

RECLAMATION

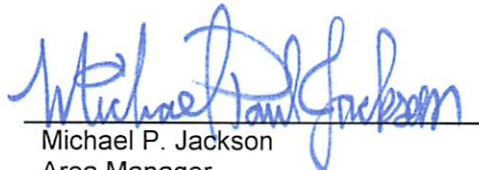
Managing Water in the West

RECORD OF DECISION

Cachuma Lake Resource Management Plan

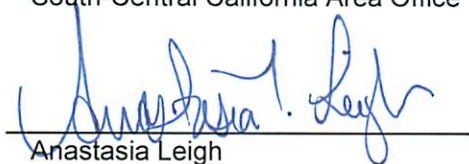
ROD 10-112

Recommended by:


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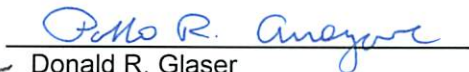
Date: 5/20/2011

Concurred by:


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Date: 5/24/2011

Approved by:


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Date: 5/27/11



Introduction

Cachuma Lake is a reservoir formed by Bradbury Dam, which was completed in 1956 as part of the Cachuma Project. Located approximately 11 miles northwest of the City of Goleta in Santa Barbara County, Cachuma Lake provides water to the City of Santa Barbara, Goleta Water District, Montecito Water District, Carpinteria Valley Water District, and Santa Ynez River Water Conservation District–Improvement District #1. Cachuma Lake provides water storage for the delivery of irrigation, municipal, and industrial water supplies, as well as recreation opportunities and fish and wildlife habitat.

The Cachuma Lake 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 9,250 acres, including Cachuma Lake (3,043 acres at full level) and the surrounding shores and rugged hillsides. All recreational uses and improvements at the lake must be consistent with the authorized purposes of the Cachuma Project and should not interfere with lake operations, which are focused on providing a reliable annual yield of high-quality water. The guidance provided in the RMP will help Cachuma Lake 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 a new management agreement with a managing partner. 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 Plan Area. This ROD has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA] (42 USC 4321 et seq.) 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 Cachuma Lake RMP, which is incorporated by reference and was published on May 28, 2010. Reclamation has considered all comments received on the Proposed Action in developing this ROD.

Decision

Reclamation’s decision is to implement Alternative 2, the Enhanced Recreation Alternative, 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 include 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 Cachuma Lake would continue unchanged. The description of the No Action Alternative on FEIS page 2-15 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 (Enhanced Recreation)

Alternative 2 emphasizes enhancement of current recreational uses and public access at Cachuma Lake, while protecting water quality, natural resources, and cultural resources. Management actions include upgrades and improvements for many of the County Park's existing facilities and utilities, as well as infrastructure improvements. Recreational enhancements would include the expansion of camping, hiking, bicycling, and day use opportunities, as well as the addition of a water park depending on funding and public demand. Alternative 2 also includes the development and implementation of focused management plans for boating, fisheries, trails, and vegetation.

Alternative 3 (Expanded Recreation)

Alternative 3 would expand recreational uses and public access, while protecting water quality, natural resources, and cultural resources. This alternative was included to demonstrate a scenario in which recreational uses at Cachuma Lake are substantially expanded while meeting the RMP goals related to protection of resources to the extent feasible. Alternative 3 builds upon and is in addition to the management actions listed under Alternative 2 with key additions that would allow body-contact water sports including windsurfing and swim beaches, as well as development of resort-like accommodations at the County Park. As with all alternatives, no personal watercraft use or waterskiing will be permitted. The same focused management plans as proposed under Alternative 2 would be developed and implemented.

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 approximately 6 miles southwest of the Plan Area.

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 recreation opportunities that many user groups have requested in public meetings and written comments (see the Public Scoping Report [URS 2006a] and Appendix B of 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, fisheries, trails, and vegetation.

Alternative 3 provides more infrastructure and service support to accommodate potential 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 a tranquil and serene setting would have limited opportunities under this alternative. Natural resources would be more affected 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 management elements of the Cachuma Lake RMP Preferred Alternative (Alternative 2) are detailed below.

