



## Chapter 1

# Introduction

### **1.1 RMP Program and Policy**

The Pacific Northwest Region of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) is conducting a multi-year program to prepare a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for each of its major facilities. This program is guided by Federal legislation and policies to ensure that Federal lands are managed to serve a wide range of public purposes. RMP preparation is specifically authorized in Title 28 of Public Law 102-575. It is also an outcome of *Assessment '87*, a Reclamation study that examined the future direction of its programs. This study established a broad framework for moving forward into the 21st century, with increased emphasis on the improved management of projects and the protection of the environment. Each RMP is intended to provide the management framework needed to balance the development, use, and protection of Reclamation lands and their associated natural, cultural, and recreational resources. It is Reclamation's blueprint for future resource management decisions to guide Reclamation, managing partners, and agency cooperators, as well as inform the public about the resource management policies and actions to be implemented over the life of the RMP.

Reclamation's resource management policy is to provide a broad level of stewardship to ensure and encourage resource protection, conservation, and multiple use, as appropriate. Management practices and principles established in this RMP, in accordance with exist-

ing Federal laws, regulations, and policies, provide for the protection of fish, wildlife, and other natural resources; cultural resources; public health and safety; and applicable uses of Reclamation lands and water areas, public access, and outdoor recreation.

### **1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Plan**

The Minidoka North Side (MNS or Minidoka) RMP is a 15-year plan to provide management direction for lands and facilities under Reclamation's jurisdiction. This RMP is needed to address Reclamation's future management of the 119 separate parcels (approximately 17,700 acres) that make up the Minidoka North Side area, and are spread out over approximately 527,000 acres. Reclamation obtained the majority of these parcels at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The parcels were either acquired or withdrawn from the public land base specifically for Reclamation's irrigation projects. Now, however, it is apparent that not all of the parcels are required for operation and maintenance of the irrigation projects. In the long term, many of these parcels are likely to be relinquished – that is, put back in public land status and managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Approximately 46 percent of the parcels will remain under Reclamation's jurisdiction. The RMP addresses management of the existing land base (all 119 parcels), including interim management for parcels that are no longer

needed for Project purposes and long-term management for the parcels to be retained.

In this document, the entire area is collectively referred to as the “RMP Study Area.” The Study Area includes Reclamation lands, as well as those surrounding the MNS parcels (see Regional Location Map).

Through implementation of the RMP, Reclamation aims to balance competing and conflicting demands for differing uses and to maximize compatibility with surrounding land uses, while affording an appropriate level of resource protection and enhancement.

Over the course of implementing the RMP, it will be reviewed, reevaluated, and revised (if necessary) in cooperation with all involved agencies and Tribes to reflect changing conditions and management objectives. If a proposed modification to the RMP would significantly affect area resources or public use, opportunities for public involvement will be provided. The RMP will be reviewed at the end of its 15-year life.

In addition to this introductory chapter, the RMP contains the five main chapters, summarized below.

Chapter 2 summarizes the relevant natural, cultural, and socioeconomic resources in the Study Area. The resource inventory describes existing conditions and lays the framework for identifying suitable resources for a variety of land and water uses, as well as sensitive resources that require special protection, enhancement, or restoration.

Chapter 3 summarizes existing land use and management. The range of existing land uses is described and existing land use agreements identified. These include: Project facilities and general operations (i.e., Minidoka Dam and Lake Walcott); agreements, easements and permits; encroachments; public facilities, utilities and services; recreational uses; and access.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the RMP planning process, including the public involvement program and input received through newsbrief response forms, meetings/workshops, and agency consultation. This chapter also describes Reclamation’s efforts regarding its responsibilities to the affected Tribes. All of this information helped identify the range of issues and concerns, establish goals and objectives, identify the range of alternative plans for study, and modify the Preferred Alternative, which ultimately became this RMP.

Chapter 5 is the core of the RMP and provides a detailed description of the Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions associated with the plan. The Goals, Objectives, and Management Actions are organized according to the six themes that follow: (1) land use and management; (2) natural resources; (3) cultural resources; (4) Indian sacred sites; (5) Indian Trust Assets; and (6) recreation and access.

