

# RECLAMATION

## *Managing Water in the West*

### **Carson River Floodplain Rehabilitation and Habitat Restoration Project**

#### **Finding of No Significant Impact**


FONSI No. LO-2014-1014

Prepared by:

  
Selena J. Weldon  
Natural Resources Specialist

Date: 11/18/15

Recommended by:

  
Caryn Hunt DeCarlo  
Desert Terminal Lakes Program Manager

Date: 11/18/15

Approved by:

  
Terri A. Edwards  
Area Manager

Date: 11/18/15



U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation  
Lahontan Basin Area Office  
705 North Plaza Street, Suite 320  
Carson City, Nevada 89701

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## **I. Background, Proposed Action, and Purpose and Need**

Vegetation composition within large reaches of the Middle Carson River floodplain in Lyon County, Nevada, is dominated by non-native, noxious, and invasive weeds. These weeds are having adverse impacts on riparian forests and desirable forb and grass species through displacement, and they can eventually convert entire landscapes to undesirable weed monocultures. Weed populations are also reducing river bank stability and increasing soil erosion and stream sedimentation, which adversely affect the river's water quality. Successful control of these weeds and replacing them with native and desirable vegetation is needed to restore the riverine ecosystem.

The Dayton Valley Conservation District (DVCD) plans to control noxious and invasive weeds and restore native and desirable vegetation on public and private lands (12 parcels, 451 acres total) within the floodplain of the Middle Carson River, Lyon County, Nevada. Funds for this habitat restoration project would be provided via a sub-grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF); the original grant funding source is the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) Desert Terminal Lakes (DTL) Program.

The DVCD, along with partners and cooperators, has implemented a series of projects on the Middle Carson River designed to restore floodplain riparian habitat. The Proposed Action would provide important follow up treatments for some parcels that were previously treated and initial treatments for other parcels.

Treatment priorities would be the non-native, noxious, and invasive weed species listed on the Nevada Department of Agriculture's Noxious Weed List. Treatments would consist of various combinations of mowing to remove decadent vegetation and stimulate weed growth (to enhance herbicide uptake), herbicide application to control weeds, and drill and broadcast seeding to establish native and desirable vegetation. Parcels would be inventoried and mapped for longer-term habitat monitoring. DVCD would obtain right-of-entry authorizations from willing private landowners.

## **II. Summary of Impacts**

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Reclamation's Lahontan Basin Area Office has evaluated the potential environmental consequences of allowing the use of federal grant funding by DVCD for the Proposed Action in an Environmental Assessment (EA). The results of the analysis are summarized in the following sections.

### **Proposed Action**

#### **Vegetation**

Under the Proposed Action infestations of multiple non-native, noxious, and invasive weeds within the treatment parcels (451 acres total) would be reduced or eliminated. The passive spread of these weeds to other lands would also be reduced. Native plants adjacent to herbicide spot treatments would naturally reseed the treated areas within 1–2 years. The drill-seeded parcels would be revegetated by native and desirable species in the applied seed mix within 1

year, given suitable weather conditions. Through seeding, native and desirable vegetation would increase in percent cover and gain a competitive advantage over the weeds. Conditions would gradually become more favorable for longer-term natural succession to native shrubs and trees in the riparian zone. No special status plants are present within the project area.

## **Wildlife**

Controlling weeds and planting native and desirable vegetation that can compete with weeds would benefit a variety of wildlife by restoring riparian habitat along the Middle Carson River. Over time, native wildlife may recolonize the treatment parcels from adjoining occupied habitats. Direct impacts to wildlife from the Proposed Action are possible if individuals are present within a treatment parcel. However, direct impacts are not expected to occur because most wildlife would move away from areas of disturbance, and wildlife use of noxious and invasive weeds is limited. Indirect effects to wildlife could include temporary displacement caused by disturbance from humans and equipment during spraying, mapping, and monitoring activities. All such disturbance would be temporary (lasting a few hours to a few days) and intermittent and is not likely to result in any long-term impacts to local individuals or regional populations. No federally-listed wildlife species would be affected because they are not known to occur in the project area.

