

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Lower Colorado Region
Phoenix Area Office

DRAFT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

LAKE PLEASANT REGIONAL PARK
AGUA FRIA CONSERVATION AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN
MARICOPA and YAVAPAI COUNTIES, ARIZONA

Approved: _____ Date: _____

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FONSI No. PXAO-_____

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), to describe potential environmental impacts resulting from approving an amendment to the Lake Pleasant Regional Park's (LPRP) Lake Pleasant Master Plan (LPMP). LPRP encompasses approximately 23,361 acres of land owned by Reclamation, which are managed by Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department (MCPRD) as a regional park. The amendment would include an Agua Fria Conservation Area (AFCA) Management Plan into the LPMP. The AFCA consists of approximately 2,405 acres and is located in the northeastern portion of LPRP. It was designated as one of several conservation areas within LPRP in recognition of the sensitive natural and cultural resources that occur there.

Reclamation has determined that approval of an amendment to the LPMP to include the AFCA Management Plan, and the Plan's subsequent implementation by MCPRD, will not result in significant environmental impacts to the human environment, which would merit preparation of an environmental impact statement.

BACKGROUND

LPRP is located in Maricopa and Yavapai counties, Arizona. It encompasses 23,361 acres of land and includes Lake Pleasant. Reclamation acquired the lands that make up LPRP as part of the New Waddell Dam feature of the Central Arizona Project. The dam was constructed by Reclamation and is operated for CAP water storage and delivery; therefore, the water level of the reservoir varies annually depending upon the timing and amount of CAP water deliveries that are made. Recreation within LPRP is managed by MCPRD pursuant to a 1990 land management agreement with Reclamation (1990 Agreement).

The 1990 Agreement required MCPRD to develop a master plan for developing and operating the LPRP, which Reclamation would need to approve prior to its implementation by the County. MCPRD developed the Lake Pleasant Master Plan (LPMP), which established guidelines for development of LPRP and outlined future desired conditions for, among other things, recreation and resource protection. In 1997, Reclamation prepared an EA on the LPMP and issued a FONSI, approving the LPMP.

The LPMP describes conservation areas within the LPRP as "natural, environmentally sensitive areas intended to remain relatively undisturbed to preserve the native environment." The LPMP identified several conservation areas, indicating these areas would have relatively limited access and development; therefore, it was envisioned there would be minimal operation and maintenance costs associated with these areas. One such conservation area, the AFCA, contains about 2,405 acres; it was designated as a conservation area in recognition of the special assemblages of natural and cultural resources that occurred there.

In December 2006, MCPRD and Reclamation met with other governmental agencies responsible for land, recreation and wildlife management of the areas within and adjacent to the AFCA (collectively called the "Partners"), to discuss how shooting, trash dumping, off-road vehicle travel, vandalism, and criminal activities were degrading cultural and natural resources of the

AFCA and creating a public hazard. The Partners determined some type of plan needed to be developed and implemented that would allow access and recreational opportunities within the AFCA for responsible users while providing protection to the natural and cultural resources of the area. That process led to the development of the proposed AFCA Management Plan.

Under the 1990 Agreement, amendments to the LPMP plan must be approved by Reclamation. Reclamation prepared an EA to describe potential environmental consequences resulting from incorporation of the AFCA Management Plan into the LPMP by amendment, and its subsequent implementation. The EA describes the process through which the Partners gathered public input about actual and desired uses of the AFCA and then developed the “Partners Consensus Plan,” which is identified in the EA as the Proposed Action. The EA describes the existing conditions within the AFCA and the environmental impacts that are anticipated to result from implementing the Partners Consensus Plan, an alternative that would only minimally develop the AFCA, and a No Action alternative.

The EA was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, as amended (NEPA), and Department of the Interior regulations regarding implementation of NEPA (43 CFR Part 46).

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based upon the EA, Reclamation has determined that amending the LPMP to include the AFCA Management Plan, and MCPRD’s implementation of the Plan will not result in significant environmental impacts to the AFCA, LPRP, or the human environment in the vicinity of the project area. Preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required. This decision is based upon the following considerations.

(1) No significant adverse environmental impacts will occur as a result of the Proposed Action. The EA indicates no significant adverse environmental impacts will result from implementing the AFCA Management Plan.

