BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Final Environmental Assessment
Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project

WaterSMART Program
Upper Colorado Basin: Interior Region 7
Western Colorado Area Office



October 2026

Mission Statements

The mission of the Department of the Interior is to protect and manage the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provide scientific and other information about those resources; and honor its trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated island communities.

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.

Final Environmental Assessment Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project

WaterSMART Program
Upper Colorado Basin: Interior Region 7
Western Colorado Area Office

Prepared for Reclamation by SGM, Inc., Durango Office

Cover Photo: Mancos River (SGM, May 2025).

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND DECISION RECORD

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Interior Region 7: Upper Colorado Basin
Western Colorado Area Office
Grand Junction, Colorado

Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project

Introduction

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969[1] and the Department of the Interior's NEPA Handbook at 516 DM 1, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has completed an environmental assessment (EA) for the Proposed Action of authorizing the use of federal funds to implement the Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project. See 42 U.S.C. § 4336 ("An agency shall prepare an environmental assessment with respect to a proposed agency action that does not have a reasonably foreseeable significant effect on the quality of the human environment, … Such environmental assessment shall be a concise public document prepared by a Federal agency to set forth the basis of such agency's finding of no significant impact or determination that an environmental impact statement is necessary."); see also 43 C.F.R. § 46.300. Under the authority of the WaterSMART Program, Reclamation will fund the Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project and is the lead agency for purposes of compliance with the NEPA for this Proposed Action.

The EA was prepared by Reclamation to address the potential impacts to the human environment due to implementation of the Proposed Action. The EA is attached to this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and is incorporated by reference.

Alternatives

The EA analyzes the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative to implement the Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project.

Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact

[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.

Reclamation's decision is to implement the Proposed Action Alternative. Based upon a review of the EA, Reclamation has determined that implementing the Proposed Action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required for this proposed action. This finding is based on consideration of the degree of effects of the Proposed Action on the potentially affected environment, as analyzed in the EA.

Potentially Affected Environment

The project is located in 17 different locations in eastern Montezuma County, Colorado (see Section 1.1 of the Final EA). The affected locality is the project areas around the Crystal Creek Inlet Canal, Crystal Creek Outlet Canal, East Mancos Highline Ditch, Field Ditch, Frank Ditch, Giles Ditch, Lee and Burke Ditch, Lee Ditch, Long Park Ditch, No. 6 (Sheek) Ditch, Rush Ditch, Weber Reservoir, Willis Ditch, Brown/Reddert Ranch, RSL Ranch, Colyer Property, and the G5 Ranch. Affected interests include Reclamation, Mancos Conservation District, stakeholders, and adjacent landowners. The EA evaluates the effects on the potentially affected environment, which includes physical, ecological, and socioeconomic factors.

Summary of Effects

Table ES-1. provides a summary of environmental impacts for each of the resources evaluated in this EA

Resource	Impacts: No Action Alternative	Impacts: Proposed Action Alternative
Agricultural Resources and Soils	No Effect	No farmland would be permanently removed from production. No change in the configuration of irrigated lands. No interruption to agricultural production. No part of the irrigation season would be lost.
Air Quality	No Effect	Dirt work would result in particulate emissions and diesel emissions; however, releases would be temporary and minor. No change from existing conditions once construction is complete.
Noise	No Effect	Increased noise during construction phase, largely screened by topography and vegetation. No permanent change in noise levels.
Noxious Weeds	Continued weed pressure due to annual maintenance/ ground disturbance.	Weed pressure would increase temporarily during the installation of the Proposed Action due to expanded ground disturbance associated with construction. With revegetation efforts and weed mitigation, effects are expected to be short-term and minor and would not contribute to regional weed abundance.

Resource	Impacts: No Action Alternative	Impacts: Proposed Action Alternative
Transportation & Public Safety	Wildfire within the forest fuels management area would continue to pose a safety risk for communities and landowners in the vicinity of the project area.	During the implementation phase of the Proposed Action, there would be minor increases in traffic on the county road network. Emergency services would not be hindered in their response. Implementation of the forest fuels management component of the Proposed Action would likely increase public safety by reducing the risk of wildfires.
Vegetation	No Effect; continued sporadic treatment and clearing of riparian vegetation along ditches	All vegetation disturbance would occur within the ditch prisms for the irrigation infrastructure component of the project. There would be no permanent loss of vegetation. Forest fuels thinning would occur on four private ranches which would reduce wildfire risks and increase forest health. Areas disturbed would be revegetated after construction.
Visual Resources	No Effect	There would be no change to visual resources. Construction equipment and construction traffic would utilize the local road network over the short-term and construction operations would be completely hidden from public view by surrounding vegetation and topography. The level of change after project implementation would be imperceptible.
Water Rights & Use	No Effect	The irrigation infrastructure projects would result in better water management of the existing water rights.
Water Quality	No Effect	Beneficial effects on water quality. Implementing the forest fuels management would reduce the impacts of wildfires in the Mancos and Lost Canyon watersheds, reducing the potential for high levels of erosion and sedimentation from entering the associated streams. The irrigation infrastructure improvements would allow more efficient control and measurement of water diverted for agricultural purposes, reducing erosion and potential sedimentation.
Surface Water	No change to surface water	The irrigation infrastructure improvements would allow more precise measurement and distribution of existing irrigation water rights.

Resource	Impacts: No Action Alternative	Impacts: Proposed Action Alternative
Wildlife & Special Status Species	No changes to the existing levels of anthropogenic disturbance.	A temporary increase in construction noise, dust, emissions, and a general increase in human activity would occur near the irrigation infrastructure components over the autumn construction season. Wildlife could be displaced by the increased human presence, though not during critical breeding seasons for most wildlife. Once the Proposed Action is implemented, wildlife habitat would be substantially similar to pre-construction conditions. There would be no effect to any federally listed threatened and endangered species. There would be no new effect to the Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback chub, and bonytail critical habitat.
Cultural Resources	No Effect	There would be no adverse effects to historic properties, including impacts to education and knowledge, learning and interpretation, and research opportunities. SHPO's consultation confirms that the proposed action would result in no adverse effect to historic properties and is included in **Appendix C.**

Degree of the Effects

In determining the degree of effects of the Proposed Action, Reclamation has considered the following criteria. These criteria were incorporated into the resource issues and analyses described in the EA. See 43 C.F.R. § 46.310 ("The level of detail and depth of impact analysis should normally be limited to the minimum needed to determine whether there would be significant environmental effects.").

1. **Both Short- and Long-Term Effects.** The Proposed Action would have minor impacts on resources as described in the EA section 3.2. Environmental commitments were incorporated into the design of the Proposed Action to reduce impacts. The predicted short-term and long-term effects of the Proposed Action are fully analyzed in section 3.2 and are incorporated by reference here.

2. **Both Beneficial and Adverse Effects.** The Proposed Action would have a minor impact on resources as described and analyzed in the EA. Environmental commitments were incorporated into the design of the Proposed Action to reduce impacts. The beneficial and adverse effects of the Proposed Action are fully analyzed in section 3.2 of the EA, and incorporated by reference here.

3. **Effects on Public Health and Safety.** The Proposed Action will have beneficial impacts on public health or safety. A full analysis can be found in section 3.2.6 of the EA, and is incorporated by reference.

4. **Economic Effects.** The Proposed Action will have minimal impacts on economics. Effects are minor because construction is short-term and localized, and no agricultural lands are taken out of production, water rights and delivery allocations remain unchanged. A full analysis can be found in section 3.2.9 of the EA, and is incorporated by reference.

5. **Effects on the Quality of Life of the American People.** The Proposed Action will have minimal impacts on the quality of life of the American people. Effects are minor because work occurs on private lands, primarily outside the irrigation season; construction disturbances are temporary and localized; and best management practices (BMPs) and agency coordination avoid sustained community effects. The Proposed Action will have no effect on access to products, including opportunities to consume, use, possess, or purchase products extracted or produced from Federal lands and in the Outer Continental Shelf (see section 3.2.1). The Proposed Action will have no effect to visitor experience, including recreation access and visitor services (see section 3.2.1). The Proposed Action will have no effect to public services, including emergency services, public water supply, transportation, education, or social services (see section 3.2.6). The Proposed Action will have no effect to the way of life and cultural for Native Americans, including traditional land and water use and practices, and their cultural heritage (see section 3.2.1). The Proposed Action will have no effect on the passive use of ecosystems, including stewardship, existence values, and bequest values (see section 3.2.7). The Proposed Action will have no effect on education and knowledge, including learning, interpretation, and research opportunities related to cultural, historic, and natural resources (see section 3.2.13). Analysis of the natural environment can be found in Chapter 3 and environmental commitments can be found in Chapter 4.

Environmental Commitments

The environmental commitments located in Chapter 4 of the Final EA will be implemented to further reduce the insignificant effects of the Proposed Action. Chapter 4 also states the authority for any environmental commitments adopted and any applicable monitoring or enforcement provisions. Chapter 4 of the Final EA is incorporated by reference.