Physical Resources

- Phase out non-conformant boat engines beginning within two years of the Managing Agreement approval date between Reclamation and Santa Barbara County Parks Department. This phase out would be completed within five years of the Managing

Agreement approval date unless the testing for contaminants described in Appendix A of the Cachuma RMP/FEIS are found to exceed state maximum contaminate levels, in which case the phase out would be completed within six months;

- Protect water quality by ensuring proper waste disposal, supervising cattle grazing practices through lease agreement terms, preventing containment release into the Lake, and continuing water quality testing practices in Cachuma Lake and at treatment plants;
- Continue implementation of the vessel inspection and quarantine program to protect against introduction of invasive mussels, and augment the program as new information becomes available;
- Update campgrounds and associated facilities to comply with the American Disabilities Act, security and law enforcement;
- 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;
- Continue to manage Storke Flats and Johnson Canyon as designated watershed areas with no public access;
- Focus habitat enhancement and preservation on the east end of the lake, past the log boom;
- Develop and implement focused management plans for boating, fisheries, trails, and vegetation;
- Continue grazing on the North Shore and update the Rangeland Assessment and Grazing Management Plan; and
- Set up educational displays, interpretive signs and programs around the Plan Area to emphasize water quality and the natural resource environment.

Lands, Transportation, and Access

- Improve the entrance/exit road at Live Oak Camp to accommodate increased use;
- Fix stretches of roads prone to flooding; and
- Implement a new design and relocation plan for the Park entrance.

Cultural and Social Resources

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

Recreation

- Allow day use and full public access on the South Shore;
- Improve operations, overall appearance, and facilities at the County Park;
- Consider addition of a water park facility;

- Upgrade marine docks and allow kayak and canoe use on the Lake;
- Provide full range of camping opportunities and day-use activities in the County Park, including yurts, RVs, cabins, marina, shoreline access, shoreline fishing, hiking, and bicycling;
- Allow full-day use and full camping facilities at Live Oak and develop playing fields, a nature center, a pool, an amphitheater, and shoreline fishing areas;
- Allow full day use and public access on Arrowhead Island, in accordance with restrictions;
- Allow limited hiking and bicycling with permit on primitive trails and self-contained camping on the North Shore, and continue equestrian use;
- Allow guided group day use on the Santa Ynez Peninsula;
- Develop a Park trail system management and monitoring plan for hikers, horseback riders, and mountain biking;
- Explore and support, where appropriate, concessionaire agreements with private enterprises and managing partner agreements with public agencies;
- Continue to allow radio-controlled airplane “Float/Fly” events in coordination with the local managing partner;
- Continue to operate, manage, update, and modernize campgrounds and day-use facilities; and
- Designate boat density 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, and fisheries 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 Santa Barbara County Parks Department, 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 May 19, 2010, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Notice of Availability was published on May 28, 2010. Copies of the FEIS were distributed to those who requested a copy. A press release was issued on May 20, 2010, and sent to the recipients on the Cachuma Lake RMP/EIS mailing list. The FEIS was also made available on Reclamation's Cachuma Lake RMP/EIS website at http://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa_projdetails.cfm?Project_ID=283.

One comment letter on the FEIS was submitted after issuance of the Notice of Availability. The substantive issues in the comment letter and Reclamation's responses are summarized as follows.

Kathleen M. Goforth, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, June 28, 2010

1. The EPA encourages Reclamation to consider the impacts of all activities, including vegetation management and recreation, on bald eagle nesting activities, which encompass breeding, feeding, and roosting. The EPA defers to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the adequacy of 1.35 miles from the documented bald eagle nest to the Plan boundary.

Response: The FEIS includes measures to monitor for and minimize and/or mitigate potential effects to bald eagles from Plan implementation (Section 4.4.7). If the documented breeding pair rebuilds their nest within the Plan Area, appropriate buffers and restrictions will be enforced to avoid disturbance to the nesting pair. The same course of action will be taken if a new bald eagle pair takes residency within the Plan Area. The FEIS analysis of impacts from potential management actions is programmatic, as stated in Section 1.2, and therefore any future actions that would result in new facilities, ground disturbances, or environmental impacts beyond the programmatic analysis would be subject to subsequent environmental review and special-status species consultation as appropriate.

2. The EPA recommends a firm commitment in the Record of Decision to project-specific NEPA analyses.

Response: This ROD makes clear the intention to prepare site-specific analysis for actions required to implement Alternative 2.