

Scoping Information Package

Proposal to Construct a Boat Ramp Facility on the Mainstem Snake River Below McTucker Creek, Bingham County, Idaho

This information package summarizes the proposal from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to perform construction activities necessary to install a new boat ramp with an associated gravel access road and parking area on Bureau of Reclamation lands along the mainstem Snake River, a portion of which are cooperatively managed under a multiagency Memorandum of Understanding between Reclamation, IDFG, and Bingham County. The proposed boat ramp would replace the degraded and eroded boat ramp at nearby McTucker Creek in the McTucker Bottoms area just upstream from the northern end of American Falls Reservoir, Bingham County, Idaho.

Federal actions are analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences. Reclamation is seeking input to better identify issues and concerns associated with this proposal, further detailed below.

Background and Existing Condition

The existing McTucker Boat Ramp is located on McTucker Creek, a primarily spring-fed stream adjacent to the Snake River and approximately 1.2 miles (1.9 km) upstream from the full pool footprint of American Falls Reservoir in Bingham County, Idaho. A map showing the locations of existing and proposed facilities discussed is attached to this document.

The existing boat ramp serves as an important river put-in and takeout point for Search and Rescue teams, anglers, floaters, hunters, and other outdoor recreators to access McTucker Creek, the Snake River, the upper reaches of American Falls Reservoir, and adjacent public lands. The nearest alternative boat ramps include Tilden Bridge approximately 15 miles (24.1 km) upstream on the Snake River, and the Sportsman's Park Boat Ramp approximately 9 miles (14.5 km) downstream/down-reservoir on the west side of American Falls Reservoir.

The reach of McTucker Creek adjacent to the existing boat ramp is experiencing significant bedload deposition likely due to a combination of hydrologic factors including long-term backwater effects from American Falls Reservoir at full pool. Streamflow in McTucker Creek is supplemented by groundwater and two side-channel contributions from the Snake River; another contributing factor to sediment deposition at the existing boat ramp site is that the primary Snake River channel has naturally been migrating southeast away from McTucker Creek, which has slowly reduced the Snake River's contribution to McTucker Creek's streamflow. Degradation of the current ramp is exacerbated during periods of low flow, and lower streamflow conditions are likely to become increasingly common as the Snake River continues to migrate away from McTucker Creek. Consequently, repair needs to the existing boat ramp to support current usage levels are likely to become more frequent and extensive.

The above factors have resulted in substantial gravel bar deposits that isolate water access at the boat ramp from both American Falls Reservoir and the nearby Snake River during low flow periods in the fall and winter, severely limiting boater access to the ramp. At these times, float boaters that launch from Tilden Bridge have slim opportunities to get through side channels to McTucker Boat Ramp and floating to Sportsman's Park is not a viable option. This effectively eliminates an entire user group from accessing 15 miles (24.1 km) of the Snake River for parts of each year.

Additionally, during low flows, McTucker Creek is a popular fishery for wading anglers. However, the existing boat ramp is still utilized by motorboats during low water due to a lack of viable access alternatives. Since water in McTucker Creek is only a few inches deep in many places between the boat ramp and the Snake River at these times, motorboaters often choose to travel at high speeds to make it from the ramp to the river. This can result in dangerous conflicts between wading anglers and motorboaters and congestion at the boat ramp.

Finally, Search and Rescue teams recognize the north end of American Falls Reservoir and the reaches of the Snake River downstream from Tilden Bridge as vulnerable areas where search and rescue efforts, when necessary, are severely limited by access. During low water periods from late fall into spring, the only access to these areas is from Tilden Bridge because the boat ramp at Sportsman's Park is typically dewatered at low reservoir levels. Search and rescue efforts during these periods have historically necessitated that teams navigate jet boats at night from Tilden Bridge into the reservoir to aid stranded boaters, which is extremely dangerous.

