

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

RECORD OF DECISION

Lake Casitas Resource Management Plan

ROD 10-111

Recommended by:

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Date: 3/29/2011

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ACTING FOR



Introduction

Lake Casitas is part of the 1956 Ventura River Project and is located approximately 78 miles northwest of the City of Los Angeles and 13 miles north of the City of Ventura, near the intersection of State Route (SR) 33 and SR 150. The Casitas Dam that led to the formation of Lake Casitas was completed in 1958 and holds water from the Ventura River and Coyote Creek. Lake Casitas provides water storage for the delivery of irrigation, municipal, and industrial water supplies, as well as recreation opportunities and fish and wildlife habitat.

The Lake Casitas Resource Management Plan (RMP) addresses resource management alternatives for the Plan Area as appropriate for water quality, recreation, natural resource and cultural resource management opportunities. The Plan Area encompasses approximately 7,400 acres, including Lake Casitas (2,700 acres), Park lands around the lake (1,200 acres), and Open Space lands located to the north of the Park (3,500 acres). All recreational uses and improvements at the lake must be consistent with the original purpose of the Reclamation project and should not interfere with lake operations, which are focused on providing for Ventura River Project water storage, and delivery of a reliable annual yield of high-quality water. The guidance provided in the RMP will help Lake Casitas managers fulfill 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." The RMP will also provide the framework for establishing new management agreement(s) with managing partner(s). As such, there is no site specific analysis associated with any of the alternatives. The associated Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) describes only the magnitude and direction of impacts associated with the alternatives addressed in the EIS.

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents Reclamation's decision to follow a specific direction for resource management provided in the alternative selected for the Lake Casitas Recreation Area (Park) and the Open Space lands north of the Park. This ROD has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA] (40 CFR 1508.27) and the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA implementing regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508). The decision made herein is based on the information and analysis contained within the Final EIS (FEIS) for the *Lake Casitas Resource Management Plan*, which is incorporated by reference and was published on April 26, 2010. Reclamation has considered all comments received on the Proposed Action in developing this ROD.

Decision

Reclamation's decision is to implement Alternative 2 as described in the FEIS. Implementing this alternative would allow some enhancement of current recreational uses and public access while protecting water quality, natural resources and cultural resources. Several actions contained in this alternative will depend on site specific environmental analysis as described within the Environmental Commitments.

Alternatives Considered in the Final EIS

Three management alternatives were developed to address the major planning issues. Each alternative provided direction for resource programs based on the development of specific goals and management actions. Each alternative described specific issues influencing land management and each emphasized a different combination of resource uses, allocations, and restoration measures to address issues and resolve conflicts among users. None of the alternatives includes site specific actions, and the analysis is representative of the kinds of impacts expected to occur.

Alternative 1 (No Action)

For the No Action Alternative, the current resource and recreation management direction and practices at Lake Casitas would continue unchanged. The description of the No Action Alternative on FEIS pages 2-13 and 2-14 reflects the current management direction and level of management intensity for the Plan Area. The activities described are existing and ongoing, and represent the expected future condition if the RMP were not implemented. None of the physical actions that are expected to occur have been analyzed previously; rather, the current direction was used for comparative purposes. Alternative 1, No Action, provides the benchmark for making comparisons in the EIS among possible future changes under Alternatives 2 and 3.

Alternative 2 (Enhancement)

Alternative 2 emphasizes expansion of current recreational uses and public access at Lake Casitas, while protecting water quality, natural resources and cultural resources with new or modified land and recreation management practices. Management actions include upgrades and improvements for many of the Park's existing facilities and utilities, and would be implemented depending on funding and public demand. Examples include building connectors to the Los Padres National Forest and Ojai Conservancy trail heads in the Open Space Lands and expanding boating support by increasing the marina and boat ramp capacity. Other infrastructure improvements that would be allowed depending on funding and public demand includes expanding the water park, building an amphitheater, and modifying some campsites to be compatible with multiple uses. Park infrastructure improvements are also included in Alternative 2. These include road repairs, relocating and screening the storage area, and improving the Park entrance.

