

RECLAMATION

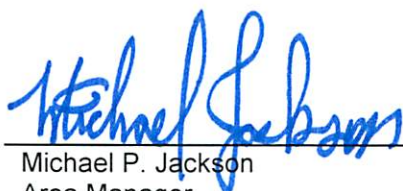
Managing Water in the West

RECORD OF DECISION

San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area Resource Management Plan/ General Plan

ROD 11-048

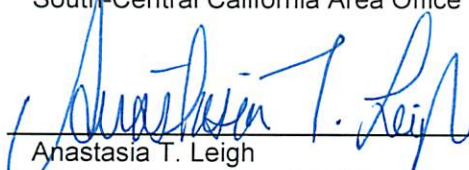
Recommended by:



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Date: 2/28/2014

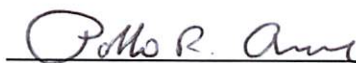
Concurred by:



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Date: 3 4/4/14



Introduction

The San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area (Plan Area), located in Merced County, California, was built as part of the water storage and delivery system of reservoirs, aqueducts, power plants, and pumping stations operated under the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) Central Valley Project and California State Water Project. The 27,000-acre Plan Area includes the water surfaces of San Luis Reservoir, O'Neill Forebay, Los Banos Creek Reservoir, and adjacent recreation lands. San Luis Reservoir was completed in 1967 to store and regulate water pumped from the Sacramento–San Joaquin River Delta for use in the San Joaquin Valley and southern California. Los Banos Creek Reservoir was completed in 1965 to prevent storm runoff from flooding the California Aqueduct and the Delta-Mendota Canal. Through a management agreement with Reclamation, California State Parks has the responsibility to plan, design, construct, maintain, and operate the recreation areas.

The Resource Management Plan and General Plan (RMP/GP) addresses resource management alternatives for the Plan Area as appropriate for water quality and for natural, cultural, and recreational resource management opportunities. All recreational uses and improvements in the Plan Area must be consistent with the purpose of the water storage and distribution and power generation. The guidance provided in the RMP/GP will help Plan Area 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/GP will also provide the framework for establishing a new management agreement between Reclamation and California State Parks.

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents Reclamation's decision to follow a specific direction for resource management provided in the alternative selected for the Plan Area. This ROD has been prepared to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA] (42 U.S.C. § 4321-4347), as amended, and in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality's (40 CFR 1500-1508) and Department of the Interior's (43 CFR Part 46) NEPA implementing regulations. The decision made herein is based on the information and analysis contained within the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (FEIS/R) for the *San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area Final Resource Management Plan/General Plan*, which is incorporated by reference and was published in June 2013. The FEIS/R for the RMP/GP describes only the magnitude and direction of impacts associated with each alternative, and does not include site-specific analysis. The FEIS/R is programmatic in nature and further site-specific analysis, which will tier from the FEIS/R, will be completed for projects as they are identified and the project description and impacts are ripe for analysis. Reclamation has considered all comments received on the Proposed Action in developing this ROD.

Decision

Reclamation's decision is to implement Alternative 3, the Preferred Alternative, as described in the FEIS/R. This alternative was found to meet Reclamation's statutory mission and responsibilities, giving consideration to economic, environmental, technical, and other factors.

Implementing this alternative would allow for enhancement of current recreational uses and public access while protecting water quality, natural resources, and cultural resources.

Alternatives Considered in the FEIS/R

Four management alternatives were developed to address the major planning objectives. Each alternative provides direction for resource protection based on the development of specific goals and management actions. Each alternative describes specific issues influencing water and land management and each emphasizes a different combination of resource uses, allocations, and restoration measures to address issues. 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)

Alternative 1, the No Action Alternative, would continue the existing management direction set by previous planning documents as well as ongoing programs initiated under existing legislation and regulations. Alternative 1 is intended to reflect current and expected future conditions in the Plan Area if Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 are not chosen to be implemented. The No Action Alternative provides the benchmark for making comparisons in the FEIS/R among possible future changes under Alternatives 2, 3, and 4.

Under Alternative 1, there would be no timed phaseout of nonconformant two-stroke engines. Nonconformant two-stroke engines use a mix of gasoline and oil, which enters the combustion chamber at the same time that exhaust leaves the chamber.

Existing visitor facilities (including entrance stations, boat launches, parking lots, restrooms, camping areas, gathering areas, shade ramadas, picnic areas, and trails) would remain the same. The boat launch at Medeiros Use Area would remain closed.