Decision Record

Based on the analysis of the proposed action alternative located in Section 3.2 of the Final Environmental Assessment, the Decision Maker certifies that this Final Environmental Assessment represents Reclamation's good-faith effort to fulfill NEPA's requirements within the congressional timeline; that such effort is substantially complete; that, in Reclamation's expert opinion, it has thoroughly considered the factors mandated by NEPA, and that, in Reclamation's judgment, the analysis contained therein is adequate to inform and reasonably explain Reclamation's decision regarding the proposed Federal Action. Therefore, the Decision Maker has decided to authorize implementation of the proposed action alternative.

Approved by:

Digitally signed by BART DEMING
Date: 2026.10.26 22:10:21 -06'00'

_____

Bart Deming
Area Manager, Western Colorado Area Office

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to disclose and evaluate the potential environmental effects of the Mancos Conservation District's (MCD) Watershed Resiliency Project (Project) located in Montezuma County, Colorado, and assesses its compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The project would upgrade agricultural diversion structures, replace aging flumes and headgates, install remote metering and telemetry equipment, and complete fire mitigation work on 650 upland acres.

The Federal action to be evaluated in this EA is whether Reclamation would authorize the use of Federal funds, under their WaterSMART Program, to implement the Project.

Two of MCD's project locations are located on USDA Forest Service (USFS) lands. The USFS has determined that the proposed activities on the San Juan National Forest qualify as maintenance activities and no additional coordination between the Reclamation and the USFS is necessary.

Throughout this document, the components of the Proposed Action that consist of water measuring, control, and diversion infrastructure are referred to as the "irrigation infrastructure projects", and the component of the Proposed Action that consist of reducing wildfire hazards by reducing forest fuels is referred to as the "forest fuels management projects".

1.1 – Project Location and Legal Description

The Proposed Action would occur at 17 different locations in eastern Montezuma County, Colorado (**Figure 1**). The proposed activity and legal descriptions for each location are as follows:

- Crystal Creek Inlet Canal – Telemetry equipment installation. Located in the Southwest ¼ of the Northwest ¼ of Section 2, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 211732 E 4145126 N

- Crystal Creek Outlet Canal – Telemetry equipment installation. Located in the Northwest ¼ of the Northeast ¼ of Section 15, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 210611 E 4142421 N

- East Mancos Highline Ditch – Telemetry equipment installation. Located in the Southwest ¼ of the Southwest ¼ of Section 20, Township 36 North, Range 12 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 216039 E 4139676 N

- Field Ditch – Replace Parshall flume. Located in the Southeast ¼ of the Southwest ¼ of Section 14, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 211658 E 4141249 N

- Frank Ditch – Rebuild water diversion. Located in the Southeast ¼ of the Southwest ¼ of Section 28, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 208443 E 4138117 N

- Giles Ditch – Replace Parshall flume. Located in the Northeast ¼ of the Northwest ¼ of Section 24, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 213329 E 4140853 N

- Lee and Burke Ditch – Replace Parshall flume and install telemetry. Located in the Southwest ¼ of the Northwest ¼ of Section 14, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 211555 E 4141849 N

- Lee Ditch – Replace headgate and Parshall flume. Located in the Southwest ¼ of the Northeast ¼ of Section 27, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 210450 E 4138893 N

- Long Park Ditch – Replace headgate, Relocate Parshall flume, install telemetry, rebuild diversion. Located in the Northeast ¼ of the Northwest ¼ of Section 08, Township 36 North, Range 12 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 216367 E 4143800 N. The Long Park Diversion and associated infrastructure is located on USFS land.

- No. 6 (Sheek) Ditch – Rebuild the diversion. Located in the Northwest ¼ of the Northwest ¼ of Section 32, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 206429 E 4137795 N

- Rush Ditch - Chicken Cr Split – Install Two Ramp Flumes with one upstream and the other downstream of existing diversion structure. Located in the Northeast ¼ of the Northwest ¼ of Section 08, Township 37 North, Range 12 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 216477 E 4153685 N. The Rush Ditch diversion is located on USFS land.

- Weber Reservoir – Install telemetry equipment and new staff gauge. Located in the Southeast ¼ of the Southeast ¼ of Section 01, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 214038 E 4144313 N

- Willis Ditch – Replace existing Parshall flume and rebuild the diversion. Located in the Southwest ¼ of the Southwest ¼ of Section 28, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 208169 E 4138017 N

- Brown/Reddert Ranch – Forest fuels thinning. Located in the Northeast ¼ of the Southwest ¼ of Section 04, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 208679 E 4144900 N

- RSL Ranch - Forest fuels thinning. Located in the Northeast ¼ of the Northeast ¼ of Section 28, Township 37 North, Range 14 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 199994 E 4149184 N

- Colyer Property - Forest fuels thinning. Located in the Northwest ¼ of the Southeast ¼ of Section 02, Township 36 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 212298 E 4144774 N

- G5 Ranch - Forest fuels thinning. Located in the Southeast ¼ of the Southeast ¼ of Section 33, Township 37 North, Range 13 West of the N.M.P.M., Montezuma County, Colorado, with UTM (Zone 13N) coordinates of 209043E 4146236 N

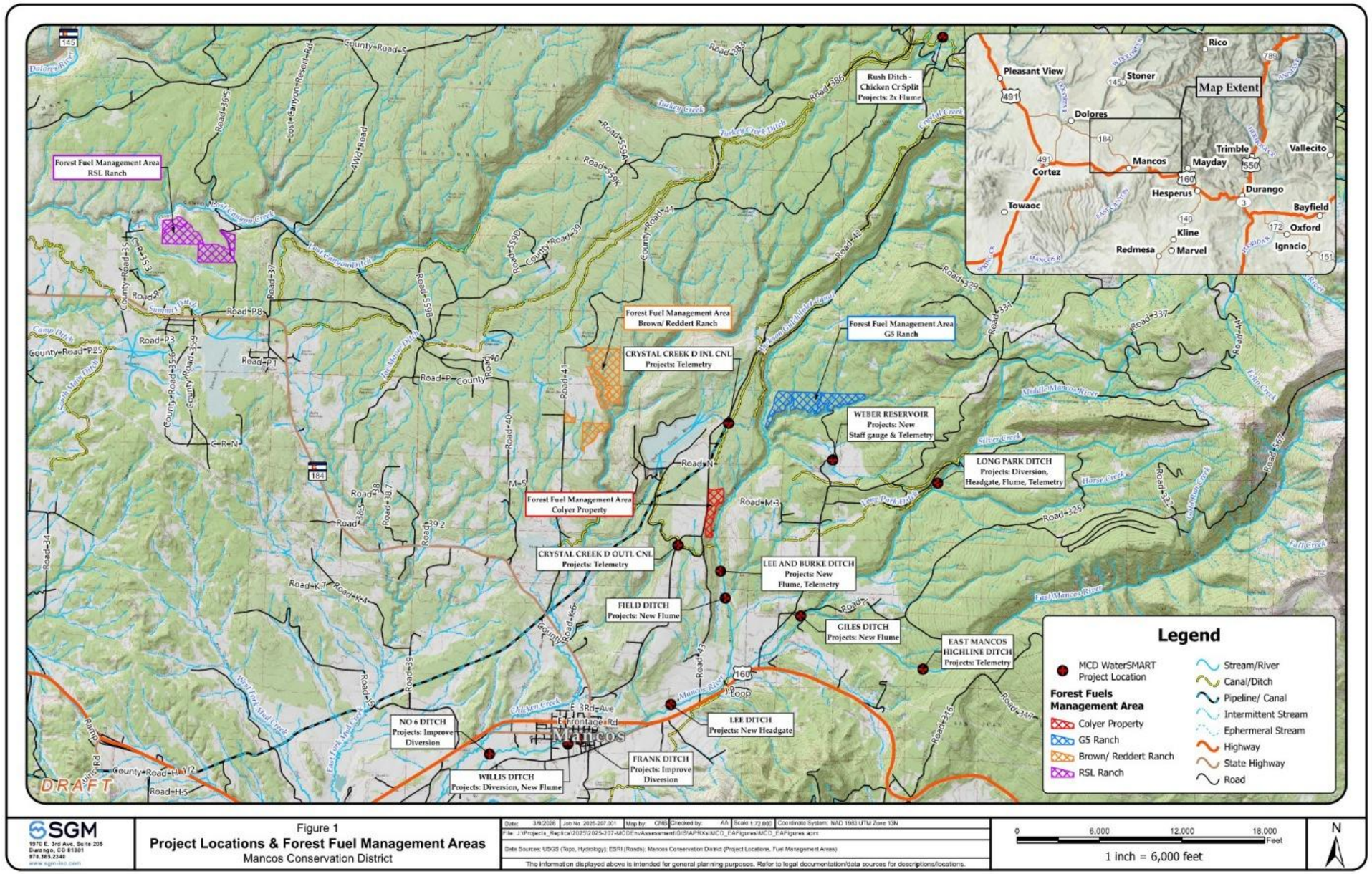
Project components fall within the Mancos River and Lost Canyon Creek Watersheds, which are tributaries to the San Juan and Colorado Rivers (**Figure 1**).

1.2 – Need for and Purpose of the Proposed Action

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to contribute to the WaterSMART Environmental Water Resources Projects objective of providing "benefits to ecological values or watershed health… as part of a collaborative process to… increase the reliability of water resources".

The need for the Proposed Action is to reduce potential wildfire hazards on 650 upland acres, improve water quality and temperature by reducing erosion and sedimentation, and allow irrigation waters to be used more efficiently. This grant would support the ability of local agriculture to remain resilient to increasingly varied fluctuations in water supply.

