

Bureau of Reclamation

Mid-Pacific Region
Sacramento, California

Finding Of No Significant Impact

Upper Truckee River Restoration Project Middle Reaches 3 and 4

Recommended:

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FONSI No. 08-08-MP

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The Proposed Action is the restoration of reaches 3 and 4 of Upper Truckee River. The Bureau of Reclamation, the City of South Lake Tahoe, and the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) prepared the attached draft environmental assessment/Initial Study/TRPA Initial Environmental Checklist (EA/IS/TRPA IEC) in January 2008 and a final Environmental Assessment in April 2008. Reclamation prepared the attached supplemental environmental information document in May 2008 which is included as part of the final environmental assessment. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), the Mid-Pacific Regional Office of Reclamation has found that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

Background

In January of 2003, the Tahoe Resource Conservation District (TRCD) released an Environmental Assessment (EA), Feasibility Report, and Conceptual Plans for the Upper Truckee River Restoration Project now commonly referred to as the Upper Truckee River Restoration Project. The project study area encompassed six reaches which comprise the entire Middle Reach, extending from the Highway 50 bridge in the City of South Lake Tahoe to the Elks Club Bridge at Highway 50 in El Dorado County. The report evaluated four alternatives including no action, moderate enhancement plan, full enhancement plan, and complete restoration of the old river channel. Complete restoration of Middle Reaches 2, 3 and 4 (Airport Reach) was deemed not feasible because the existing private landowner wished to keep his property as a grazing meadow and it was anticipated that the Lake Tahoe Airport would remain indefinitely. Based on preliminary investigations, the selected plan included in the TRCD 2003 EA was a combination of the moderate and full enhancement plans. Since the release of the January 2003 report, the six reaches have been divided into three separate sections: 1) Reach 1 is private property, Reach 2 is a mix of private property and City of South Lake Tahoe owned property, 2) Reaches 3 and 4 are City property, and 3) Reaches 5 and 6 are California Tahoe Conservancy and U.S. Forest Service property.

This Proposed Action focuses on the portion of Reach 2 owned by the City and Reaches 3 and 4 or the Airport Reach. This area is adjacent to the Lake Tahoe Airport and cattle grazing property within private ownership. Funding is being provided for the Airport Reach project by Reclamation, the Tahoe Regional Development Program for planning funds, the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA) for construction funds and the California Tahoe Conservancy for planning and construction funding. The objectives of the Upper Truckee River Restoration Project for the Airport Reach are to improve natural function of the channel, increase overbank flow, and deposit sediment into the floodplain more frequently. Controlling the flow and gradient, protecting the stream banks and designing to allow the river to overtop its banks during peak periods will have many benefits. Benefits are reduced velocities, more frequent flooding of the meadow during high flows, improved riparian and meadow vegetation, higher groundwater, more productive fisheries, improved macroinvertebrate populations and terrestrial wildlife habitat, and a reduction in fine sediment transport during overbanking events.

Findings

Based on the analysis in the Upper Truckee River Restoration Project, Middle Reaches 3 and 4 EA/IS/TRPA IEC and the supplemental environmental information document, Reclamation found that there are no significant impacts. The reasons why the impacts of the Proposed Action, which are discussed in detail in the EA, are not significant are summarized as follows:

1. Scenic Quality - There will not be any significant aesthetic impacts. Scenic quality will improve because of enhanced riparian vegetation.
2. Agricultural Resources - There will not be any significant impacts to agricultural resources. Increased flooding frequency of the grazing area may benefit production of vegetation for grazing. The extent of the flooding area would not change as a result of the Proposed Action.
3. Air Quality - The Proposed Action will have no significant impacts to Air Quality. The EA analysis has shown that emissions produced as a result of the Proposed Action will be below applicable standards. However, per El Dorado AQMD Rule 223-1, the local government agency has established the Fugitive Dust Control Permit program, which requires the construction operator to submit a permit application for a fugitive dust control plan including the dust control measures as stipulated in El Dorado AQMD Rule 223-1 Table 1 and 2, such as spraying water, applying soil stabilizer, covering stockpiles, haul materials, etc. The permit application must be submitted and approved prior to the construction project. The details of the fugitive dust control measures can be found in Appendix F of the EA. All excess fill material will be disposed of onsite which helps to keep emissions below emission standards.
4. Aquatic Resources/Fisheries – The Proposed Action will not significantly affect aquatic resources. Fish rescue and relocation measures discussed in the EA will prevent fish mortality during construction of inchannel features and during river diversion. The project will benefit the fishery by improving aquatic habitat for salmonoid species and removing fish barriers that impede fish passage.
5. Wildlife Resources – The Proposed Action will not significantly affect wildlife resources. Special status species are not present within the project area; however, habitat exists for some special status species. Environmental commitments include requiring wildlife surveys prior to construction for Northern goshawk and willow flycatcher to verify that birds are not present. If birds are discovered in the project area, limited operating periods will be imposed. Additional environmental commitments include conducting bird surveys to determine if nesting birds are present where trees are proposed to be removed between April 1 and August 15. If nesting birds are present, then affected nest trees will not be cut until the nests are empty or after August 15. Additional environmental commitments and mitigations measures are identified in the EA. The project will benefit wildlife because increased wetland area and enhanced riparian area is expected upon project completion. The Proposed Action is expected to increase habitat for willow flycatcher.
6. Vegetation - The Proposed Action will not significantly affect vegetation resources. Special status species are not present within the project area. The project design includes revegetation