## **Geology and Soils**

Under the Proposed Action, surface soil horizons in treatment parcels would likely be disturbed by mowing, drill/broadcast seeding, and boom spraying equipment. These agricultural areas have nearly level topography, so the potential for damaging gullying or scouring from heavy rain events after treatments is relatively low. Flooding along the Middle Carson River could impact the treatment parcels because they would have a higher risk of erosion until native and desirable plant cover is established in 1–2 years. Best management practices (BMPs), such as the use of vehicles and equipment with rubber tires (vs. tracks), would be implemented to limit soil damage and prevent acceleration of soil erosion beyond natural levels. Herbicide prescriptions for each parcel would be based on site-specific conditions. Herbicide label instructions and BMPs would also be strictly followed, so no adverse effects to soils from herbicide applications are likely to occur.

## **Water Resources**

The Proposed Action includes avoidance of herbicide applications in areas adjacent to the Carson River, wetlands, and irrigation ditches. DVCD would follow a spill prevention plan and have a spill containment kit in each vehicle in the unlikely event of a chemical spill. Herbicide label instructions and proposed BMPs would be strictly followed, so no adverse effects to water resources are likely to occur. The treatment parcels would eventually have a higher percentage cover of native and desirable vegetation that would have a long-term beneficial effect on the river's water quality.

## **Air Quality**

Under the Proposed Action there would be temporary, localized increases in fugitive dust (particulate matter) and engine emissions during mowing and drill seeding activities. Subsequent intermittent decreases in air quality may occur during windy periods until exposed soils are revegetated through seeding or natural vegetation succession (1–2 years). Dust and

engine emissions would be at low levels and are not anticipated to violate national or state air quality standards. For treatments closer to populated areas, DVCD would implement public outreach and provide recommendations to minimize any potential dust exposure (*e.g.*, keeping windows closed).

## **Noise**

Noise associated with the Proposed Action would originate from DVCD application crew communications and equipment used during mowing and drill seeding. Noise impacts would be temporary and intermittent. For treatments closer to populated areas, DVCD would implement public outreach and provide recommendations to minimize any potential noise exposure (*e.g.*, keeping windows closed).

## **Health and Safety**

Herbicides proposed for use are toxic to plants, but are essentially non-toxic to humans and other mammals, birds, insects, earthworms, and soil microorganisms. Herbicide labels, Material Safety Data Sheets, Safety Data Sheets, and BMPs would be strictly followed for all herbicide applications. The use of clean personal protective equipment, proper application equipment, careful herbicide handling, worker education, safety oversight, and site-specific measures (soils analysis, avoiding water, *etc.*) are expected to minimize the risk of any adverse effects to DVCD workers and the public. Posting signs at entry points for treated areas which are used by the public and making direct contacts with participating landowners would further reduce potential exposure of humans and domestic animals. Terrestrial and aquatic wildlife would not be exposed to toxic levels of herbicides except by accidental spills or possible direct ingestion of large amounts of vegetation recently sprayed with 2,4-D by individual terrestrial wildlife. These scenarios are unlikely given that a spill containment plan would be implemented, water would be avoided, and the target weeds are not desirable forage for wildlife.

## **Cultural Resources**

Through a cultural resources inventory, five isolated, non-significant prehistoric and historic artifacts were identified within the area of potential effect (APE) for the Proposed Action. Unevaluated National Historic Trails and historic ditches present within the 0.25-mile visual APE were treated as historic properties. Considering that the proposed treatment would restore the area to natural conditions while maintaining the agricultural appearance, the Proposed Action would have no adverse visual effect on nearby historic properties. Reclamation reached a finding of no historic properties affected for this undertaking, pursuant to 36 CFR §800.5(b). Reclamation initiated consultation with the Nevada State Preservation Office (SHPO) on September 29, 2015, and SHPO responded on November 10, 2015, concurring with Reclamation's determination of no adverse effect to historic properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.4(d)(1).

## **Indian Trust Assets and Indian Sacred Sites**

There are no Indian Trust Assets within or adjacent to the treatment parcels (512 DM 2). Therefore, there would be no impact to Indian Trust Assets from the Proposed Action. There are also no identified Indian Sacred Sites within or adjacent to the treatment parcels (Executive Order 13007 and 512 DM 3). Therefore, there would be no impacts that would adversely affect the physical integrity of Indian Sacred Sites or restrict access to or ceremonial use of such sites.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would have a positive long-term effect on Indian trust resources (fish, wildlife, and vegetation) because it would facilitate recovery of the natural vegetation and wildlife species diversity within the Middle Carson River floodplain. Accessibility to the river and riparian areas on public lands for tribal members would also improve when dense weed infestations are controlled or eliminated.