Figure 1. Proposed Action



1.3 – Decision to be Made

Reclamation will decide whether to authorize the use of Federal funds for the MCD to implement the Proposed Action as outlined above. This EA has been prepared to evaluate adverse and beneficial effects of the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives, and to provide a basis for decisions by Reclamation on whether to fund the Proposed Action. If Reclamation decides not to authorize the use of federal funds to fund the proposed Project, MCD would not fund the Proposed Action as outlined above.

1.4 – Background

Reclamation's WaterSMART Program is a primary source of funding for the Proposed Action. Through WaterSMART Water and Energy Efficiency Grants (formerly Challenge Grants), Reclamation provides 50/50 cost share funding to irrigation and water districts, tribes, states and other entities with water or power delivery authority. Projects conserve and use water more efficiently; increase the production of hydropower; mitigate conflict risk in areas at a high risk of future water conflict; and accomplish other benefits that contribute to water supply reliability in the western United States. Projects are selected through a competitive process and the focus is on projects that can be completed within two or three years.

Conservation Districts are political subdivisions of the State of Colorado, with their authorities, powers and structure articulated in Colorado Revised Statutes, Title 35, Article 70. MCD was organized under the authority of the Colorado Soil Conservation District law and was established on August 31, 1948. MCD's mission is to promote the long-term sustainable use and protection of natural resources in the Mancos River Watershed through educational, technical, and financial assistance for residents and landowners. Since 1948, the MCD has taken a leading role in multi-benefit natural resource planning and project development, working with landowners, community partners, federal, state, and local agencies, and nonprofits. Current MCD programs advance projects to improve water infrastructure and watershed health, soil health, and forest health, as well as associated educational programs.

The proposed improvements within the Mancos River and Lost Canyon watersheds would help meet the goals of the Colorado Water Plan (2023), which supports a vibrant agricultural economy by improving the efficiency of water delivery infrastructure, and ultimately improving water quality in the Colorado River Watershed.

1.5 – Relationship to Other Projects

The following projects are currently in progress or are currently complete within the Mancos River Watershed:

- The Depot (in progress) – forest fuels management on 35 acres of Ponderosa Pine Forest (37° 27.1956'N 108° 20.8885'W)
- Adam's Ranch (in progress) – forest fuels management on 52 acres of Pinyon Juniper Forest (37° 26.0271'N 108° 22.2667'W)
- Via Colorado (in progress) – forest fuels management on 178 acres of Ponderosa Pine Forest (37° 23.6718'N 108° 19.241'W)
- Sullwold (completed 2025) – forest fuels management on 54 acres of Ponderosa/Pinyon Juniper Forest (37° 23.2458'N 108° 17.162'W)

- Goodman (completed 2025) – forest fuels management on 34 acres Ponderosa Pine Forest (37° 24.1504'N 108° 20.4706'W)
- Truman (completed in 2025) – forest fuels management on 26 acres of Ponderosa Pine Forest (37° 24.3148'N 108° 20.4586'W)
- Big Toe Ranch (completed in 2025) – forest fuels management on 30 acres of Ponderosa/Pinyon Juniper Forest (37° 24.0908'N 108° 20.2246'W)
- Doyle (completed in 2025) – forest fuels management on 64 acres of Ponderosa/Pinyon Juniper Forest (37° 24.079'N 108° 14.057'W)
- Sheek Diversion Upgrade (completed in 2025) – ditch diversion improved for fish passage (37°20'07.9"N 108°19'27.1"W)

1.6 – Agency Coordination & Public Comment

Agency coordination for this EA was completed by Reclamation, in consultation with the following agencies and organizations, during the planning stages of the Proposed Action to identify the potential environmental and human environment issues and concerns associated with implementation of the Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives:

- U.S. Forest Service (USFS), San Juan National Forest, Delores Public Lands Office.
- Colorado State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Denver, CO
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), Durango, CO
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Ecological Services, Grand Junction, CO
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Durango, CO
- Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Fort Belknap Indian Community of the Fort Belknap Reservation of Montana, Navajo Nation, Southern Ute Tribe, and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe

The draft EA was available for public comment. Public comments received within the 30-day comment period are included as an **Appendix A** in this Final EA.

CHAPTER 2 – PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives evaluated in this EA include No Action and the Proposed Action Alternatives.

2.1 – No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, Reclamation would not provide funding for the proposed action. MCD would continue to seek other funding sources to implement the proposed action, and the ditch companies would continue to operate their facilities as they exist today.

2.2 – Proposed Action

The Proposed Action would occur at 17 different locations in eastern Montezuma County Colorado involving one or more of the following components/treatments:

- Upgrade four agricultural diversion structures to allow for efficient irrigation diversions and fish passage.
- Replacement of two leaking headgates.
- Installation of telemetry equipment on 10 agricultural ditches and one reservoir.
- Replace 6 Parshall flumes and install two new ramp flumes.
- Complete forest fuels management utilizing mechanical treatments for wildfire mitigation on 4 private ranches totaling 650 acres of private property.

The locations of the specific components of the Proposed Action for irrigation infrastructure improvements and forest fuels management are discussed in **Chapter 1** and illustrated in **Figure 1**. Two of the 13 irrigation ditches that are part of the Proposed Action are located on USFS land, which are the Rush and Long Park Ditches. For these two ditches, irrigation infrastructure improvements would take place within the existing ditch easement. The USFS has determined that the installation of flumes, telemetry, relocated headgates, and improved diversions are maintenance activities, and no additional coordination or special use authorizations are necessary (therefore, they do not have a connected federal action requiring NEPA compliance) (**Appendix D**) The remaining eleven irrigation ditch project areas are on private land and are where the proposed irrigation infrastructure improvements would occur.

Forest fuels management components of the Proposed Action would occur on 4 private ranches which are the Brown/Reddert Ranch, RSL Ranch, Colyer Property, and G5 Ranch on 650 acres (**Figure 1**). Individual forest management plans were prepared for each ranch by professional foresters and are available under separate cover:

- Brown/Reddert Ranch Forest Stewardship Plan (Short, Bruce F. 2024)
- Colyer Property Forest Stewardship Plan (Short, Bruce F. 2024)
- G5 Ranch Forest Management Plan (Harris, Tara, R. Henke. 2025)
- RSL Forest Management Plan (Ramirez, Jesse. 2024)

Forest fuels treatment prescriptions correspond to the average size of the timber, quantity/quality of timber, and operability of each treatment area. Treatments also include a combination of light crown thinning, understory and ladder fuel thinning, and surface fuel reduction strategies based on best management practices for the region. The management and removal of snags and severely diseased and insect-infested trees are also included in the prescriptions for each of the four private ranches.

2.3.1 – Installation of Irrigation Infrastructure and Reconstruction of Existing Diversions

Under the irrigation infrastructure projects component of the Proposed Action, 10 of the locations proposed for new or replacement flumes, headgates, and telemetry equipment would be transported via pick-up truck or mini excavator to the specific location where the equipment would be installed. Those locations include the Crystal Creek Inlet Canal, Crystal Creek Outlet Canal, East Mancos Highline Canal, Field Diversion Ditch, Giles Ditch, Lee & Burke Ditch, Lee Ditch, Rush Ditch, and Weber Reservoir. No site-specific staging areas are necessary given the small footprint of the equipment to be installed.

Parshall or ramp Flumes (**Photos 1 and 2**) would be constructed of appropriate material (galvanized steel, stainless steel, mild steel (painted), or concrete), and typically installed on prepared subgrade, depending on soil type and conditions during installation. Flumes would be installed level front-to-back and side-to-side. Once leveled, flumes would be anchored in place for their anticipated lifespan, either through bedding / encasing in concrete, or with the use of an anchoring or leveling stand. Approach and exit side wing walls from the flume would tie-in to the ditch banks to direct all ditch flows through the flume and to prevent ditch bank erosion. Cutoff walls as well as a scour pad (typically concrete or grouted cobbles) would be installed to prevent head cutting. Upon installation, site cleanup and erosion control measures and revegetation would be implemented.

Photo 1. Typical Parshall flume installation



Photo 2. Typical ramp flume installation



Telemetry equipment stations (**Photo 3**) are self-contained systems that typically include electronic measuring equipment, cellular tower transmitter antenna, a solar panel, and a lockable steel or polycarbonate enclosure. The steel mast is typically anchored into the ground by a concrete footer. It is anticipated that the footer to support the telemetry equipment would be completed by hand. Telemetry stations may need to be installed in a location with sufficient solar exposure away from the measurement device, in which case shallow trenching (typically by hand) may be required between the measurement device and telemetry station. Temporary surface disturbance associated with the installation of this equipment would typically be less than 25 square feet.

Photo 3. Typical Telemetry Installation



A headgate is a control structure that regulates the rate of diversions into an irrigation ditch. Headgates are typically anchored to the opening of a concrete or steel headwall and should create a watertight seal when fully closed. Headgates allow for accurate adjustment of diversion rate and should include a means to secure the position, or amount open, to prevent unauthorized diversions or adjustment. Typical installation methods include setting concrete anchors or mounting bolts through the mounting holes on the headgate frame and sealing around the frame with non-shrink grout or other sealant materials.

