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Inside ***News from the Reservoir***
July 2002

**Acting as contracted agent for the Bureau of Reclamation, Mid-Pacific Region*

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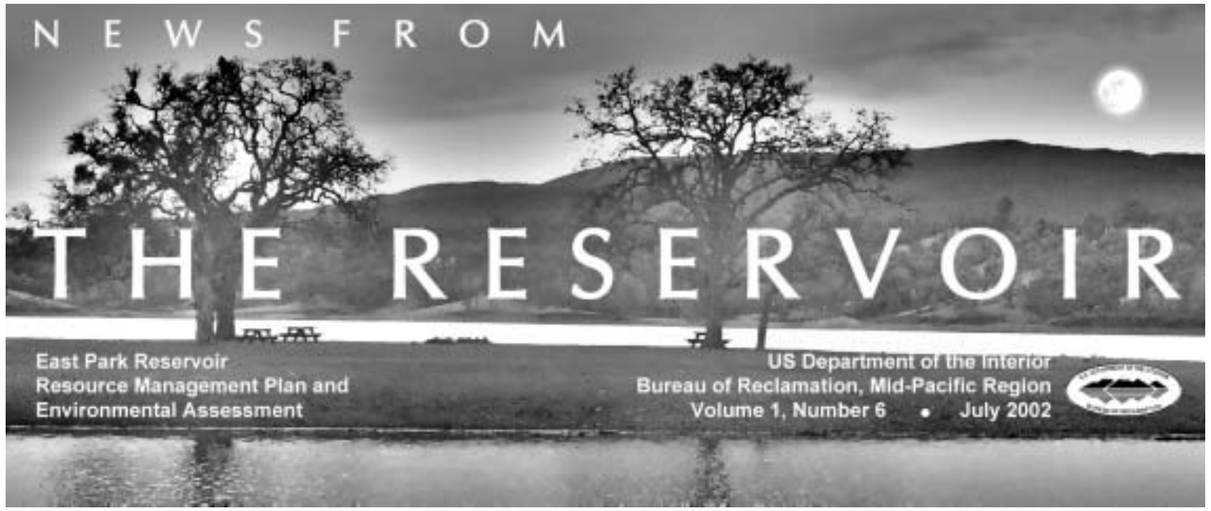
News Flash!

You are invited to attend Reclamation's open house on Thursday, August 15, at the Maxwell Inn.

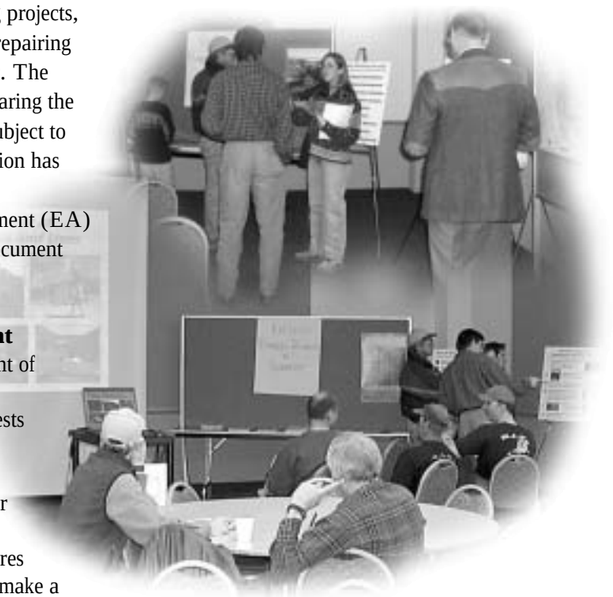


NEPA and Public Involvement Explained

As we enter the NEPA phase of the RMP planning process and prepare for the first open house on August 15, 2002 (see page 4 for time and location), we thought it would be a good time to summarize the NEPA process, specifically how the public can participate in the process.

Overview of the National Environmental Policy Act

Under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), federal agencies are required to consider the environmental impacts of their proposed actions before they take them. The federal actions that are subject to NEPA include such activities as planning and funding projects, issuing permits, and repairing and building facilities. The federal action of preparing the East Park RMP is subject to NEPA, so Reclamation has determined that an environmental assessment (EA) will be the NEPA document that will be prepared.