Alternative 2 (Limited New Access and Development)

Alternative 2 would include the fewest physical additions and visitor use modifications among the action alternatives. Changes and additions to visitor facilities include adding or reconfiguring campsites at Basalt, San Luis Creek, and Los Banos Creek use areas; relocating the equestrian camp at Los Banos Creek Use Area; and providing a new boarding float, accessible fishing pier, and multipurpose building at San Luis Creek Use Area. At Medeiros Use Area, Alternative 2 would allow for consideration of enhancements to reopen or relocate the boat launch.

The RMP/GP defines water management zones (which do not relate to water supply or operations) and land management zones to focus Plan Area recreation in environmentally and logistically suitable locations. The zones are described in detail in FEIS/R Section 4.3. Water management zones and target boat densities would remain the same as with Alternative 1, and except for a small area of additional Frontcountry Zone in Los Banos Creek Use Area, land management zones would also remain the same. The expansion of the Frontcountry Zone would slightly increase visitor access within the Plan Area compared with Alternative 1, but unlike Alternatives 3 and 4, no trails or facilities outside of existing use areas are proposed.

Under Alternative 2, the use of nonconformant two-stroke engines would be phased out within a three-year period, with enforcement measures to be defined in a boating management plan. Alternative 2 also includes the development and implementation of focused management plans for trails, cultural resources, and vegetation, which are described in detail in FEIS/R Section 4.4.2.

Alternative 3 (Moderate New Access and Development)

Alternative 3 balances the need for future visitor facilities with resource management. This alternative anticipates increased future visitation by providing for physical additions and visitor use modifications but concentrates them in and around existing developed areas.

Changes and additions to visitor facilities with Alternative 3 are generally the same as Alternative 2; however, camping and day use facilities in each designated use area would accommodate a greater number of visitors. In addition, Alternative 3 would provide new overnight lodging options in the form of cabins or yurts at Basalt and San Luis Creek use areas, primitive campsites at the Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Use Area, and developed campsites on the south shore of Los Banos Creek Use Area. Alternative 3 would allow for developing a multi-use trail from Basalt Use Area to Pacheco State Park, with a backpacker's campground along the way, as well as a trail from Dinosaur Point to Pacheco State Park.

Water-based management zones would change in some locations but target boat densities would remain in the same range as with Alternatives 1 and 2. The Frontcountry land management zones would be expanded to encompass all of Medeiros Use Area and additional land along the north and south entry roads of Los Banos Creek Use Area. The management zone changes would allow for a greater number of visitors and slightly higher intensity of visitor use during the 25-year planning horizon. The expansion of Frontcountry Zones and addition of trails outside of existing use areas would increase visitor access throughout the Plan Area compared with Alternatives 1 and 2.

As with Alternative 2, Alternative 3 would phase out the use of nonconformant two-stroke engines within a three-year period and would include focused management plans for boating, trails, cultural resources, and vegetation.

Alternative 4 (Maximum New Access and Development)

Alternative 4 would provide for the most physical additions and visitor use modifications and the greatest intensity of use among the action alternatives. Some of the proposed additions and uses are in currently undeveloped areas.

With Alternative 4, camping and day use facilities in each designated use area would accommodate the greatest number of visitors of all of the action alternatives. Alternative 4 would also provide for a higher level of development at each use area, including the addition of marinas at Dinosaur Point and San Luis Creek use areas, amphitheaters at Basalt and San Luis Creek use areas, and a restaurant and motel at Medeiros Use Area. At the OHV Use Area, modifications would be made to allow for more intensive activity, such as by constructing a professional motocross track. This alternative would add camping and day use facilities in several areas where none currently exist, such as at Quien Sabe Point, Golden Eye, Harper Lane, and Coyote

Springs in the San Luis South area; Whistler Point and Honker Bay near Dinosaur Point; and La Plata and Padre Arroyo Flat in the Los Banos Creek Use Area. In addition, Alternative 4 would allow for visitor access to Basalt Quarry, which would remain closed under all other alternatives, as well as a new trail that would traverse both federal and private lands to connect Basalt and Los Banos Creek use areas.

Water-based management zones would change in most locations and allow for higher boat densities than with the other alternatives. The land management zones would be the same as proposed for Alternative 3. The management zone changes would allow for the greatest number of visitors and highest intensity of visitor use of all of the action alternatives. The addition of camping, day use facilities, and trails outside of existing use areas would allow for the greatest increase in visitor access throughout the Plan Area compared with the other alternatives.

As with Alternatives 2 and 3, Alternative 4 would phase out the use of nonconformant two-stroke engines within a three-year period and would include focused management plans for boating, trails, cultural resources, and vegetation.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The Environmentally Preferable Alternative is the alternative that will best promote NEPA's Section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources (CEQ – NEPA's Forty Most Asked Questions). As further expressed in Section 101, the Environmentally Preferable Alternative may also attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequence, while achieving a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities (42 CFR § 4331).