Photo 4. Typical Headgate Installation



The estimated temporary surface disturbance for the irrigation infrastructure projects portion of the Proposed Action is summarized below (**Table 1**). Most of the earthwork for the installation of flumes, headgates, and telemetry projects would be completed with mini excavators and/or by hand.

Water diversion improvements at Long Park, No.6, Frank, and Willis ditches would be completed using tracked equipment. Construction staging would occur adjacent to the diversion structures, as well as along the two-tracks and roads that access the diversions. Environmental commitments would be followed to minimize effects on the natural and human environment during construction discussed in **Chapter 4**.

Proposed improvements associated with the Long Park Ditch infrastructure (located on USFS land) include reconstruction of the diversion, replacing the headgate, relocating the Parshall flume, and adding telemetry. All the Long Park Ditch proposed infrastructure improvements would occur within the USFS ditch easement.

Table 1. Irrigation Infrastructure Projects

Project Component	Proposed Activity	Estimated Surface Disturbance
Crystal Creek Inlet Canal	Add telemetry to existing flume	25 ft^2
Crystal Creek Outlet Canal	Add telemetry to existing flume	25 ft^2
East Mancos Highline Ditch	Add telemetry to existing flume	25 ft^2
Field Diversion Ditch	Replace Parshall flume	200 ft^2
Giles Ditch	Replace Parshall flume	200 ft^2
Lee & Burke Ditch	Replace Parshall & add telemetry	200 ft^2
Lee Ditch	Replace Parshall flume Replace headgate	400 ft^2
Long Park Ditch	Rebuild Diversion, replace headgate, relocate flume, & add telemetry	9,756 ft^2
Rush Ditch (Chicken Creek Split upstream of diversion)	Install ramp flume	1,500 ft^2
Rush Ditch (Chicken Creek Split downstream of diversion)	Install ramp flume	1,500 ft^2
Willis Ditch	Rebuild Diversion Replace Parshall flume	6,300 ft^2
Frank Ditch Diversion	Rebuild diversion	3,920 ft^2
Number 6 Ditch Diversion	Rebuild diversion	3,485 ft^2
Weber Reservoir	Add telemetry to determine reservoir level and new staff gauge	100 ft^2

Notes: No new access is necessary or proposed for this project. The existing access roads and two tracks may require maintenance (grading and vegetation trimming), but no new roads or two tracks are proposed. The proposed structures (flumes, headgates, and telemetry equipment) are located within the existing disturbance footprint of the ditches and would be maintained free of weeds and vegetation for ongoing inspection and maintenance needs.

2.3.2 – Forest Fuels Management Implementation

Forest fuels management treatments would include a combination of light crown thinning, understory and ladder fuel thinning, and surface fuel reduction strategies based on best management practices for the region. Forest fuels treatment prescriptions correspond to the average size of the timber, quantity/quality of timber, and operability of each treatment area.

Where crowns are connected, a light crown thinning would prevent fire propagation and transmission through the canopy. The crown thinning would target basal area retention metrics provided in the prescriptions with the goal of keeping the largest and healthiest fire-adapted overstory trees. The forest management plans and associated prescriptions for each ranch have specified the conditions for each site to determine removing trees that exhibit mortality, insect/disease, overtopped growth conditions, or other limiting factors.

Understory and ladder fuel thinning would prevent fire from climbing into the crowns, thereby allowing fire to move naturally on the forest floor. This typically encompasses removal of trees in the smaller size classes. These trees are defined by growth under the codominant and dominant tree canopy. Additionally, the understory species on these sites are mostly populated with shade-tolerant non-fire-adapted species, which pose increased fire intensity issues. For each ranch property the forest management prescriptions' retention species are identified to ensure that multi-age site forest types are created in the future with fire-adapted seed stock. Understory and ladder fuel removals are also accounted for in the overall basal area retention metrics called out in each prescription.

Ground and surface fuel mastication would redistribute the fuel loading on the ground to allow for faster decomposition over time, greater water retention in the soil, and decreased fire intensity. These actions in fuel reduction would allow for defensible fuel breaks and prevention of soil sterilization, post-fire debris flows, and other outcomes that affect the reliability of water transmission. The intended outcomes would be accomplished through mastication and lop and pile. Mastication would be utilized in areas where the overly dense wood is non-merchantable. Lop and scatter/pile would be utilized in areas where slope and terrain are unsuitable for operating tracked or tired equipment. Hand crews would be employed to thin overly dense forested areas. Forest fuels would be either piled or scattered, depending on the nature of the forest stand.

Additional mitigation measures associated with forest fuels management include minimizing surface disturbance, halting tree thinning activities when soils within the project area are too wet and would result in significant ruts, surface damage, and increased rates of soil erosion. All project components are readily accessible from existing roads, two-tracks, or the Long Park Ditch platform. No temporary roads would be necessary to complete the projects associated with the proposed action. All disturbed areas would be restored to original contours and revegetated following construction. For all aspects of the Proposed Action, Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be used to minimize impacts of the project on the human and ecological environments.

As outlined in the Proposed Action, the four ranches have specific forest management prescriptions which would reduce the risk of wildfire, thereby helping to protect water quality in the following watersheds:

- Lost Canyon Creek Watershed
- West Fork of the Mancos River Watershed

- Middle Fork of the Mancos River Watershed
- East Fork of the Mancos River Watershed
- Chicken Creek watershed.

Table 2. Forest Fuels Management Proposed Action Components

Project Location	Forest Type(s)	Proposed Activity	Treatment Type
Brown/Reddert Ranch	Ponderosa Pine, Gambel oak, Pinyon/Juniper	Forest fuels management on 241 acres. Reduce average stand density by 25%, remove 50% of oak, pinyon, and juniper. Pile slash to burn. Merchantable timber to be removed from acreage.	Hand crew/ mechanized.
RSL Ranch	Ponderosa Pine, Gambel oak, Pinyon/Juniper	Forest fuels management on 187 acres. Reduce average stand density by 19%. All oaks, pinyon, and juniper under ponderosa pine overstory to be masticated under ponderosa dripline or within 20' of the forest crown. Pile slash to burn. Logs would be cut, skidded, and decked for landowner utilization	Hand crew/ mechanized.
Colyer Property	Ponderosa Pine, Gambel oak, Pinyon/Juniper	Forest fuels management on 54 acres. Reduce average stand density by 45%, remove 50% of oak, pinyon, and juniper. Mastication and pile slash to burn. Logs would be cut, skid, and decked for landowner utilization	Hand crew/ mechanized.
G5 Ranch	Ponderosa Pine, Gambel oak, Pinyon/Juniper	Forest fuels management on 168 acres. Reduce average stand density between 37% and 43%. Remove all oaks under 3 feet in height. Pile slash to burn. Logs would be cut, skid, and decked for landowner utilization	Hand crew/ mechanized.

2.4 – Right-of-Way and Land Ownership

Lands associated with the irrigation infrastructure components of the proposed action are privately owned except for the Long Park Ditch and Rush Ditch infrastructure project locations, which are located on the San Juan National Forest and managed by the Dolores Ranger District. The portions of the Long Park and Rush ditches located on the National Forest operate within a 60-foot-wide ditch easement and proposed infrastructure improvements would occur within that easement. The Forest Fuels Management portions of the proposed action are located entirely on private land.

2.5 – Manpower and Equipment

For the irrigation infrastructure projects that involve Parshall flume, telemetry, and headgate installation, crew size would vary from 3 to 4 people. Specialized equipment would include pick-up trucks, ATVs, mini-excavators, or small backhoes. For the water diversion improvements, a 3 to 5 person crew is anticipated, and equipment would include a tracked excavator, dump trucks, and pick-up trucks. For the forest fuels management component of the Proposed Action, crew size would range from 4 to 5 people. Specialized equipment would include a feller buncher, wood processor, log skidder, log loader, and bulldozer.

2.6 – Access

During installation of the irrigation infrastructure components including diversion improvements, access would be via existing county roads, forest service roads, farm lanes, and two-tracks. For some locations, final access to existing flumes or headgates would occur by crossing pastures which may result in crushed or damaged herbaceous vegetation. No temporary roads would be required except for the Long Park Ditch diversion improvements. Access for the forest fuels management component would utilize existing access to the forested areas proposed for treatment. In areas where native soils have been disturbed during logging operations, the selected contractor would scarify and sow weed-free seed mixtures specified by MCD.

2.7 – Staging Areas

Staging areas would only be necessary for the four diversion improvement projects at Frank, Willis, No. 6, and Long Park Ditches. Staging would occur on existing two tracks and adjacent to the diversion work. Anticipated surface disturbance area, including staging equipment and construction material, is included in **Table 1**.

2.8 – Construction Timeframe

The irrigation infrastructure components of the Proposed Action, which includes the reconstruction of diversions for fish passage, as well as flume, headgate, and telemetry installations would take place after September 1st, 2026, and no instream work would occur between May 1st and August 31st. The forest fuels management component of the Proposed Action follows MBTA timing restrictions outlined in the San Juan National Forest Salter Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment (USFS, 2021). Understory forest fuels timing restrictions precludes the removal of Gambel oak and associated brush from April 1st through July 31st. Overstory tree clearing and crown thinning would follow USFWS raptor timing restrictions for Osprey and Coopers hawk requiring a ¼ mile buffer around the nest locations from March 1st through August 31st.

