

Finding of No Significant Impact
Final Environmental Assessment
Warm Springs Preserve Stream Restoration and Irrigation
Improvement Project
Ketchum, Idaho
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Columbia-Pacific Northwest Region
Snake River Area Office
CPN FONSI # 2025-05

Introduction

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has prepared this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to comply with the Council on Environmental Quality regulations¹ for implementing procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act. This document briefly describes the Proposed Action, other alternatives considered, the scoping process, Reclamation's consultation and coordination activities, and Reclamation's finding. The Final Environmental Assessment (EA) fully documents the analyses of the potential environmental effects of implementing the changes proposed.

¹ Executive Order 14154, *Unleashing American Energy* (Jan. 20, 2025), and a Presidential Memorandum, *Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity* (Jan. 21, 2025), require the Department to strictly adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq. Further, such Order and Memorandum repeal Executive Orders 12898 (Feb. 11, 1994) and 14096 (Apr. 21, 2023). Because Executive Orders 12898 and 14096 have been repealed, complying with such Orders is a legal impossibility. Reclamation verifies that it has complied with the requirements of NEPA, including the Department's regulations and procedures implementing NEPA at 43 C.F.R. Part 46 and Part 516 of the Departmental Manual, consistent with the President's January 2025 Order and Memorandum. Reclamation has also voluntarily considered the Council on Environmental Quality's rescinded regulations implementing NEPA, previously found at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508, as guidance to the extent appropriate and consistent with the requirements of NEPA and Executive Order 14154.

Location and Background

The proposed project area is on Warm Springs Creek, located about ¼-mile upstream of the confluence with the Big Wood River in Ketchum, Idaho. The stream reach is about 4,800 feet long and is located about 2 miles west of downtown Ketchum, Idaho. Ketchum is located in the Wood River Valley in central Idaho. Warm Springs Creek originates high in the Smoky Mountains west of Ketchum and flows for about 24 miles before flowing into the Big Wood River in Ketchum. The Big Wood River originates at Galena Summit northwest of Ketchum and flows approximately 66 miles south past the resort towns of Ketchum, Hailey, and Bellevue before joining Camas Creek at Magic Reservoir. On its way, the river collects water from tributaries in the Smoky, Boulder, and Pioneer mountains, including Warm Springs Creek.

The Warm Springs Preserve property has a long and diverse history. The property was used for cattle ranching from the 1880's to the 1940's. Since that time, the property has been used for the establishment and operation of the Warm Springs Inn and restaurant, a rodeo arena, a golf course, tennis courts, fish ponds, and most recently a public park. The history of impactful land uses, and the vegetation clearing conducted to facilitate those uses, has degraded the project reach of Warm Spring Creek and the adjacent riparian and floodplain areas. The property currently provides limited aquatic and terrestrial habitat. In 2022, the City of Ketchum took possession of 65 acres of the Warm Springs Ranch property and established the Warm Springs Preserve for public use. The City of Ketchum has partnered with the Wood River Land Trust (WRLT) and various stakeholders including the Friends of the Warm Springs Preserve (FWSP) to create a renewed landscape and enhance the public streamside park.

The objectives of the proposed Warm Springs Preserve Stream Restoration and Irrigation Improvement project are to rehabilitate riverine, riparian, and floodplain on the Warm Springs Preserve property. The primary components of this project include restoration of aquatic habitat within the existing creek channel, creation of side channels, enhancement of floodplain connectivity, flood conveyance improvements, and reestablishment of native plant communities

Purpose and Need

Reclamation's purpose and need for the Proposed Action is to finalize a decision on providing WaterSMART (Sustaining and Managing America's Resources for Tomorrow) grant to the Wood River Land Trust to fund riverine, riparian, and floodplain rehabilitation, along with adding irrigation and public park amenities at the Warm Springs Preserve. The proposed project would improve aquatic and terrestrial habitat and irrigation capabilities in the Warm Springs Preserve. Project objectives include the following:

- Improve the irrigation diversion and reduce annual maintenance requirements,
- Improve the complexity of Warm Springs Creek aquatic habitat (through pool creation, point bar establishment, and riffle bed feature creation),
- Improve stream function and aquatic habitat through the installation of woody material and creation of multiple perennial side channels,

- Improve riparian and floodplain habitat and function via reestablishing a hydraulically connected floodplain and planting native vegetation, and
- Improve public access and public park amenities by installing a new bridge.