Alternative 3 (Recreation Expansion)

Alternative 3 would expand recreational uses and public access to meet potential increases in market demand, while protecting water quality, natural resources and cultural resources with new or modified land and recreation management practices. This alternative was included to demonstrate a scenario in which recreational uses at Lake Casitas are substantially expanded while meeting the RMP goals related to protection of resources to the extent feasible. Alternative 3 includes all of the management actions in Alternative 2 with a key addition that would allow

body contact water sports including water-skiing and swim beaches. In addition, the majority of campsites would be modified for multiple uses, day use would be allowed on the Main Island, and equestrian use would be permitted in the Open Space Lands.

Basis of Decision, Issues Evaluated, and Factors Considered

Reclamation evaluated the effects of the proposed alternatives on aesthetics/visual resources, agricultural resources, air quality/global climate change, biological resources, cultural resources, environmental justice, geology, soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, Indian Trust Assets, Indian Sacred Sites, land use, mineral resources, noise, public services, recreation, socioeconomics, transportation/circulation, utilities/service systems and cumulative impacts. This analysis was programmatic in nature as no site specific analysis was conducted. Further site specific analysis will be required to implement the preferred alternative.

There will be no impacts to Indian Trust Assets as there are none in the Proposed Action area. The nearest Indian Trust Asset is a Public Domain Allotment approximately 39 miles to the west-northwest of the Plan Area.

The No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) would continue the management actions identified in FEIS Sections 2.5 and 2.6 on a project by project basis with no overall coordinated direction, and no recreation facility enhancements would take place. Alternative 1 does not increase recreational opportunities that many user groups would like to have, as voiced at the public meetings for this RMP (see the Public Scoping Report [Reclamation 2007]) and summarized in the FEIS. The No Action Alternative would not provide additional measures for future protection of water, biological, and recreational resources because of the lack of management plans for boating, vegetation/fire management, and trails.

Alternative 3 provides more infrastructure and service support to accommodate the projected recreation demand, but the density of boat usage and users allowed in natural areas could compromise the quality of experience for many recreationists. Recreationists seeking tranquil and serene setting would have limited opportunities under this alternative. Natural resources would be more impacted than with Alternative 2 and water quality impacts could result from body contact in the Lake.

Reclamation has selected Alternative 2, based on interdisciplinary team recommendations, environmental analysis of the alternatives, and public input. Alternative 2 provides the most reasonable and practical approach to managing the Plan Area, while addressing the relevant issues and purpose and need. Alternative 2 places more emphasis on resource protection and limits some recreation opportunities compared to Alternative 3. Alternative 2 would minimize potential effects to water quality, vegetation, special-status species, visual resources, and land use compared with Alternative 3, and would include specific management plans. Alternative 2 balances project lands management, and emphasizes a level of protection, enhancement, and use of the resources into the future.

The elements of the Lake Casitas Resource Management Plan Preferred Alternative (Alternative 2) are detailed below.

Physical Resources

- Protect water quality by implementing a Stormwater Management Plan, preventing containment release into Lake Casitas, updating minimum basic facilities to be in compliance with ADA, security and law enforcement and ensuring sanitary waste management facilities;
- Manage recreation facilities to protect visual and aesthetic resources.

Natural Resources

- Protect native and unique plant communities and fish and wildlife habitat and eradicate weeds for long-term sustainability and viability;
- Develop and implement specific management plans, including Vegetation Management Plan and Habitat Restoration Program, Boating Management Plan, Fire Management Plan, and Trail Management Plan.
- Set up educational displays, interpretive signs and programs around the Park to emphasize water quality and the natural resource environment.

Lands, Transportation, and Access

- Allow limited access (day use hiking and biking on designated trails) in Open Space Lands;
- Improve roads, restroom remodeling, and RV storage location; and
- Improve Park entrance access.

Cultural and Social Resources

- Continue and improve public education concerning sensitive cultural resources in the Plan Area.