2.9 – Permits and Authorizations

2.9.1 – Agreements & Authorizations

The following interagency agreements are currently in place for the Proposed Action:

- USACE – Project components fall under the Clean Water Act Agricultural Exemption. USACE coordination letter is included in **Appendix B**.
- USFS – activities at Rush and Long Park Ditches would be completed within the existing ditch easements and have been determined to be exempt under maintenance.

- 2.9.2 – Construction Permits & Plans

Implementation of the Proposed Action would require a Montezuma County Floodplain Development Permit for all the agricultural infrastructure projects including the reconstruction of diversions, replacement of headgates, and the replacement or installation of flumes.

2.9.3 – Natural Resource Protection Laws

Compliance with all laws and Executive Orders (E.O.) are required prior to and during project implementation, including but not limited to:

Clean Air Act of 1963 (42 U.S.C. § 7401)

Endangered Species Act of 1973 as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531-1544, 87 Stat. 884)

Clean Water Act of 1972 as amended (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.)

Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-712)

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 (16 U.S.C. 668- 668c)

2.9.4 – Cultural Resource Laws

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.)

Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (16 U.S.C. 470aa-470mm et seq.)

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (25 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.)

American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978 (42 U.S.C. Public Law 95-341)

Archaeology and Historic Preservation: Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines (48 FR 44716)

CHAPTER 3 – AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 - Introduction

This chapter discusses resources that may be affected by the Proposed Action Alternative and the No Action Alternative. For each resource, the potentially affected area and/or interests are identified, existing conditions described, and potential impacts predicted under the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives. This section is concluded with a summary of impacts.

3.2 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

3.2.1 – Environmental Resources Considered but Excluded from Analysis

Issues determined to be of potential significance, and therefore appropriate for further impact analysis under this EA, are discussed in more detail in this Chapter.

The following issues were identified as not present or not affected, and are not analyzed further in this EA[2]:

Products Produced or Extracted from Federal Lands or the Outer Continental Shelf. No Federal lands or lands in the Outer Continental Shelf are involved with the Project. Therefore, neither the No Action Alternative, nor the Action Alternatives, would affect access to products produced or extracted there.

Recreation. The majority of the project locations are on private land that is utilized for agricultural activities and little to no recreational use occurs in those locations. The Long Park and Rush Ditch project components located on USFS and are also outside of areas that would be utilized for recreational purposes. The Proposed Action is not expected to have a discernible effect on recreation and, therefore, this resource is not carried forward for further analysis.

Indian Trust Assets and Native American Religious and Cultural Heritage Concerns. No Indian trust assets have been identified within the Proposed Action Area. No Native American sacred sites are known within the Proposed Action Area. Neither the No Action Alternative, nor the Proposed Action, would have an effect on Indian trust assets, Native American sacred sites, or Native American ways of life or cultural heritage and practices, including traditional land and water use

[2] 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.

and practices. To confirm this finding, Reclamation consulted with the tribes with historic presence in the region (Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Fort Belknap Indian Community of the Forst Belknap Reservation of Montana, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Navajo Nation, and the Southern Ute Indian Tribe). Reclamation provided the tribes with a description of the Proposed Action and a written request for comments regarding any potential effects on Indian trust assets or Native American sacred sites because of the Proposed Action. The Southern Ute Indian Tribe was the only tribal party to respond, and they indicated the project would have no adverse effect on identified properties of cultural and religious significance (**Appendix C**). The Proposed Action will have no effect to the way of life and cultural for Native Americans, including traditional land and water use and practices, and their cultural heritage

Wild & Scenic Rivers, Land with Wilderness Characteristics, or Wilderness Study Areas. No Wild and Scenic Rivers, land with wilderness characteristics, or Wilderness Study Areas exist in the Project Area. Therefore, neither the No Action Alternative nor the Action Alternatives, would have an effect on these resources.

Products produced or extracted from Federal lands or the Outer Continental Shelf. No products are produced in the Project areas on USFS (Federal) lands, and no lands in the Outer Continental Shelf are involved with the Project. Therefore, neither the No Action Alternative, nor the Action Alternatives, would affect access to products produced or extracted there.

All other resources considered and analyzed are presented in the remainder of this chapter. Environmental commitments necessary to mitigate the effects of the project on the human and natural environment are discussed in **Chapter 4**.

3.2.2 – Agricultural Resources and Soils

It is the policy of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to "maintain and keep current an inventory of the prime farmland and unique farmland of the Nation… the objective of the inventory is to identify the extent and location of important rural lands needed to produce food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops" (7 CFR 657.2). NRCS identifies categories of farmlands of national and statewide importance in the region, based on soil types and irrigation status. Tables 3 and 4 list soil types as provided by the NRCS soil survey.

Table 3. NRCS mapped soils in irrigation infrastructure treatment areas.

Project Component	Soil Type	Prime Farmland
Crystal Creek Inlet Canal	Granath-Fughes complex, 0 to 15 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Crystal Creek Outlet Canal	Granath loam, 3 to 6 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Prime farmland if irrigated

Project Component	Soil Type	Prime Farmland
East Mancos Highline Ditch	Dalmatian-Apmay-Schrader complex, 0 to 5 percent slopes, Partially Hydric	Not prime farmland
Field Diversion Ditch	Dalmatian-Apmay-Schrader complex, 0 to 5 percent slopes, Partially Hydric	Not prime farmland
Giles Ditch	Purcella loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes, Predominantly Nonydric	Not prime farmland
Lee & Burke Ditch	Dalmatian-Apmay-Schrader complex, 0 to 5 percent slopes, Partially Hydric	Not prime farmland
Lee Ditch	Fluvents-Fluvaquents complex, 0 to 3 percent slopes, Partially Hydric	Not prime farmland
Lee Ditch	Umbarg-Winner-Tesajo complex, 0 to 2 percent slopes, rarely flooded, Partially Hydric	Not prime farmland
Long Park Ditch	Sheek-Archuleta-Rock outcrop complex, 25 to 80 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Rush Ditch (Chicken Creek Split upstream of diversion)	Flygare-Foidel complex, 15 to 30 percent slopes, Predominantly Nonydric	Not prime farmland
Rush Ditch	NRCS Soil Survey Information is not available on USFS land.	-
Willis Ditch	Umbarg-Winner-Tesajo complex, 0 to 2 percent slopes, rarely flooded, Partially Hydric	Not prime farmland
Willis Ditch	Fluvents-Fluvaquents complex, 0 to 3 percent slopes, Partially Hydric	Not prime farmland
Frank Ditch Diversion	Purcella loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes, Predominantly Nonydric	Prime farmland if irrigated and drained
Frank Ditch Diversion	Umbarg-Winner-Tesajo complex, 0 to 2 percent slopes, rarely flooded,Partially Hydric	Prime farmland if irrigated and drained
Number 6 Ditch Diversion	Purcella loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes, Predominantly Nonydric	Not prime farmland

Project Component	Soil Type	Prime Farmland
Number 6 Ditch Diversion	Fluvents-Fluvaquents complex, 0 to 3 percent slopes, Partially Hydric	Not prime farmland
Weber Reservoir	Fivepine-Nortez complex, 0 to 15 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland

Table 4. NRCS mapped soils in forest fuel management areas

Project Location	Soil Type	Prime Farmland
Brown/Reddert Ranch	Argiustolls-Haplustalfs complex, 30 to 80 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Brown/Reddert Ranch	Fughes-Sheek complex, 15 to 30 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Brown/Reddert Ranch	Argiustolls-Haplustalfs-Rock outcrop complex, 30 to 80 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Brown/Reddert Ranch	Burnson loam, 1 to 15 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Brown/Reddert Ranch	Granath-Fughes complex, 0 to 15 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Brown/Reddert Ranch	Argiustolls-Haplustalfs-Rock outcrop complex, 30 to 80 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Brown/Reddert Ranch	Fortlewis stony fine sandy loam, 3 to 12 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Brown/Reddert Ranch	Burnson loam, 1 to 15 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
RSL Ranch	Ilex loam, 3 to 12 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
RSL Ranch	Sheek-Archuleta-Rock outcrop complex, 25 to 80 percent slopes, north aspect, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
RSL Ranch	Sheek-Archuleta complex, 6 to 25 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland

Project Location	Soil Type	Prime Farmland
RSL Ranch	Ilex-Pramiss-Falconry complex, 3 to 20 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
RSL Ranch	Ilex loam, 3 to 12 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Colyer Property	Fughes-Herm complex, 1 to 35 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Colyer Property	Granath loam, 3 to 6 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
Colyer Property	Falconry gravelly fine sandy loam, 3 to 25 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Partially in prime farmland if irrigated
Colyer Property	Ricot loam, 1 to 3 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Partially in prime farmland if irrigated
Colyer Property	Herm very cobbly loam, 15 to 40 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Partially in prime farmland if irrigated
Colyer Property	Sheek-Archuleta-Rock outcrop complex, 25 to 80 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Partially in prime farmland if irrigated
Colyer Property	Dalmatian-Apmay-Schrader complex, 0 to 5 percent slopes, Partially Hydric	Partially in prime farmland if irrigated
G5 Ranch	Argiustolls-Haplustalfs complex, 30 to 80 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
G5 Ranch	Fughes-Sheek complex, 15 to 30 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
G5 Ranch	Argiustolls-Haplustalfs-Rock outcrop complex, 30 to 80 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
G5 Ranch	Burnson loam, 1 to 15 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
G5 Ranch	Granath-Fughes complex, 0 to 15 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
G5 Ranch	Argiustolls-Haplustalfs-Rock outcrop complex, 30 to 80 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland
G5 Ranch	Fortlewis stony fine sandy loam, 3 to 12 percent slopes	Not prime farmland
G5 Ranch	Burnson loam, 1 to 15 percent slopes, Nonhydric	Not prime farmland

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative would have no effect on Prime Farmlands, Unique Farmlands, or Farmlands of Statewide Importance. Farmlands in the Project Area would continue to produce as in the past.