Alternatives Considered

The range of alternatives developed for analysis of this Proposed Action was based on the purpose and need for the project, and on the issues raised during internal, external, and Tribal scoping. The alternatives analyzed include a No Action alternative (Alternative A) and the Proposed Action (Alternative B). The No Action alternative does not meet the defined purpose and need for action but was evaluated because it provides an appropriate baseline.

Summary of Environmental Effects

The following summarizes the effects that the preferred alternative – the Proposed Action (Alternative B) – would have on each resource category analyzed in the EA. Chapter 3 of the EA provides a full analysis and explanation of how each resource was evaluated.

Hydrology and Geomorphology

The proposed project configuration would establish side channels that would convey surface waters around an existing surface water diversion in the project area owned by Brennan Holdings 300 LLC. However, the surface water conveyance through these side channels (5.3 cfs in the Baldy Channel and 0.3 cfs in the Sunny Channel during low flows) would leave 23.4 cfs in the main channel of Warm Springs Creek during even low flow conditions (the 95% exceedance flow). This volume of instream flow in the mainstem of Warm Springs Creek would be adequate to support the Brennan Holdings 300 LLC surface water right of 1.0 cfs even during low flow conditions.

The Proposed Action would provide continuity in the channel profile under both high-flow and low-flow conditions. The constructed riffle would help to maintain adequate hydraulic head, including at low flows, for sufficient water diversion without the need for additional recurring maintenance activity.

Floodplain grading along with side channel creation and enhancement would benefit floodplain functionality during high-flows and relieve pressure within the main channel. This would lead to more stable channel morphology and a reduction in sediment production via bank erosion. Habitat enhancement structures would help provide much-needed diversity in available fish habitat at all flow levels while also providing roughness to eroding banks to reduce erosive forces.

The Proposed Action would further maximize the overall restoration of fluvial functions in the project area reach of Warm Springs Creek while protecting land adjacent to the river from further erosion. The Proposed Action would beneficially contribute to the overall long-term effectiveness of restoration activities in Warm Springs Creek.

The combined effects of the Proposed Action would further improve fluvial and ecological functions in this reach of Warm Springs Creek. The proposed surface water conveyance through the constructed side channels would maintain adequate baseflows in Warm Springs Creek for aquatic organisms. And when combined with the numerous creek restoration and streambank stabilization projects that are planned for Warm Springs Creek, the combined effects would improve the restoration of fluvial conditions and stabilize creek banks.

Water Quality

The Proposed Action would have short-term construction effects and long-term effects on water quality in Warm Springs Creek. Short-term effects are associated with heavy equipment work in and around the Warm Springs Creek channel. Anticipated short term water quality effects include minor increases in turbidity in Warm Springs Creek from disturbance and mobilization of river-bottom and streambank sediments during the removal of the existing irrigation diversion structure, construction of the new riffle, installation of the habitat boulders and woody habitat structures, streambank grading and during tie-in of the new side channels. Instream work would be conducted during the low-flow period, and sediment and erosion control best management practices (BMPs) such as coffer dams would be utilized to isolate instream work and straw wattles utilized to prevent upland sediment from mobilizing into the creek. These measures would help to lessen water quality impacts. The sediment plumes created by the Proposed Action are anticipated to dissipate rapidly due to dilution and would be deposited downstream at locations determined by sediment particle size relative to varying areas of flow velocity in the channel.

Long-term post-construction effects include reduced likelihood of streambank erosion and associated sediment entrainment in the project area reach of Warm Springs Creek due to improved flood conveyance and increased vertical channel stability and bank stability. The long-term improvements resulting from the project would benefit designated uses of water supply, recreation, wildlife habitat, aesthetics, and aquatic life due to reduced channel incision, improved floodplain connectivity, improved vertical and lateral channel stability, and aquatic habitat diversification. The project would not affect elevated total phosphorus levels that have been documented upstream of the project area in the upper sub-basin.