Recreation

- Provide marina and boating support by expanding marina and boat ramp capacity as well as expanding the interpretive boat program with additional natural, cultural and/or historic resource themes;
- Phase out of non-compliant marine outboard engines;
- Expand the water park, relocate the storage area, build a new amphitheater and parking area within or near the existing special event area;
- Add landscape screening of parking and storage areas and modify some campsites to be compatible with multiple uses (e.g., RVs, yurts, tents);
- Develop a Park trail system management plan to monitor usage;
- Improve the bike path within the Park and realign it to expand the path south from the Santa Ana Boat Ramp area to connect to the Lake Shore Trail;

- Allow limited day-use and an outdoor environmental education facility on the Main Island;
- Expand the floating restroom facilities on the lake;
- Explore and support, where appropriate, concessionaire agreements with private enterprises and managing partner agreements with public agencies;
- Continue to operate, manage, update, and modernize campgrounds and day-use facilities; and
- Designate Water Recreation Opportunity Spectrum zones to encourage environmental protection and facilitate use of the lake.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

Alternative 2 is identified as the environmentally preferable alternative because it places more emphasis on resource protection and limits some recreation opportunities compared to Alternatives 1 and 3. Fewer recreational facilities would be added with Alternative 2 than with Alternative 3. Additionally, as compared with Alternative 1, Alternative 2 would minimize potential effects to water quality, vegetation, special-status species, visual resources, and land use because it would include preparation of specific management plans whereas the current management practice does not.

Implementing the Decision and Environmental Commitments

Reclamation will enter into a management agreement with the Casitas Municipal Water District, which will provide for the implementation of the RMP/EIS and ROD. Reclamation will require site specific environmental analysis and appropriate mitigation for all proposed actions under Alternative 2. Reclamation will serve as project lead for implementation of laws to protect water quality, natural resources and cultural resources including but not limited to the:

- National Environmental Policy Act
- Endangered Species Act
- National Historic Preservation Act
- Archaeological Resources Protection Act
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

Comments on the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Final Environmental Impact Report

Reclamation's Notice of Availability of the FEIS was published on April 16, 2010, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Notice of Availability was published on April 26, 2010. Copies of the FEIS were distributed to those who requested a copy. A press release was issued on April 14, 2010, and sent to the recipients on the Lake Casitas RMP/EIS mailing list. The FEIS was also made available on the Lake Casitas RMP/EIS website at http://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa_projdetails.cfm?Project_ID=792. Three comment letters on the FEIS were submitted during the 30-day waiting period after issuance of the Notice of Availability. The substantive issues raised in the comment letters and Reclamation's responses are summarized as follows.

Pat Baggerly, Environmental Coalition, May 14, 2010

1. The comment suggests Reclamation consider greenhouse gas (GHG) impacts significant and discuss actions to adapt to future climate change. **Response:** As stated in Section 4.2.3.4, as individual projects under the RMP are proposed, greenhouse gas emissions can be evaluated against sector-specific significance thresholds that will be forthcoming from the California Air Resources Board. Potential actions to reduce GHG emissions from vehicles, boats, and future projects implemented under the RMP are described on pages E-21 and E-22 of the FEIS.
2. The commenter requests that the DEIS be reissued as a revised draft so that additions and corrections can be reviewed and written comments addressed in the FEIS. The comment also points out that the same request was made at the end of the Environmental Coalition letter on page E-59 of the FEIS and was not addressed. **Response:** All comments received on the DEIS have been responded to and are available for public review in Appendix E of the FEIS. The responses in Appendix E indicate the locations where the DEIS text was revised. The DEIS will not be re-circulated.

The comment letter shown on page E-59 of the FEIS contains an incorrect bracket location; the response to Comment R-3-6 should have corresponded to item 6 of the letter. The comment bracketed as R-3-6 generally refers to previous substantive comments that were addressed in detail in the responses to Comments R-3-1 through R-3-5. No further response is necessary.