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action no farmland would be permanently removed from production because of the Proposed Action. No change in the configuration of irrigated lands currently served by the existing irrigation infrastructure would occur as a result of the Proposed Action and no interruption to agricultural production would occur. No part of the irrigation season is expected to be lost during implementation of the Proposed Action. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse effects on agricultural resources and soils due to implementing the Proposed Action.

3.2.3 – Air Quality

According to National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Montezuma County meets the requirements for an attainment area, meaning all criteria pollutants are at safe levels. Regulated air pollutants in the County, including carbon monoxide, particulate matter (PM 10 and 2.5), ozone, sulfur dioxide, lead, and nitrogen, are below specific limits set for criteria air pollutants under the Clean Air Act (EPA 2021). Montezuma County is consistently in attainment although regional air quality is increasingly degraded on a discrete and seasonal basis due to wildfire activity.

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no change in the existing level of air quality for the irrigation infrastructure or forest fuels management components of the project.

Proposed Action: During the construction phase of the Project, dirt work would result in particulate emissions and diesel emissions; however, releases would be temporary and minor (two to four pieces of construction equipment operating at the same time, at most, during the implementation phase). This is not significantly different from occasional local air quality impacts associated with ranching activities that require heavy equipment. Once construction is complete, there are no emissions associated with the Proposed Action and air quality at the specific project locations would return to pre-construction levels. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not have a significant adverse effect on air quality.

3.2.4 – Noise

Even though all the project components are located in rural agricultural settings, anthropogenic noise is present at detectable levels due to normal farm activity and traffic on the adjacent county roads. Current noise levels are relatively consistent year-to-year.

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no change in the existing level of anthropogenic noise at the different project locations.

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action, there would be additional noise introduced at each individual project location, due to the operation of construction equipment and associated

activities. The noise associated with the construction equipment/activities would be temporary (limited to the construction phase) and would be largely attenuated and mitigated by the presence of heavy vegetation surrounding all the project locations. After construction and installation of the project components are complete, noise levels would return to pre-construction levels. The Proposed Action would not have a significant adverse effect on noise.

3.2.5 – Noxious Weeds

The Colorado Noxious Weed Act designates undesirable plants that are considered a threat to Colorado's natural resources. Impacts from weed infestations include the loss of forage for wildlife and livestock, decreased availability of habitat for wildlife, and a loss of biodiversity relative to undisturbed areas. The individual ditch companies and ranches are responsible for complying with the Colorado Noxious Weed Act. Noxious weed surveys were conducted in the vicinity of all the proposed action components and no noxious weed infestations were noted. However, background concentrations of common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) were identified along the Long Park Ditch in the vicinity of the headgate and diversion. Common mullein is a List C species which are widespread and are not currently subject to requirements for eradication.

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action alternative, background concentrations of weeds would continue to exist at current levels throughout the agricultural and ranch lands included in the proposed action.

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action, any existing weeds currently in the Project areas may be spread to different project locations during the construction phase from pick-up trucks and other construction equipment, and existing weeds may be spread within the disturbed construction corridor. No imported fill is proposed, so new weed species currently absent in the surrounding area would not become established. The individual ditch companies would continue to be responsible for complying with the Colorado Noxious Weed Act, including obtaining appropriate pesticide use permits and managing listed weed species within the ditch easement.

Risk of expanded weed presence because of the Proposed Action would be mitigated by power-washing construction equipment to be sure it is free of soil and debris prior to entering the construction site, by timely weed treatment, and by re-establishing drought-tolerant, non-invasive vegetation within the portion of the disturbed corridor. The Proposed Action would not contribute to an increase in noxious weeds, due to the implementation of weed management measures as outlined in **Chapter 4**. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse effect to noxious weeds as a result of implementing the Proposed Action.

3.2.6 – Transportation and Public Safety

The major transportation resource in the vicinity of the Proposed Action is US Highway 160, Colorado State Highway 184, and the following Montezuma County Roads J, P8, 40, 41, 43, and 325. Private roads and county roads generally provide access and mobility for residents traveling in and out of the Proposed Action area locations. Wildfire within the forest fuels management area pose a safety risk for communities and landowners in the vicinity of the project area. The Montezuma County Sheriff, Southwest Health System ambulances in Mancos, and the Mancos

Fire Protection District service the project area. For the last five years, the project area has been growing in population at a rate of approximately 1% per year, resulting in minor increases in traffic volumes on local and county roads.

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no effect on transportation. Wildfire within the forest fuels management area would continue to pose a safety risk for communities and landowners in the vicinity of the project area.

Proposed Action: The proposed irrigation infrastructure project components are generally small and limited in nature and may involve small, short term local increases in truck traffic. Execution of the forest fuels management components would have similar impacts to county road traffic. However, once the proposed irrigation infrastructure and forest management activities are completed, traffic volumes would return to pre-existing conditions. The Proposed Action would not increase traffic levels and would not have a significant adverse effect to transportation.

The Montezuma County Sheriff, Southwest Health System ambulances in Mancos, and the Mancos Fire Protection District would continue to cover the Project area for emergency response and would not be hindered in their response. Implementation of the forest fuels management component of the Proposed Action would likely increase public safety by reducing the risk of wildfires for communities and landowners in the vicinity of the project area. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse effect to safety as a result of implementing the Proposed Action.

3.2.7 – Vegetation

The various irrigation infrastructure and forest fuels management projects occur in several vegetation community types including aspen groves, ponderosa pine, and lowland riparian ecosystems. The plant communities at proposed irrigation infrastructure and forest fuels management locations are summarized as follows:

- Crystal Creek Inlet Canal – Historically ponderosa pine forests, which is now mostly replaced with irrigated pastures and cottonwood trees growing along the irrigation ditch.
- Crystal Creek Outlet Canal – Historically Gambel oak shrublands, which is currently replaced with irrigated pastures and cottonwood trees growing along the irrigation ditch.
- East Mancos Highline Ditch – The diversion is located within a southwest facing aspen forest
- Field Ditch – The diversion and existing flume occur within the riparian plant community of the Mancos River.
- Frank Ditch – The diversion occurs within the riparian plant community of the Mancos River.
- Giles Ditch – The existing Parshall flume is located within the riparian plant community of the Mancos River.
- Lee and Burke Ditch – The existing diversion and Parshall flume occur within the riparian plant community of the Mancos River.
- Lee Ditch – The existing diversion and Parshall flume occur within the riparian plant community of the Mancos River.

- Long Park Ditch – The existing diversion and headgate occurs in a spruce/fir forest riparian corridor on USFS land.
- No. 6 (Sheek) Ditch – The existing diversion and headgate occur within the riparian plant community of the Mancos River.
- Rush Ditch - Chicken Creek Split – The existing diversion occurs on the edge of an aspen grove.
- Weber Reservoir – Vegetation surrounding the reservoir consists of a combination of ponderosa pine and Gambel oaks along with pasture that has been heavily grazed by cattle.
- Willis Ditch – The diversion occurs within the riparian plant community of the Mancos River.
- Brown/Reddert Ranch – The portions of the ranch proposed for forest fuel treatments consist of a ponderosa pine forest with Gambel oak and Rocky Mountain juniper shrub layer.
- RSL Ranch - Portions of the ranch proposed for forest fuel treatments consist of a ponderosa pine forest with Gambel oak and Rocky Mountain juniper shrub layer.
- Colyer Property - Portions of the ranch proposed for forest fuel treatments consist of a ponderosa pine forest with Gambel oak and Rocky Mountain juniper shrub layer.
  G5 Ranch - Portions of the ranch proposed for forest fuel treatments consist of a ponderosa pine forest with Gambel oak and Rocky Mountain juniper shrub layer

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no impact to existing plant communities. Minor ongoing maintenance, vegetation clearing, and weed treatment would continue along the existing irrigation infrastructure and ranchland.

Proposed Action: Impacts resulting from the irrigation infrastructure projects would be confined to the ditch easements. There would be no permanent loss of vegetation due to the use of existing access roads and the confinement of construction activity to the ditch alignment itself. For forest fuels management components of the Proposed Action would result in forest and associated understory clearing and are designed to improve ponderosa pine forest health by reducing understory ladder fuels and removing diseased vegetation, restoring the ponderosa forest's ability to withstand natural wildfire conditions. Given the implementation of BMPs associated with construction activities both during and after construction, the Proposed Action would have no significant, long-term effects on vegetation (or the passive use of ecosystems, including stewardship, existence values, and bequest values).