(2) The Proposed Action will not result in any adverse effects to public health or safety. The project area is located within an area that is attaining all National Ambient Air Quality Standards except ozone. Construction activities are expected to be of short duration (two months or less at any given time); ozone precursor emissions associated with construction activities are expected to be minimal. Long-term impacts from additional emissions resulting from increased vehicular traffic traveling to/from the AFCA and motorized boats utilizing the boat launches were estimated based upon extreme worst case assumptions (i.e., the highest weekend use experienced during a 6-week pilot project was projected to occur every day during the entire 6-month open season). Even using this worst case scenario, the estimated ozone precursor emissions that would result from long-term use of the AFCA were substantially below the *de minimis* threshold of 100 tons per year. In addition, the typical open season for the AFCA (January through June) will occur outside the peak ozone season for Maricopa County (July 1 through September 30).

The relatively minute quantities of pollutants released during construction and subsequent use of the AFCA area will have a negligible cumulative effect on local air quality or global processes that lead to climate change.

(3) No direct adverse impacts will occur from the proposed project to unique characteristics of the geographic area such as historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. There is no agriculture on any of the proposed project lands; however, there is evidence the area has been used for cattle grazing. There are no wild and scenic rivers, or rivers proposed for designation as wild and scenic in the vicinity of, or that could be impacted by, the project. One of the primary purposes of implementing the Management Plan is to protect sensitive natural and cultural resources within the AFCA; therefore, impacts are anticipated to be beneficial to these resources. These sensitive resources are to be inventoried prior to opening the AFCA, and monitored yearly thereafter. Adjustments to the Management Plan are to be made if sensitive sites show degradation or damage beyond limits established during the initial baseline inventory.

(4) Effects on the quality of the human environment are anticipated to be beneficial under the Proposed Action, providing desired recreational opportunities in a relatively undeveloped and natural setting, while protecting sensitive natural and cultural resources.

(5) Highly uncertain, unique or unknown risks affecting the human environment are not anticipated to occur as a result of this Proposed Action. In spring 2008, Arizona Game and Fish Department conducted a six-week pilot project, opening the AFCA for day-use only, Friday through Sunday, essentially as described in the Management Plan. Impacts affecting the human environment are expected to be similar to and consistent with what was experienced during the six-week pilot project.

(6) The proposed action will not establish a precedent for future actions, and will not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Although MCPRD intends to develop management plans for other conservation areas, as needed, each management plan will be site-specific and developed to address the unique natural and cultural resources within each of these conservation areas.

(7) Cumulatively significant impacts are not anticipated to occur as a result of the proposed action. Construction of the proposed project will contribute temporary minor emissions of air pollutants in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project; the project area is surrounded by undeveloped park land and no other construction or activities generating ongoing emissions are anticipated to be occurring in the vicinity of this work.

Traffic associated with use of the AFCA would travel along Table Mesa Road, through the Table Mesa Recreation Area, located east of the AFCA. Estimated emissions from increased traffic along Table Mesa Road from the proposed project, based upon an extreme worst case scenario, would be less than 24 tons per year. Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Bradshaw-Harquahala Resource Management Plan (B-H RMP) indicates implementing the B-H RMP will

reduce overall emissions by restricting or prohibiting use in certain areas, moving certain activities to other areas, avoiding use during high pollution days, using dust suppressants, etc. The B-H RMP states BLM will ensure compliance with new Maricopa County air quality rules (BLM 2008).

(8) Cultural resource surveys were conducted at LPRP prior to construction of the CAP. Additional surveys have been conducted periodically within LPRP since completion of New Waddell Dam. Prior to the opening of AFCA, Reclamation will note the conditions of all known sites. These sites will be monitored to determine if the Management Plan is effective in protecting these sites, or adjustments will need to be made to the Management Plan.

(9) No federally protected species or areas designated as critical habitat will be adversely affected by the proposed action. Reclamation identified three federally listed endangered or threatened species, listed on Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) website for Maricopa and Yavapai counties, that are known or are likely to occur within the AFCA: bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*), and lesser long-nosed bat (*Leptonycteris curasoae yerbabuena*). Reclamation determined the proposed action "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" the bald eagle and the southwestern willow flycatcher. Reclamation identified conservation measures that will be implemented as part of the AFCA Management Plan. FWS concurred with Reclamation's findings.

(10) The proposed action does not threaten to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. MCPRD and its Partners are required to follow all requirements and conditions related to work within waters of the U.S., and comply with any and all State or local environmentally-related rules or regulations in the implementation of the AFCA Management Plan.

Documents related to this action are identified below.

BLM (Bureau of Land Management). 2008. Agua Fria National Monument and Bradshaw-Harquahala Proposed Resource Management Plans and Final Environmental Impact Statement. Phoenix, AZ. June.

Reclamation. (Bureau of Reclamation). 2010. Environmental Assessment – Lake Pleasant Regional Park Agua Fria Conservation Area Management Plan. Maricopa and Yavapai Counties, Arizona. January.