with riparian species within the newly created floodplain. During construction a temporary irrigation system will be constructed to help with riparian vegetation establishment. Additional environmental commitments and mitigation measures are listed in the EA. The project will benefit vegetation because increased wetland area and enhanced riparian area is expected upon project completion. The Proposed Action includes a provision in the project plans and specifications to remove identified noxious weeds from the project area. Existing beneficial species will be salvaged and replanted to the extent practicable.

7. Wetlands - The Proposed Action will not significantly adversely affect wetlands. The Proposed Action is for the purpose of river and stream environment zone restoration. After completion of the construction, wetland area could increase by 54 percent which will be a benefit to wetlands. Other delineated wetlands where construction is not proposed will be protected from disturbance during construction.

8. Cultural Resources - None of the identified cultural resources that lie within the area of potential effects are considered to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Reclamation consulted with the State Historic Preservation Officer regarding this conclusion and the finding that the proposed action will not affect any historic properties.

9. Geology and Soils - The Proposed Action will not significantly affect geology and soils. Bank stabilization measures are included in the Proposed Action along the Upper Truckee River. This is a benefit to soils and geology in the project area. The Proposed Action would increase the frequency of overbank flow that will help to reduce sediment loading downstream to Lake Tahoe. Clarity loss in Lake Tahoe is attributed to fine sediment and nutrient loading, thus a reduction in sediment loading will benefit Lake Tahoe. A Stormwater Pollution Prevent Plan is required to be approved by Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) prior to issuance of a permit for construction.

10. Public Safety and Hazards/Risk of Upset - The Proposed Action will not significantly affect public safety and hazards. A construction safety plan will be prepared that will address travel through runway safety areas at the airport. Existing South Tahoe Public Utility District (STPUD) sewer and water lines will be marked prior to construction to avoid grading conflicts with these facilities. The plans and specifications will require the contractor to conduct an Underground Service Alert notice prior to excavation. The Proposed Action includes construction of engineered bank protection along the airport fence that will protect the airport runway and STPUD lines from future river encroachment.

11. Hydrology and Water Quality - The Proposed Action will not significantly affect water quality. A six- foot high water-filled berm will be placed at key points, where the old and new channel meet and at the low water crossing, thereby protecting receiving waters and striving to prevent potential exceedances of water quality discharge standards stipulated in the Lahontan RWQCB permit. An internal drainage system will be constructed and maintained within the project site during all construction activities to contain any runoff within the project boundary and prevent it from exiting the site.

Grading activities are scheduled to occur during the months of August through October when the weather is usually dry. Localized pumping will be used to hydraulically contain turbid

groundwater or standing water as a result of excavation of saturated soil. If turbid water occurs, it will be treated to ensure discharge meets TRPA and Lahontan RWQCB standards. A preliminary dewatering plan has been developed and is discussed in the EA. A Stormwater Pollution Prevent Plan is required to be approved by Lahontan RWQCB prior to issuance of a permit for construction.

It is expected that water quality will improve as a result of the Proposed Action because river banks will be stabilized helping to reduce the amount of sediment and bank erosion entering the river. In addition, increased overbanking frequency will result in a reduction in sediment entering Lake Tahoe because it will have more opportunity to be deposited on the newly created floodplain.

12. Land Use - There will be no impacts to land use as a result of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action will provide restoration improvements described in planning considerations and special policies of the TRPA Plan Area Statements.

13. Noise - No permanent or significant noise impacts will result from the Proposed Action. Short-term impacts during construction will be mitigated with environmental commitments and measures described in the EA. These measures discuss hours of construction to be limited to between 8 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and using equipment with mufflers.

14. Recreation - The Proposed Action will not significantly affect recreation. Construction in the river channel will be at times when the flow is low and boating use is low. The contractor will fence off some areas of the site and place signage to inform the public that may stray into the City project from adjacent neighborhoods. All public recreation access will be restored once the project is completed.

15. Traffic and Circulation - There will be no impacts to automobile traffic from the Proposed Action. Potential impacts to air traffic will be reduced to a less than significant level with environmental commitments and mitigation measures described in the EA. Traffic control and safety measures shall be included in the construction plans and specifications.

16. Utilities - The Proposed Action will not significantly affect existing utilities. The contractor will consult with STPUD prior to construction. STPUD will have an opportunity to review the plans prior to construction. The Proposed Action includes construction of engineered bank protection along the airport fence that will protect the STPUD lines from future river encroachment.

17. Indian Trust Assets - There will be no impacts to Indian Trust Assets as a result of the Proposed Action.

18. Environmental Justice - Implementing the Proposed Action will not disproportionately affect the human health or environment of minority populations or low-income populations.