3.2.8 – Visual Resources

The viewshed for the proposed action consists of a variety of native plant communities including cottonwood tree dominated riparian vegetation along the Mancos River, Gambel oak-mixed montane shrublands, ponderosa pine woodlands, aspen woodlands, and irrigated pastures that are interspersed throughout the greater project area. The irrigation infrastructure improvements and forest fuel management treatment areas are primarily located on private lands and there is

no trend or reasonably foreseeable future action that would significantly change the level of visual impact in the area.

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative would have no effect on visual resources on private or USFS lands. Visual resources would remain unchanged.

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action, the level of change around the proposed irrigation infrastructure components and forest fuel management areas would result in no change to visual resources. Construction equipment and construction traffic would utilize the local road network over the short term and construction operations would be completely hidden from public view by surrounding vegetation and topography. The level of change after project implementation would be imperceptible. The Proposed Action would not result in visual resource impacts, due to the dispersed nature of the proposed action and the absence of long-term effects. Therefore, there would be no significant adverse effect on visual resources due to implementing the Proposed Action.

3.2.9 – Water Rights & Use

The use of irrigation water has been part of the history of the Mancos River Valley since the area was homesteaded during the 19th century.

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative would result in no changes in existing water rights and use.

Proposed Action: Implementation of the Proposed Action for the irrigation infrastructure projects would result in better water management of the existing water rights and would not result in a change of water rights in the geographic area served by MCD.

3.2.10 – Water Quality

One of the goals of the proposed action is to protect existing water quality within the Lost Canyon, Chicken Creek, and Mancos River watersheds by reducing the risks of severe wildfires by implementing the forest fuel management recommendations as outlined in **Chapter 2**. Overall water quality in the Mancos watershed has been sufficient to support a variety of agricultural activities since the 19th century. In addition, the aging irrigation infrastructure is inefficient at measuring and controlling irrigation water resulting in increases in erosion and sedimentation.

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, potential water quality impacts due to wildfire in the Mancos and Lost Canyon drainages would remain unchanged. Inefficient irrigation practices would continue for the 13 irrigation ditches that are included in the proposed action.

Proposed Action: Implementing the forest fuels management component of the proposed action would reduce the impacts of wildfires in the Mancos and Lost Canyon watersheds reducing the potential for high levels of erosion and sedimentation from entering the associated streams that flow through the ranch properties. The proposed irrigation infrastructure improvements would improve water quality by allowing more efficient control and measurement of water diverted for agricultural purposes reducing erosion and potential sedimentation.

3.2.11 – Surface Water

Within the project area, water for irrigation infrastructure components is obtained within the Mancos River and Chicken Creek Watersheds and then spread onto farms and fields (Table 5). Surface water features in the Project Area include irrigation ditches managed by private companies, including the Crystal Creek Inlet Canal, Crystal Creek Outlet Canal, East Mancos Highline Canal, Field Diversion Ditch, Giles Ditch, Lee & Burke Ditch, Lee Ditch, Long Park Ditch, Rush Ditch, Willis Ditch, and Frank Ditch. Current irrigation control structures associated with the Proposed Action have reached the end of their design life and are not capable of accurately measuring or controlling irrigation water. Water from Reclamation's Jackson Reservoir also contributes in varying proportions to the irrigation water supplied to the ditches listed above. Table 5 summarizes the streams, wetlands and reservoirs associated with the irrigation infrastructure and forest fuels management project components.

Under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), impacts to the Mancos River are regulated by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). In order to discuss the various project components of the Proposed Action, a pre-application conference was held with the USACE in November of 2025. The USACE determined that the project components qualify for the CWA agricultural exemption and provided a letter to MCD confirming that the proposed irrigation infrastructure improvements fall under the CWA agricultural exemption and no Section 404 permits would be necessary. This letter is included in **Appendix B**.

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action alternative, irrigation water delivery would continue for the 12 irrigation ditches that are part of the proposed action, and there would be no changes to surface waters associated with forest fuel management component of the proposed action.

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action, the irrigation infrastructure improvements would be installed allowing more precise measurement and distribution of existing irrigation water rights. Per the USACE consultation letter, no CWA permits would be necessary to implement the project. The Proposed Action would not decrease the quantity or quality of surface waters or wetlands.

Table 5. Wetlands and Waters of the US within Proposed Action

Watershed[(1)]	Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC)	Perennial Stream[(2)] (Miles)	Wetlands - NWI[(3)] (Acres)	Lakes/ Reservoirs[(4)] (Acres)
Chicken Creek	HUC12-140801070103	20	472	322
East Mancos River	HUC12-14080107014	12	16	2
Jackson Reservoir		2	209	223
Lost Canyon Creek	HUC12-140300020305	43	625	414

Middle Mancos River	HUC12-140801070101	15	39	7
Weber Reservoir		0	37	39
West Mancos River	HUC12-140801070102	33	200	62

Notes:

1) Basins delineated from USGS Stream Stats
2) Perennial streams sourced from USGS national hydrographic dataset
3) Wetlands sourced from US Fish & Wildlife national wetland inventory
4) Lakes/Reservoirs streams sourced from USGS national hydrographic dataset

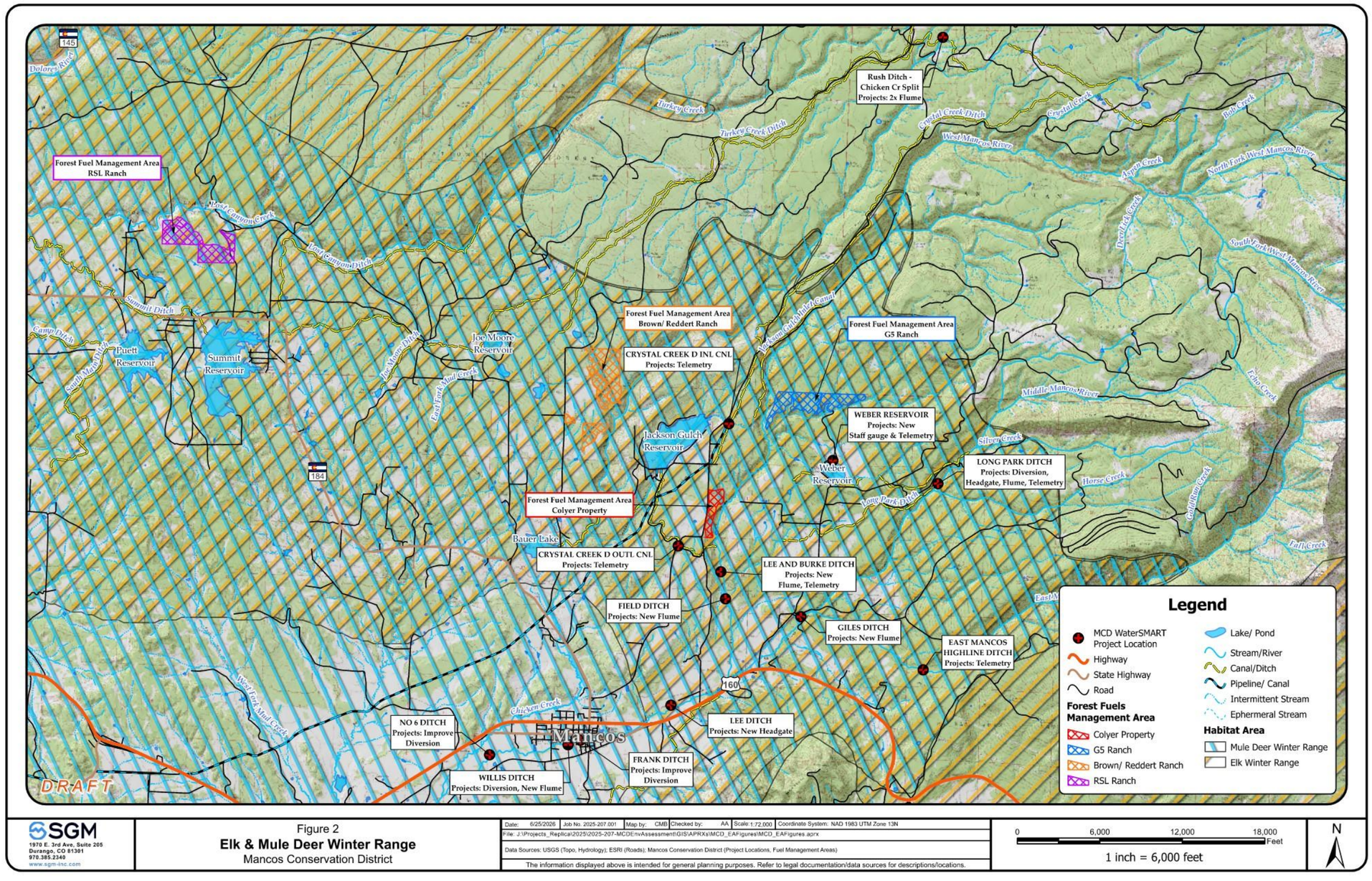
3.2.12 – Wildlife & Special Status Species

The Mancos, Chicken Creek, and Lost Canyon Watersheds in general are heavily vegetated with a variety of plant communities including upland ponderosa pine, Gambel oak, and aspen forests. Low elevation cottonwood galleries dominate the riparian plant communities along the stream and river channels, as described in section 3.2.7 Vegetation. Wildlife present in the area likely includes the entire suite of western Colorado mammal fauna, including elk, deer, fox, coyote, mountain lion, bear, and a wide range of small mammals. Migratory birds frequent the area, attracted by the perennial water sources and the diversity of vegetation types.