The combined effects of the Proposed Action and with other actions in the vicinity of the project area are not likely to have a negative long-term impact on water quality in Warm Springs Creek as long as BMPs are implemented to prevent erosion and movement of sediment from construction zones, disturbed areas are fully reclaimed and revegetated, and riparian areas and streambanks are protected. The combined effects would likely not add to short-term sedimentation (turbidity and excessive fine sediment deposition) issues attributed to construction because of the temporal separation between projects. These projects are completed on different time frames, and any adverse short-term sedimentation effects would dissipate and fall back to baseline levels, and any short-term sedimentation effects would not be additive.

Biota – Vegetation, Wetlands, Fish and Wildlife

Vegetation and Wildlife-During construction, existing vegetation at the proposed construction sites would be disturbed or removed permanently to facilitate the proposed restoration and improvement designs. The use of heavy equipment in the area would create the risk of spreading noxious weeds in the project area; this risk would be minimized by the development and implementation of a noxious weed management plan before, during, and after construction. Disturbance to native vegetation outside of design features would be minimized and all temporarily impacted areas would be fully revegetated after construction has been completed, which would result in a long-term increase in vegetation coverage. As the restoration and improvement project is being constructed, wildlife would experience temporary but direct disturbance and would likely exhibit avoidance behavior due to the increased human presence and heavy equipment activity. This effect would be limited to the duration of construction and localized only to the project area.

Post-construction, vegetation and wildlife would experience long-term benefits from the creation of diverse aquatic and riparian habitats, improved floodplain connectivity and function, improved flood pulse dynamics, enhanced riparian vegetation recruitment, and the establishment of four additional side channels revegetated with site-specific native riparian vegetation. Due to the installation of a large amount of native vegetation there would be no net loss of vegetation or habitat in the long term. The restoration of the ecological function of the Warm Springs Creek channel and floodplain would allow for enhanced long-term recruitment of riparian and floodplain vegetation that would continue to establish over a period of years. This increase in vegetation productivity and long-term cover would provide higher quality and additional riparian habitat for a diversity wildlife species. Proposed improvements would result in a long-term increase in habitat availability.

Fisheries-During the proposed construction, the project area would experience localized short-term detrimental effects to fisheries due to increased turbidity from equipment operation and direct disturbance to the proposed portions of the channel. These effects would be minor in scale and temporary, given that the proposed construction areas are relatively small compared to the surrounding landscape and Big Wood River watershed. Sediments released into the water during construction would be expected to dissipate rapidly as they move down stream downstream. The use of BMPs would isolate and minimize the short-term effects of disturbance.

Post construction, fisheries are expected to experience a direct long-term benefit from the creation and restoration of aquatic habitat in the Warm Springs Creek channel, by creating more pools, point bars, increasing instream woody cover and creating riffles with the appropriate size substrate for spawning. Additionally, there would be indirect and permanent beneficial effects to fish and fish habitat due to the increase in riparian habitat quality and revitalization of the floodplain connectivity and functionality. Improving the aquatic habitat and floodplain of Warm Springs Creek would contribute to improved water quality conditions, such as reduced water temperatures.

The combined effects of the Proposed Action and other actions in the vicinity of the project area would result in an increase in the quantity and quality of riparian vegetation and enhanced fish and wildlife habitat associated with Warm Springs Creek. Riparian vegetation would be increased via active planting and restoration of flood-pulse dynamics that would enhance natural recruitment of herbaceous and woody species. The enhanced riparian plant community would result in improved cover and foraging habitat for big game and other wildlife species. The in-channel, streambank and

floodplain improvements associated with this and other restoration projects in the vicinity would have a combined positive effect on the Warm Springs Creek fishery by directly improving and diversifying habitat and reducing erosion and sedimentation associated with unstable and unvegetated streambanks.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Reclamation determined the Proposed Action would have no effect on the Canada lynx and North American wolverine and would not Jeopardize the Existence of the two proposed species, Monarch butterfly and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee. Consequently, no formal Section 7 consultation was required for this project. However, due to the uncertainty surrounding potential formal listing of the proposed species, informal conferencing with the USFWS was conducted as part of Reclamation's assessment.