Need for Action

The degraded condition of the existing boat ramp site on McTucker Creek, in combination with low flow conditions, creates a barrier to feasible and safe recreator and emergency services access to the northern part of American Falls Reservoir and the 15-mile (24.1 km) upstream reach of the Snake River during significant portions of the year. A new boat ramp with an associated gravel road and parking area at the mainstem Snake River would reduce conflicts between wading and boating anglers, provide a safe takeout for float boaters, a safe launch for motorboats, a location for reservoir boaters to harbor in place, and would significantly reduce safety risks for search and rescue teams in the area.

Proposed Action

IDFG proposes to relocate boat ramp facilities to a new downstream location on the mainstem Snake River below the inflow of McTucker Creek. This would require the installation of approximately 0.7 miles (1.1 km) of new all-weather gravel road along the alignment of an existing unmaintained two-track road, construction of a new gravel parking area (anticipated approximate dimensions 80 feet x 150 feet), and construction of a new boat ramp that would make use of existing cement bridge abutments already present in the river channel from a historical road. A double-vault toilet may also be installed if needed to service the new more remote parking area. The combined footprint of the proposed parking, boat ramp, and restroom facilities would be up to one acre. Construction would be scheduled to occur between the months

of October 2024 and April 2025, and would be expected to take 2–3 weeks. The proposed improvements would be developed within the 100-year floodplain extents of the Snake River.

The tiles at the existing boat ramp would be left in place, and the site would remain available to serve as a high-water access point and takeout point for float recreators. A gate would be installed at the roadway to direct recreators to the most appropriate site for boat launching and trailering, dependent on water levels.

A map showing the locations of existing and proposed facilities is attached to this document.

Preliminary Alternative Development

Reclamation intends to develop an Environmental Assessment (EA), a NEPA document which would include impact analysis of the Proposed Action Alternative and a No Action Alternative. Additional alternatives could be developed and analyzed in consideration of issues identified throughout the NEPA process.

Project-Specific Considerations

The following known areas of potential concern will receive particular analysis in the EA:

- **Downstream Water Quality**: Monitoring and mitigation measures to address the potential for impacts to downstream water quality (e.g., increased turbidity, mobilization of suspended sediment) from construction activities would be incorporated per industry Best Management Practices and recommendations sought from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality.
- **Sensitive Habitat/Threatened or Endangered Species**: The project location falls in identified occupied nesting habitat for the western Distinct Population Segment of the yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus occidentalis*), a bird species which is listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Designated Critical Habitat for the species exists approximately 2.5 miles (4 km) from the site of the proposed boat ramp. The project location is also within the mapped potential range of Ute ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*), a plant species which is listed as Threatened under the ESA. Appropriate survey, monitoring, mitigation, and/or avoidance measures associated with these species would be incorporated per recommendations sought from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and in coordination with ESA consultation guidance, as applicable.
- **Facility Design/Maintenance in Floodplain**: The proposed improvements would be developed within the 100-year floodplain extent of the Snake River, and the entire proposed project area can become inundated at high reservoir stages and high flows in the Snake River. A 2023 feasibility study performed by consultant Quadrant River Structures, LLC identified floodplain-specific design considerations including planned




inundation of the road and parking area, which in combination with strategically placed culverts in areas expected to experience higher water velocities would minimize potential flood impacts, erosion, and other undesirable outcomes. Feasibility of the proposed ramp, road, and parking area designs would be assessed by expert hydrologists and/or fluvial geomorphologists. Applicable management agreements would be updated to reflect management of the new facilities and to ensure appropriate measures are in place for safe use and appropriate ongoing maintenance of the facilities under varying hydrologic scenarios.

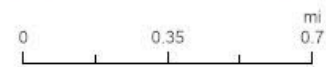
Attachment: A map of the proposed project location with project area detail is included.

Proposed McTucker Boat Ramp Project Area



Legend

-  Existing boat ramp
-  Proposed boat ramp and parking lot location
-  Proposed 0.7 mi (1.1 km) access road route



DISCLAIMER: This map and data are provided as-is and are intended for general reference only. None of the parties involved in preparing the map or data contained herein warrant or represent the data to be complete and accurate.

Date: 2/27/2024