3. The comment indicates that a July 3, 2006, comment letter from the Environmental Coalition was not addressed or included in the text of the FEIS or in Appendix E, Responses to Comments on the Casitas RMP/EIS. **Response:** The letter is not included in Appendix E because the letter relates to public scoping and is not a comment on the DEIS. This and all other letters received during the scoping period were considered in the development of the Draft RMP/EIS.
4. The commenter asks if public comments on the FEIS could be submitted and considered through May 25, 2010, because the EPA's Federal Register notice stated its review of the

FEIS would end on that date. **Response:** May 24, 2010, was the end of the waiting period for issuance of the ROD, as stated in the EPA's Federal Register notice (75 Federal Register 79: 21625-21626; ER-FRL-8989-9) and the Lake Casitas RMP/EIS website (http://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa_projdetails.cfm?Project_ID=792). All public comments received on the FEIS through May 26, 2010, are addressed in this ROD.

Richard Handley, Casitas Municipal Water District, May 21, 2010

1. The comment requests that Reclamation reconsider the need for a new management agreement for recreation in addition to Casitas Municipal Water District's repayment contract (No. 14-06-200-5257). The comment also requests that Reclamation consider establishing a set of guidelines and practices for management under the RMP. **Response:** The management agreement is a requirement of the authorizing legislation for the Ventura River Project (Public Law 84-423, March 1, 1956, 70 Stat. 32) and the Federal Water Project Recreation Act (Public Law 89-72, 89th Congress, S.1229, July 9, 1965, 79 Stat. 213, 214; as amended by Public Law 93-251, March 7, 1974, 88 Stat. 33, Sec. 77 and Public Law 102-575, October 30, 1992, 106 Stat. 4690, Title XXVIII). The proposed management agreement is needed to provide the guidelines and practices requested in the comment.
2. The comment notes that the RMP contains vague references to relocation of the fire station and other firefighting activities, such as in Sections 2.4.3.3 and 4.9.5. **Response:** The fire station will not be relocated because that action is not included in the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 2). As stated in Section 2.5.3, the location of the fire incident command center and support activity site will depend on the complexity of the emergency. If low complexity, the location will be adjacent to the existing fire station; if high complexity, the temporary location would be in the central Open Space Lands. Once the incident is over, the fire incident command center and support activity site will be restored to its natural state. Fire hand-crew training locations will vary depending on conditions.
3. The comment states that the text of Section 3.8.3.5 has not been revised to reflect consideration of water quality impacts and mitigation/monitoring requirements for prescribed burns, as indicated on page E-48 of the FEIS. **Response:** The reference to Section 3.8.3.5 on page E-48 is a typographical error. The requested material is included in Mitigation Measure SG-2 in Section 4.3.7, which states that the following would be incorporated into the fire management plan:
 - Create a Prescribed Burn Plan for each proposed prescribed burn.
 - Ensure that fuel management, fire suppression, and fire response are consistent with Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, and with the RMP water quality and natural resource objectives.
 - Seek partnerships with adjacent private landowners on fuel management, including the use of prescribed burns. Ensure that prescribed burns on adjacent private lands do not adversely affect water quality and sediment conditions in Lake Casitas through such coordination and partnerships.

- Coordinate with the Los Padres National Forest on the planning of prescribed burns and other watershed management actions related to fuel and fire management in the Forest, and ensure that Forest actions do not have adverse effects on water quality and sedimentation at Lake Casitas.
 - Review all proposed for prescribed burns within the Park will be reviewed to ensure that water quality is protected.
 - The provisions in Mitigation Measure SG-2 address the concerns expressed in the comment.
4. The comment recommends changing Section 4.9.3 (“Under all alternatives, all applicable federal, state, and local regulations would be followed”) to indicate that federal regulations preempt state and local regulations on federal land. **Response:** The text will remain as it stands. Reclamation observes state and local regulations on federal lands to the greatest extent possible.
 5. The comment requests confirmation that a “no impact” determination in Tables S-1 and 4.12-1 indicates that the action has been omitted from the alternative. **Response:** The tables refer to impacts, not actions. An alternative may include an action that results in no impact, either with or without mitigation.

Kathleen M. Goforth, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, May 25, 2010

The comment requests a firm commitment in the ROD to project-specific NEPA analyses. **Response:** This ROD makes clear the intention to prepare site specific analysis for actions required to implement Alternative 2.