### **Environmental Justice**

The Proposed Action will not have disproportionately high and/or adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations (Executive Order 12898).

### **No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, Reclamation would not allow DVCD to use NFWF sub-grant funding to implement the Carson River Floodplain Rehabilitation and Habitat Restoration Project. The No Action Alternative would maintain existing vegetation conditions on the short term on both the private and public open space lands, unless other funding sources for weed treatments become available. In the foreseeable future, existing weed infestations would be expected to expand and increase in density both within and adjacent to these lands.

## **III. Cumulative Impacts**

There would be no known cumulative adverse effects to the human environment from the Proposed Action when combined with past actions and any known current or reasonably foreseeable future actions. Beneficial cumulative effects would be anticipated for native vegetation, wildlife, soils, water resources, and Indian trust resources through continuation/expansion of weed treatments and native and desirable vegetation seedings on 73 acres (Parcel 10 a, Rolling A Ranch Park/Lyon County Open Space property).

## **IV. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments**

The Proposed Action would not result in significant irreversible or irretrievable commitments of nonrenewable resources.

## **V. Consultation and Coordination**

Opportunities were provided for public scoping input, as well as public review and comment on the draft EA. A scoping letter and Proposed Action area map were distributed to 11 interested parties on November 7, 2014. Similar letters and maps were sent to the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe and Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California (Washoe Tribe) on November 7, 2014. On November 13, 2014, the Nevada State Clearinghouse sent an email regarding the Proposed Action to 70 stakeholder entities (Notice E2015-066).

On September 28, 2015, a notice of availability for the draft EA was mailed to local, State, and Federal agencies, and the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe, Washoe Tribe, and Reno-Sparks Indian Colony. The availability of the draft EA was announced in a news release dated September 30, 2015. The Nevada State Clearinghouse notified 83 stakeholder entities about the availability of

the draft EA via email on September 30, 2015 (Notice E2016-039). The draft EA was available online for review for 30 days at [www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa\\_projdetails.cfm?Project\\_ID=23109](http://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa_projdetails.cfm?Project_ID=23109), and hard copies were available at Reclamation's Lahontan Basin Area Office in Carson City, Nevada, and the Dayton Valley Branch Library in Dayton, Nevada. Responses from four entities were received during the scoping and public review periods:

- The Nevada State Land Use Planning Agency expressed support for the Proposed Action and its benefits to the Carson River.
- The National Trails Intermountain Region (NTIR) of the National Park Service noted that the California and Pony Express National Historic Trails run along the Carson River in the vicinity of the Proposed Action. NTIR supported restoring native vegetation, but requested that any trail remnants be protected from ground-disturbing activities.
- The Nevada Department of Wildlife supported the Proposed Action
- The Nevada SHPO affirmed that Section 106 consultation was concluded and concurred with Reclamation's determination of No Historic Properties Affected.

## **VI. Findings and Decision**

Reclamation's decision is to allow DVCD to use NFWF sub-grant funding to implement the Proposed Action. Based on the analysis of the environmental impacts in the attached EA and on thorough review of public comments received, Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action that will significantly impact the quality of the human environment or the natural resources of the area. A Finding of No Significant Impact is justified for the Proposed Action. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the Proposed Action.

The attached EA describes the existing environmental resources in the action area and evaluates the effects of the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative on those resources. The EA was prepared in accordance with NEPA (42 United States Code 4321-4347), Council of Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural requirements of NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and Department of the Interior NEPA regulations (43 CFR Part 46). The EA documents that compliance has occurred with the Endangered Species Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Indian Trust Assets, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Environmental Justice, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and NEPA.

Following are the reasons why the impacts of the Proposed Action are not significant:

1. Impacts to vegetation, wildlife, geology and soils, water resources, air quality, and noise, would be minor, localized, and temporary.
2. Impacts to health and safety would be unlikely to occur because the herbicides proposed for use are essentially non-toxic to humans and other mammals, birds, insects, and soil microorganisms; BMPs and public outreach measures would be implemented; and PPE would be used by applicators.

3. There will be no impact to listed, proposed, or candidate threatened or endangered species or critical habitat.
4. There will be no impact to historic properties.
5. There will be no impact to Indian Trust Assets.
6. There will be no impact to Indian Sacred Sites.
7. Implementing the Proposed Action will not disproportionately affect minorities or low-income populations and communities.