Public Involvement

A vital component of NEPA is public involvement, which vests the public in the decision-making process and allows for full environmental disclosure. This ensures that federal agencies make a diligent effort to involve the public in preparing NEPA documents.

Scoping is a public process designed to determine the issues and alternatives to be addressed in a NEPA document. It helps ensure that real problems are identified early and that they are properly studied; that issues of no concern do not consume time and effort; that the proposed action and alternatives are balanced and thorough; and that the delays of redoing an inadequate NEPA document are avoided.

Public involvement for the East Park RMP/EA is being conducted in two phases: Public scoping prior to NEPA analysis to obtain public input on East Park issues and proposed alternatives, and public review and comment on the draft RMP/EA, which includes analyzing possible environmental impacts and identifying the preferred alternative.

Objectives of Scoping

- Invite agencies and public to participate
- Identify and refine alternatives to the proposed action
- Identify a preliminary list of environmental and socioeconomic issues to address in the NEPA document
- Identify and eliminate issues determined to be insignificant

The Orland Project and How it Affects East Park Reservoir Water Levels

The guest speaker at the last East Park RMP work group meeting was Rick Massa of the Orland Unit Water Users' Association. Rick's presentation concerned the history of the Orland Project and how it affects water levels at East Park. Below are highlights of Rick's talk.

The Secretary of Interior authorized the Orland Project in 1907, and it includes water storage facilities at East Park and Stony Gorge reservoirs and a distribution system servicing approximately 21,000 acres of irrigable land surrounding Orland in Glenn County. On October 1, 1954, the Orland Unit Water Users' Association (OUWUA) assumed operation and maintenance of the Orland Project under terms of a contract with the federal government. The OUWUA is made up of approximately 1,100 to 1,200 shareholders; the average shareholder is a landowner with relatively small holdings. Water from Stony Creek, with additional tributaries, is used for storage and released for irrigation.

Water Storage

The system of Stony Creek water storage and release for irrigation and flood control is interrelated among three reservoirs, East Park, Stony Gorge Reservoirs (for irrigation) and Black Butte (for irrigation and flood control). Black Butte Lake is not part of the Orland Project as it was authorized under separate legislation for the purpose of flood control. Black Butte is managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE) and additionally stores Central Valley Project (CVP) water for Reclamation.

During the irrigation season, OUWUA provides daily water release orders to the COE for release of Black Butter water. OUWUA's use of Black Butte water is by exchange agreement with Reclamation, whereby water in Black Butte is exchanged with water in East Park and Stony Gorge reservoirs. This exchange agreement enables Black Butte water to be used first, for repayment later in the season, delaying the release of water in East Park and Stony Gorge. When there is a need for Reclamation to deliver water to its water users later in the season, the OUWUA releases this exchanged water in East Park and Stony Gorge.

Besides pasture, the principal crops benefiting from OUWUA irrigation water are wheat, alfalfa, hay, sorghum, olives, nuts, and citrus fruits.

In 1991, the project irrigated 19,160 acres, which produced $9.7 million in crops.

Map shows locations of Black Butte, Stony Gorge, and East Park reservoirs.

Changing Water Levels

Each fall Reclamation evacuates water from Black Butte Reservoir to make room for flood control. Once in the flood control season, the Corps of Engineers manages Black Butte according to a flood control diagram curve. In the spring of each year, this diagram curve allows rainwater stored for irrigation to be impounded. In the spring of 2002, there was low rainfall, and storage in Black Butte was below normal.

There were several reasons why East Park Reservoir water levels were so low this year. One, is the low water storage in Black Butte, which prevented the exchange agreement to be used to its fullest. OUWUA did not have enough available water to exchange from Black Butte, so East Park and Stony Gorge waters had to be used earlier in the season than normal. Due to the dry conditions, demand for water also came earlier from the water users.

In addition to this increased demand for Orland Project water, this year Reclamation needed to provide the Tehama-Colusa Canal Authority with a significant amount of water from Black Butte, further decreasing the amount of available water to exchange. Black Butte Lake has minimum pool requirements, as do all the reservoirs. These minimum pool requirements limit the ability of Reclamation to make water allowances for Orland water users. Reclamation and the OUWUA needed to start releasing water from East Park to Stony Gorge and Black Butte early in the 2002 season, but ceased releases during the third week of June. Now that the 4th of July holiday is over, releases should begin again.