Chapter 6 presents the implementation program associated with the Management Actions set forth in Chapter 5. This includes a description of program phasing, related actions, priorities, and responsible entities, as well as the process involved with amending and updating the plan.

### **1.3 Location and Description of the RMP Study Area**

The Minidoka North Side RMP Study Area is located in parts of Minidoka, Cassia, Jerome, Lincoln, and Blaine counties, Idaho. The Study Area includes Minidoka Dam and 119 scattered land parcels, covering approximately 17,700 acres. The immediate Study Area includes the three counties where all of Reclamation’s parcels are located—i.e., Minidoka, Cassia, and Jerome Counties.

## 1.4 Project Summary

Minidoka Dam was Reclamation's first Project in Idaho, with construction completed in 1906. The United States Congress designated its Project authorization to include irrigation and power generation. The Gravity Division and the North Side Pumping Division of the Minidoka Project were designed primarily to provide irrigation to the new communities of Heyburn, Paul, Acequia, and Rupert. The dam and powerplant were listed on the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) in 1974.

At the time the Project was initiated, large tracts of public land were withdrawn and transferred to Reclamation for homestead entry purposes and for the construction of Project facilities. Most of the Minidoka North Side Study Area lands were originally included in the North Side Extension Division, and were expected to become private irrigated farmland. However, because of economic conditions and water shortages, these lands were never developed. A portion of these remaining lands and land in the Minidoka Irrigation District (MID) are used for Project purposes. These parcels, many of which have trespass issues or other unauthorized uses, are scattered throughout the RMP Study Area among BLM and privately owned lands.

Minidoka Dam impounds Lake Walcott, one of five reservoirs associated within the larger Minidoka Project on the Snake River (see Photo 1-1). Lake Walcott State Park is located on Reclamation property adjacent to the lake, and Reclamation has closely coordinated this RMP effort with Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR) for future planning related to park lands. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) manages the reservoir water surface and lands on the adjacent Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Unlike Lake Walcott State Park, the Minidoka NWR is considered outside the RMP Study Area. President Theodore Roosevelt designated this 25,000-acre area as the Minidoka

NWR in 1909. Other lands in the vicinity are owned or managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and private individuals and entities that use the land primarily for agriculture. A&B Irrigation District (A&B), formerly the North Side Pumping Division, and the MID, formerly the Gravity Division, operate and maintain the irrigation water system on these properties.

Due to recent water supply concerns which have been heightened by continuing drought and ground water depletions, a number of water user entities have expressed interest in studying whether it might be cost-effective to raise the dam/spillway by one to five feet in conjunction with rehabilitation efforts. A 5 foot raise could provide an additional 50,000 acre feet of storage. Raising the water surface elevation would not only alter the shore line around Lake Walcott, but could also expand or modify resource management activities. However, possible benefits of a dam raise could include: additional storage for irrigation or flow augmentation purposes; increased head for power generation; improved irrigation deliveries; additional seepage for groundwater recharge; and/or improved operational flexibility for operation of the Upper Snake system.



Photo 1-1. Aerial view of Minidoka Dam, powerplant, and operation facilities, with Lake Walcott above and the Snake River below.

This proposal is not part of the RMP, however, if it is pursued through legislation, Reclamation may be asked to formally study the

feasibility of this project and evaluate the effects and cost-effectiveness of the proposal. Additional representative information about the dam raise alternatives is being gathered so stakeholders can make informed decisions about their interest in, and potential support for, future project involvement.

## **1.5 Overview of Public Involvement, Agency, and Tribal Coordination**

Reclamation conducted an extensive public involvement program as part of the RMP planning process to ensure representation and participation by all those interested in the future of the Minidoka North Side lands. To achieve full representation, the program was designed to reach a user population that was dispersed over a broad geographical area, representing diverse points of view, and enthusiastic in participating in the RMP planning process.

The public involvement program consisted of four primary elements: (a) four newsbriefs mailed to agencies, Tribes, elected officials, organizations, media, and individuals; (b) three public meetings/workshops; (c) seven meetings with a group formed as part of the RMP planning process to represent key stakeholders (including agencies, Tribes, and interest groups in the area); and (d) a public web site providing access to newsbriefs, draft materials, and meeting announcements. These elements, as well as additional agency and Tribal consultation efforts, are discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.