reflect changing conditions and management objectives on an as-needed basis. Future opportunities for public involvement would be provided on significant changes that affect resources or public use.

## **1.5 Location and Background**

Black Canyon Reservoir and Montour WMA are located in Gem County, Idaho, approximately 6 miles from the town of Emmett and about 30 miles northwest of Boise. Black Canyon Dam, which impounds Black Canyon Reservoir in the Payette River drainage, was constructed in 1924 with authorized uses including irrigation and power. Reclamation's reservoir lands cover about 1,100 surface water acres and a narrow strip of land surrounding the reservoir. The four developed day use recreation sites on Reclamation lands at the reservoir and just downstream of the dam include Black Canyon, Wild Rose, Triangle and Cobblestone parks. One 19-site campground is located at the Montour WMA. Surrounding land uses are primarily range land, agricultural, and rural residential. Land ownership is a mixture of private and Federal lands predominately managed by Reclamation and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Insert Figure 1-1, *Location Map (front)*

Insert Figure 1-1, Locations Map (back)

Cultivated crops in the area include alfalfa, barley, corn, oats, and wheat; grazing permits have also been issued on some Reclamation lands.

### **1.5.1 Historical Overview**

The Montour valley was inhabited by Native Americans as early as 6,000 years ago. Northern Shoshone and Northern Paiute bands inhabited the region for generations, and the Payette River near Montour was an important fishery. With the discovery of gold in the Boise Basin in 1862, miners began passing through the Montour Valley en route to the Boise Basin gold fields, and the community of Montour was established. The community relied primarily on logging, mining, ranching, and farming. Montour prospered up through World War I, but declined during the depression in the 1920s. Black Canyon Diversion Dam was constructed between 1922 and 1924 as part of the Payette Division of the Boise Project. The project authorization includes irrigation and power, and was primarily constructed as a diversion facility for the Black Canyon Main Canal. A powerplant was added in 1925 that consists of two generator units. The plant supplies power to meet irrigation loads in the Boise, Owyhee, and Mindoka projects as part of Reclamation's Southern Idaho Power System. Surplus power is delivered to the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) for marketing and distribution to regional industries and municipalities.

After completion of the Black Canyon Dam, sediment carried by the Payette River began filling the upper end of Black Canyon Reservoir. In time, this sediment deposition caused water to back up into the Montour area. As the water backup into Montour grew worse, several solutions were considered. In 1976, Reclamation purchased lands within the 100-year floodplain under the Montour Flood Project. Realizing its value for wildlife and public use, Montour Valley was designated by Reclamation as the Montour WMA. In 1983, IDFG and Reclamation entered into a cooperative agreement to manage the WMA.

### **1.5.2 River and Reservoir System Operations, and Existing Agreements**

Black Canyon Dam is a concrete gravity structure with a gated overflow spillway. The dam has a structural height of 183 feet and diverts water to the Payette Division of the Boise Project through the Black Canyon Canal. The reservoir is maintained at a nearly constant elevation throughout the irrigation season to allow flows to reach the canal. The reservoir has 1,100 surface acres, contains approximately 44,800 acre-feet of water, and is about 6 miles long. Additional detail is provided in Table 1.1-1, *Project Specifications*.

The dam and reservoir operate under the supervision of Reclamation's Snake River Area Office (SRAO) Area Manager. The power plant is operated by Reclamation as a run-of-the-river plant (that is, no water fluctuations), although operational releases are coordinated to maximize power generation. The RMP does not include reservoir operations, which are based on contractual and other obligations, such as flood control.

**TABLE 1.1-1**  
Project Specifications

<b>Normal Maximum Water Surface</b>	
Elevation	2,497.5 feet
Storage	44,800 acre-feet
Surface Area	1,100 acres
Shoreline	12 miles
<b>Black Canyon Dam</b>	
Structural Height	183 feet
Crest Elevation	2,500 feet
Crest Length	1,040 feet
Spillway Capacity at Elevation 2497.5 feet	39,060 cubic feet per second
Outlet Works Capacity at Elevation 24.97.5 feet	1,203 cubic feet per second
Powerplant Capacity	10,200 kW

Source: Reclamation Specifications

To meet the goals of the RMP, Reclamation needs to not only analyze the resource information, but must also incorporate its mission and Federal laws and policies. These include environmental compliance laws, Federal responsibilities to Tribes, accessibility compliance laws, and others (see Appendix A for a complete list).

Pertinent information from several related studies are being used to develop the RMP, including but not limited to the following:

- Montour Wildlife/Recreation Area Management Plan (Reclamation 1984)
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) management objectives for Montour WMA
- Recreation user data collected for Black Canyon and Montour Parks (data based on fee collection from prior years and recent user counts)

Reclamation has a cooperative agreement with IDFG to manage the 1,100 acres of land under Reclamation’s ownership at the Montour WMA. The agreement emphasizes that management focuses on protecting and enhancing wildlife habitats while providing a variety of recreation experiences. IDFG and Reclamation work cooperatively to accomplish management objectives annually depending on funding availability.

## **1.6 Related Activities**

The following proposed land development, although not a part of the proposed RMP, may have impacts on some of the same resources that could potentially be affected by implementing the Black Canyon Reservoir and Montour WMA RMP. Black Canyon Partners, LLC, is proposing a 3,232-acre planned unit development on the south side of the reservoir across from Triangle

Park. The phased development plan includes two 18-hole golf courses, a multipurpose equestrian center, home sites, public marina and boat docks, clubhouse and facilities, trails, condominiums, and commercial development consisting of a post office, fire station, ambulance, and small retail shops. Potential cumulative impacts from this proposed development are discussed in Section 3.14.

## **1.7 Scoping**

Public scoping activities were held prior to the development of the Draft EA, including the following:

- Conducted public scoping meeting
- Reviewed comments generated from the first public information newsbrief
- Gathered input on issues from the first Ad Hoc Work Group meeting

A public scoping meeting was held on April 24, 2002, in Emmett, Idaho. The meeting was advertised through media announcements sent to local and Boise newspapers, and a public information newsbrief that was sent to approximately 150 people. The purpose of the meeting and the newsbrief was to collect public input on the issues that should be addressed in the alternatives for the RMP and EA. Following this meeting, an Ad Hoc Work Group was formed to assist with alternatives development and participation throughout the process. This group consisted of Tribal, agency, and interest group representatives, and met for the first time to discuss issues on June 5, 2002. The public involvement process is described fully in Chapter 4, *Consultation and Coordination*.

## **1.8 Summary of Issues**

- **Natural & Cultural Resources**
  - Overall protection of vegetation and wildlife
  - Habitat improvements at Montour WMA
  - Hunter use/demand vs. wildlife and habitat protection at Montour WMA
  - Impacts of recreation and other uses
  - Erosion of the reservoir shoreline
  - Weed control
  - Impacts of use on cultural resources
- **Recreation**
  - Dealing with increasing demand vs. carrying capacity
  - Expansion and improvement at site-specific facilities
  - Potential need for new facilities, such as marina, concessions, group sites, trails
  - Accessibility issues

- **Land Use & Overall Management**

- Security of the dam site
- Law enforcement for vandalism, shooting, off-road vehicle (ORV) use, trespassing
- Adequacy of parking
- Coordination with relevant agencies (Gem County, Idaho Transportation Department [ITD], IDFG)
- Funding sources and prioritizing projects
- General signage and kiosks