Alternative 3 is identified as the Environmentally Preferable Alternative. Alternative 3 would provide more resource protection than Alternative 1 through the implementation of focused management plans; would better accommodate future Plan Area visitation than Alternatives 1 and 2 through provision of more physical additions and visitor uses; and would provide better resource protection than Alternative 4 by focusing those additions and visitor uses in and around existing developed areas rather than in currently undeveloped areas.

Basis of Decision, Issues Evaluated, and Factors Considered

Reclamation evaluated the direct and indirect effects of the proposed alternatives on land use, including Indian Trust Assets and Indian Sacred Sites; climate and climate change; topography, geology, and soils; hydrology, floodplain and water quality; air quality; biological resources; cultural resources; scenic and aesthetic resources; recreation; circulation; utilities and emergency services; socioeconomics; and environmental justice. Additionally, Reclamation assessed the cumulative impacts of this and other projects on hydrology, floodplain, and water quality; air quality; biological resources; scenic and aesthetic resources; recreation; and circulation. This

analysis was programmatic as no site-specific analysis was conducted. Further site-specific analysis will be required to implement the alternative chosen.

There will be no impacts to Indian Trust Assets as there are none in the Plan Area. The nearest Indian Trust Asset is the Chicken Ranch Rancheria, approximately 70 miles northeast of the Plan Area.

With Alternative 1 (No Action), the proposed Plan would not be implemented, and no Plan measures would be applied to Plan Area water and land management zones. None of the new facilities or activities identified in the action alternatives would be implemented. Over the course of the Plan horizon, regional population growth could result in demand being exceeded in more locations and more frequently than at present, and the likelihood of visitors being turned away or having lower-quality recreational experiences would be higher than with the other alternatives. The No Action Alternative would not provide additional measures for future protection of water, cultural, biological, and recreational resources.

Alternative 2 (Limited New Access and Development) emphasizes expansion of, or minor additions to, existing recreational facilities and activities. Management zones and actions under Alternative 2 would accommodate minimal additional future demand and visitor use but would not increase the variety of recreational experiences such as by providing new trails. The amount of facilities, services, and opportunities allowed under Alternative 2 may be perceived as insufficient by those seeking a more active and varied recreation experience, whereas the same amount may be considered optimum for those seeking a more passive or primitive experience. This alternative would provide measures for future protection of water, cultural, biological, and recreational resources through the timed phaseout of nonconformant two-stroke engines and focused management plans for boating, trails, cultural resources, and vegetation.

Alternative 3 (Moderate New Access and Development) proposes several physical additions and visitor use modifications to accommodate additional future demand and visitation and to increase the variety of recreational experiences. Alternative 3 is intended to increase recreational opportunities for a variety of user groups, ranging from active/varied experiences to passive/primitive experiences. Proposed facilities and activities would be sited and developed to avoid conflicts with the Plan Area's sensitive resources. This alternative would implement the same focused management plans and other resource management elements as Alternative 2.

Alternative 4 (Maximum New Access and Development) proposes intensive development of certain use areas as well as currently undeveloped areas in order to accommodate additional future demand/visitation and increase the variety of recreational experiences. This alternative would allow for a substantial expansion in recreational facilities, services, and opportunities, which would benefit those seeking a more active and varied recreation experience but could compromise recreational quality for those seeking a more passive or primitive experience. Facilities and activities proposed for Alternative 4 would have a higher potential to conflict with the Plan Area's sensitive resources than with the other alternatives. Alternative 4 would implement the same focused management plans and other resource management elements as Alternative 2.

Reclamation has selected Alternative 3, based on interdisciplinary team recommendations, environmental analysis of the alternatives, and public input. Alternative 3 provides the most reasonable and practical approach to managing the Plan Area, while addressing the relevant issues and the purpose and need. Alternative 3 would implement focused management plans not realized in the No Action Alternative. Alternative 3 limits some recreation opportunities compared to Alternative 4 and would minimize potential effects to water quality, air quality, wildlife, and circulation. Alternative 3 would allow for a greater variety of opportunities for visitors to experience Plan Area resources compared to Alternative 2. Alternative 3 balances project lands management and emphasizes a level of protection, enhancement, and use of Plan Area resources into the future.

Elements of Alternative 3 are summarized below:

Physical Resources

- Protect water quality through erosion control and soil stabilization best management practices;
- Install additional utility connections in areas of new or expanded development to allow for hookups or additional electrical demand;
- Add carbon-reducing features such as solar panels and energy-efficient lighting;
- Use clean diesel or electric technologies for construction to the extent feasible; and
- Design new facilities to support visual and aesthetic resources.