Reservoir Repairs

In addition to the low rainfall season and increased demand for irrigation water, OUWUA plans to repair the gates on East Park Dam, which in the past have been affected by problems with sedimentation. Increased sedimentation reduces the effectiveness of the gates. OUWUA must lower water levels in order to safely repair the gates. OUWUA is sensitive to Reclamation's desire to meet recreational needs and has waited beyond the July 4th holiday to lower water levels. OUWUA will bring the lake level down to just below 8,900 acre-feet to expose and repair the gates. The minimum pool requirement for East Park Reservoir is 5,000 feet.

The Minutes Corner

The following goals and objectives were discussed at the last work group meeting. These are the last of the goals and objectives developed for the East Park RMP and will be presented at the open house on August 15, 2002.

RMP Goals and Objectives Discussion

Category C: Natural Resources

3. Management Measure: Tule Management

Issue: Tule overgrowth is associated with increased sedimentation in the East Park Reservoir and deterioration of tricolored blackbird habitat (this species prefers new growth of cattails and the decadent tules inhibit new growth). Sedimentation under the bridge at Indian Creek Road contributes to a reduction in water reaching the reservoir. Tules help trap the sediment in the river channel and the sediment supports tule establishment and growth.

Goal 3-1: Develop and implement a burn plan

Objective: Work with Orland Unit Water Users Association to create and implement a burn plan.

Discussion: This would be a good year for a controlled burn, due to the low water levels. Burning should be conducted at least once every three years.

Goal 3-2: Implement a program for managing current and future sedimentation in Indian Creek

4. Management Measure C-4: Wetlands

Issue: As the nation's wetlands are continually threatened, it is important to maintain and enhance any wetlands. Tricolored blackbirds, a state species of special concern, depend on the wetlands for breeding. Local homeowners have thought that the wetlands areas at the inlets cause some flooding, as the sedimentation and decaying vegetation causes a water backlog.

Goal 4-1: Develop a wetlands management plan

Objectives:

- Develop a team to address wetland management issues and
- Work with groups such as the CCRCD, The California Department of Fish and Game, and the Colusa County Agricultural Commissioner to develop a wetlands management plan.

Goal 4-2: Review existing wetlands information and update it as needed

Objective: Coordinate with the US Army Corps of Engineers to delineate wetlands.

Goal 4-3: Protect and enhance important vegetation and fish and wildlife habitat values

Objectives:

- Develop a program to control noxious weeds and to promote the controlled growth of native species;
- Implement a marsh burn program to control the decaying bulrush and cattails; and
- Implement a program to educate the public on the importance of wetlands in general and especially to our native tricolored blackbirds and other marsh-dependent species.

Local resources are available with knowledge base (CCRCD is interested in wetland restoration).

5. Management Measure or Opportunity: Sensitive Species and Their Critical Habitats

Issue: The threatened and endangered species that have been known to occur in the area include the bald eagle, Colusa layia (considered rare by the California Native Plant Society), and the adobe lily. There is no program in place to protect these species.

Goal 5-1. Conduct a survey to identify the location of state- and federally listed species and avoid impacts to them.

Objectives:

- In all actions, promote a balanced habitat conservation and enhancement program;
- Comply with legal responsibilities for recovery and maintenance of listed threatened and endangered species;
- Conduct surveys for listed species before constructing any improvements in an area; and
- Consult with US Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

Discussion. Glen Holsten, of the California Native Plant Society, submitted a list of rare plants located in the East Park quads. Attendees discussed the possibility of partnering with college students to conduct surveys. Potential schools include Chico State University, the University of California Davis, and Humboldt State University. Surveys should be done before the recreation plan is prepared.

The next work group meeting is scheduled for sometime in September, following the open house.

What's Next?

The public open house is on August 15, 2002, and the work group will meet on September 26th to begin developing alternatives for the RMP/EA. Some of the information used during this next phase of work group sessions will likely come from comments received at the open house. Discussion and development of alternatives is a requirement under NEPA and will help ensure that all feasible management measures are explored during the East Park RMP/EA process.