Impacts associated with the construction of the Proposed Action and other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions identified in the area on T&E species would be considered temporary, seasonal, and unmeasurable at a population level scale or to habitat critical to T&E species. Expected combined effects would be discountable as long as industry standard construction BMPs are implemented, and local riparian protection regulations are adhered to.

Recreation and Aesthetics

The diversification and enhancement of instream habitat would improve aquatic conditions and result in increased angling opportunities. The improved habitat would support more wildlife and enhance wildlife viewing opportunities. Walking and hiking opportunities would be improved with new trails.

Recreation access to the project area would be restricted during construction, which would have a short-term impact on recreation. The aesthetic experience would also be disrupted on a temporary basis due to a need to control entry into the construction area and due to noise and the visual disturbance of heavy equipment usage that would be experienced by users of the action area and larger preserve. These impacts would be short in duration and would only occur during and shortly after construction. All temporary ground disturbances resulting from construction would be reclaimed at the conclusion of construction. Proposed reclamation and revegetation would return impacted areas to pre-project or better condition. The Proposed Action would result in a beneficial aesthetic impact due to the planting of native vegetation, removal of the irrigation diversion structure, and the establishment of more natural creek channel and streambank characteristics, reconnection of the floodplain, and reestablishment of more abundant and complex riparian and aquatic habitat. In concert with proposed improvements in the Warm Springs Preserve and other habitat restoration and improvement projects in the Warm Springs Creek drainage and nearby reach of the Big Wood River, the proposed project would contribute to an overall improvement of recreation opportunities and uses in the vicinity.

The combined effects of the Proposed Action and other actions in the vicinity of the project area would result in improved recreation opportunities in the vicinity. Aesthetics associated with the Proposed Action and other habitat restoration projects in the vicinity would be improved due to restoration and revegetation of the area. When combined with expected residential development in the vicinity aesthetic improvements may be negligible.

Unaffected Resources

The Proposed Action would not cause any reasonably foreseeable short, long-term or combined effects to the following resource categories:

- Indian Trust Assets
- Treaty Rights
- Cultural Resources
- Indian Sacred Sites

Consultation, Coordination, and Public Involvement

In compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended in 1992), Reclamation consulted with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office to identify cultural and historic properties in the area of potential effect. Reclamation initiated consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on August 28, 2024. SHPO concurrence with Reclamation's finding of No Adverse Effect to Historic Properties for the project area was received on September 16, 2024. This concurrence was conditional, requiring that Reclamation develop an Inadvertent Discovery Plan which would provide direction for the immediate cessation of work in the event cultural material is inadvertently encountered during project implementation.

Reclamation mailed scoping letters to representatives of the Shoshone- Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation, Burns Paiute Tribe, and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation who traditionally and currently use the area for hunting on August 7, 2024. No responses or concerns from the Tribes were brought forward during the scoping period or in response to Reclamation's invitation to consult.

Reclamation mailed scoping documentation including a letter, project information, and a map to agencies, organizations, and individuals, on August 16, 2024, soliciting assistance with identifying any issues and concerns related to the Proposed Action. The applicant also sent out scoping documentation to 1,160 community members on September 3, 2024. Reclamation received 6 written comments from the scoping period, many of which were letters to express support for the proposed project. Topics of concern that were brought to Reclamation's attention by commenters included: the potential impacts of off-leash dogs on water quality in Warm Springs Creek; the potential impact on flows in Warm Springs Creek; the potential for spread of noxious weeds; and the potential for increased traffic and parking in adjacent neighborhoods. Comments received from this scoping solicitation were addressed or incorporated into the Final EA.

Reclamation received a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request on October 11, 2024 requesting any and all information regarding emails from the following domains: @ketchumidaho.org, @woodriverlandtrust.org, and @warmspringspreserve.org. Snake River Area Office responded with said information on October 23, 2024.

Finding

Based on the analysis of the environmental effects presented in the Final EA and consultation with potentially affected agencies, Tribes, organizations, and the general public, Reclamation concludes that implementation of the preferred alternative – the Proposed Action (Alternative B) – will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment or natural and cultural resources. The overall effects of the Proposed Action will be minor, temporary, and localized. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Recommended:

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Date

Approved:

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Date