Natural Resources

- Balance expansion of visitor uses and facilities with natural resource protection by focusing activity and development in geographically appropriate areas;
- Develop and implement focused management plans for boating, trails, cultural resources, and vegetation;
- Continue measures to prevent infestation of Plan Area waters by invasive mussels;
- Perform an appropriate level of survey for wetland vegetation, special-status plants and animals and their habitats, and sensitive natural communities prior to actions that involve ground-disturbing activity; and
- Create additional interpretive programs to emphasize the Plan Area's human and natural history and the role of water and climate on the local and regional setting.

Transportation and Access

- Work with the California Department of Transportation and other appropriate agencies to improve circulation into and out of the Plan Area as well as signage outside of the Plan Area;
- Provide road and entry station improvements within the Plan Area; and

- Design and locate new facilities to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements where possible, and provide additional ADA visitor facilities such as a fishing pier at San Luis Creek Use Area.

Cultural and Social Resources

- Continue and improve public education concerning sensitive cultural resources in the Plan Area;
- Balance facilities expansion with cultural resource protection; and
- Perform an appropriate level of archaeological survey and comply with applicable cultural resource management regulations for actions that involve new ground-disturbing activity.

Recreation

- Continue to operate, manage, and update campgrounds and day use facilities;
- Phase out nonconformant two-stroke engines;
- Designate allowable boat densities to accommodate a variety of user groups and minimize conflicts among users;
- Develop new multi-use trails for hiking, cycling, and equestrian use from Basalt Use Area to Pacheco State Park and from Dinosaur Point to Pacheco State Park;
- Provide additions to camping and day use facilities at Basalt, Dinosaur Point, San Luis Creek, Medeiros, and Los Banos Creek use areas;
- Expand the boat launch at San Luis Creek Use Area and consider enhancements to allow reopening or relocating the boat launch at Medeiros Use Area;
- Provide a multipurpose building for group events and interpretive programs at San Luis Creek Use Area;
- Explore concession opportunities at San Luis Creek and Medeiros use areas;
- Allow for additions to existing facilities, provision of new primitive campsites, potential future expansion at the OHV Use Area; and
- Relocate equestrian camp at Los Banos Creek Use Area.

Implementing the Decision and Environmental Commitments

Reclamation will enter into a management agreement with California State Parks, which will provide for the implementation of Alternative 3 of the RMP/GP. Reclamation will require site-specific environmental analysis and appropriate mitigation for all proposed actions under Alternative 3. 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
- Clean Water Act
- Clean Air Act
- Endangered Species Act
- National Historic Preservation Act
- Archaeological Resources Protection Act
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

As stated previously, the FEIS/R is programmatic and describes the magnitude and direction of impacts associated with each alternative. As such, the description of proposed mitigation is programmatic. The goals and guidelines set forth in FEIS/R Section 4.2 would provide program-level avoidance and/or minimization for effects that may result from proposed management actions. Additional program-level mitigation measures are provided in FEIS/R Section 5.4. As additional area development plans or specific projects are proposed or developed, they will be subject to further environmental review. Project-specific mitigation measures may be implemented where necessary based on more specific project review.

Environmental commitments for Alternative 3, the Preferred Alternative, are summarized below.

- Continue the existing watercraft inspection program to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels. If funding does not allow for continuation of the existing program, implement a voluntary watercraft operator self-inspection program to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels, pursuant to California Fish and Game Code Section 2302. If needed, evaluate other control measures to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels.
- Develop focused management plans for boating, trails, cultural resources, and vegetation, and implement the plans within three to five years of Plan adoption, or sooner if funding is available.
- Implement a three-year phaseout of nonconformant two-stroke engines, with enforcement measures to be specified in the boating management plan.

Comments on the Final EIS/EIR

Reclamation's Notice of Availability of the FEIS/R was published on June 24, 2013, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Notice of Availability was published on July 5, 2013. Copies of the FEIS/R were distributed to those who requested a copy. A press release was issued on June 24, 2013, and sent to the recipients on the San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area RMP/GP mailing list. The FEIS/R was also made available on the San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area RMP/GP website at:

http://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa_projdetails.cfm?Project_ID=548.

On August 2, 2013, Reclamation received a letter from the EPA in accordance with their responsibilities under NEPA. In their letter, the EPA stated that their previous environmental concerns regarding potential impacts to air and water quality from visitor use, the analysis of cumulative water quality impacts, and Native American outreach that were raised in the course of their review of the Draft EIS were resolved through the additional information and responses to comments provided in the FEIS.