MCD has coordinated with CPW for the diversion designs, improving fish passage for the bluehead sucker, flannelmouth sucker, and roundtail chub. One of the major concerns for these species in the Mancos River watershed is reduced annual flows because of prolonged drought and agricultural diversions limiting the three fish species from being able to move up and down stream. The Willis, Frank, and No. 6 diversions are within the habitat range for the three fish and will incorporate CPW design criteria to the greatest extent possible and at the same time remaining consistent with FEMA and Montezuma County floodplain regulations improving fish habitat along the main stem of the Mancos River.

The majority of the Mancos River Watershed is mapped as mule deer and elk winter range (**Figure 2**). This is due to its proximity to water sources and offering lower winter snowpack depths and a variety of vegetation types for cover and browsing. The landscape is fragmented by the county road network, agricultural operations, residential homes, private roads, and driveways. However, the predominant cause of fragmentation is the abundant irrigated and unirrigated pasture lands. These pastures offer foraging opportunities for wildlife, but the abundant fences create barriers to free dispersal and habitat utilization.

Figure 2. Elk & Mule Deer Winter Range



SGM
1970 E. 3rd Ave, Suite 205
Durango, CO 81301
970.385.2340
www.sgm-inc.com

Figure 2
Elk & Mule Deer Winter Range
Mancos Conservation District

Date: 6/25/2026 | Job No. 2025-207.001 | Map by: CMB | Checked by: AA | Scale: 1:72,000 | Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 13N
File: J:\Projects_Replica\2025\2025-207-MCD\EnvAssessment\GIS\APRXs\MCD_EAFigures\MCD_EAFigures.aprx
Data Sources: USGS (Topo, Hydrology); ESRI (Roads); Mancos Conservation District (Project Locations, Fuel Management Areas)
The information displayed above is intended for general planning purposes. Refer to legal documentation/data sources for descriptions/locations.

0 6,000 12,000 18,000 Feet
1 inch = 6,000 feet

N

It is likely that deer and elk migrate through the Project Area for foraging in winter, and some amount of bedding occurs in the denser vegetation. Chicken Creek, west, middle, and east forks of the Mancos River support narrow riparian corridors. However, livestock fences are frequent barriers to natural movement throughout the area. In general, most of the Project Area has experienced significant levels of disturbance.

A Biological Memo has been prepared that provides an assessment of Special Status Species, including ESA-listed species, USFS Sensitive Species, and migratory birds including raptors within both the Irrigation Infrastructure Sites and the Forest Fuels Management Sites (SGM, 2026). The assessed species were selected based on the USFWS IPaC database, which was queried for each Project component individually (USFWS March 2026). The assessment includes twelve ESA-listed species (Canada lynx, gray wolf, Mexican spotted owl, yellow-billed cuckoo, southwestern willow flycatcher, Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback chub, bonytail, monarch butterfly, silverspot butterfly, and Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee) and one USFS Sensitive Species (northern goshawk) (Table 6).

Table 6. Summary of IPaC Federally Listed Species

Project Component	Canada Lynx	Gray Wolf	Mex. Spotted Owl	Yellow Billed Cuckoo	SW Willow Fly catcher	CO Pike Minnow	Razor back Sucker	Silverspot Butterfly	Suckley's Bumble bee	Monarch Butterfly
Crystal Creek Inlet	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Crystal Creek Outlet	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
East Mancos Highline	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Field Ditch		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Frank Ditch		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Giles Ditch		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Lee & Burke Ditch		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Lee Ditch		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Long Park Ditch	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
No. 6 (Sheek) Ditch		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Project Component	Canada Lynx	Gray Wolf	Mex. Spotted Owl	Yellow Billed Cuckoo	SW Willow Fly catcher	CO Pike Minnow	Razor back Sucker	Silverspot Butterfly	Suckley's Bumble bee	Monarch Butterfly
Rush Ditch, Chicken Creek	x	x				x	x	x	x	x
Weber Reservoir	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Willis Ditch		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Brown/Redderrt Ranch	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
RSL Ranch		x	x	x		X[2]	X[2]	x	x	x
Colyer Ranch	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
G5 Ranch	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

[1] BLUE cells are Irrigation Infrastructure components, GREEN cells are Forest Fuels Management components

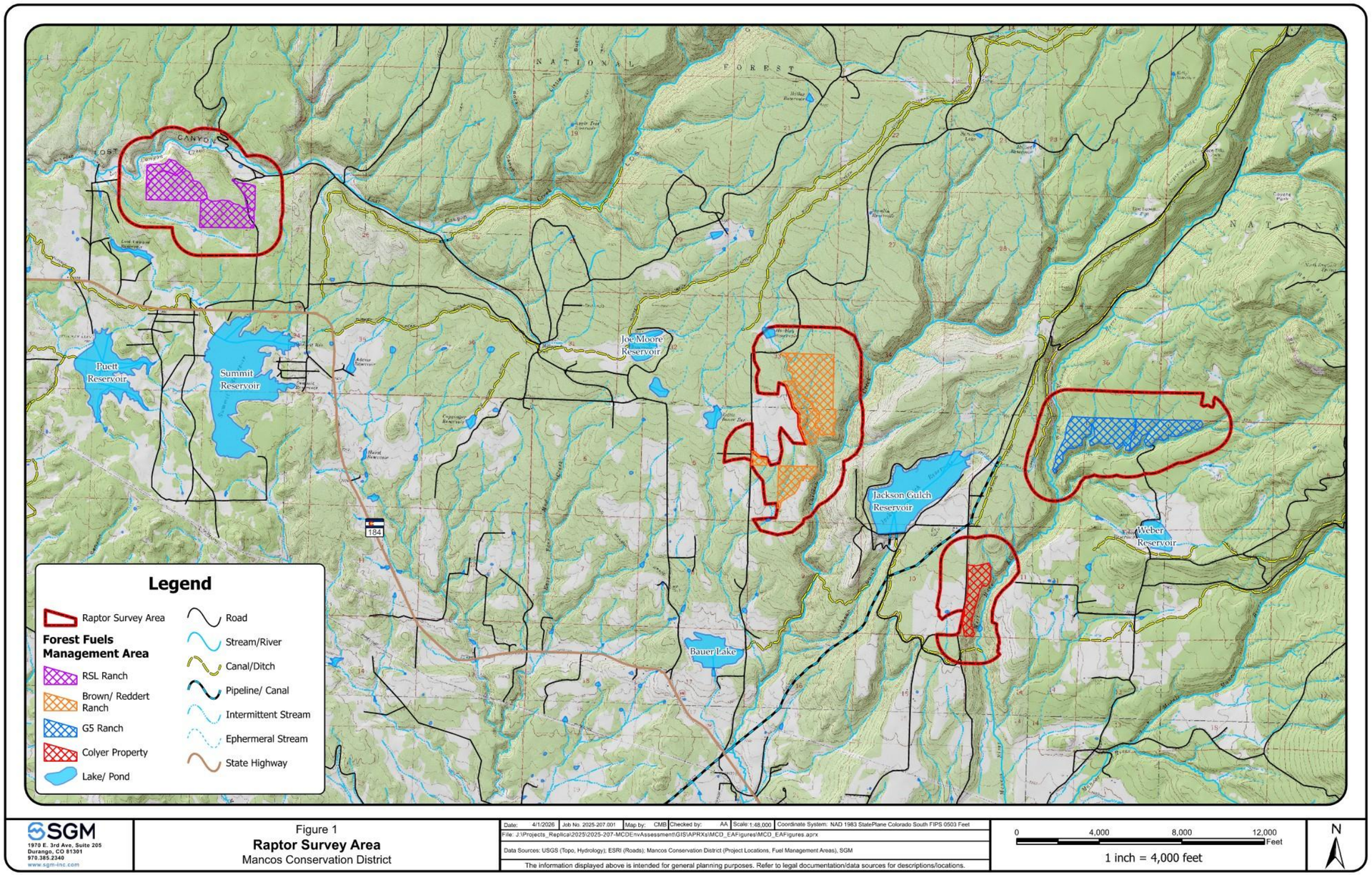
[2] RSL Ranch also includes Bonytail and Humpback Chub b/c of its location within the Dolores drainage

The following species were dismissed from analysis due to a lack of range or suitable habitat in the Project area, or the lack of jeopardy to Proposed/Experimental species: Canada lynx, gray wolf, Mexican spotted owl and silverspot butterfly. There would be *No Effect* to these species or their Critical Habitat.

Nesting Raptors: Two raptor nests were located, and nesting activity and territorial fidelity were confirmed during a comprehensive call-playback survey of the Project in 2025. The same protective timing restriction is recommended as for other sensitive species, consisting of a construction prohibition prior to September 1.

Nesting Raptor Survey:_A tree-nesting raptor survey was conducted for the four Forest Fuels Management components of the Project and the surrounding 0.25-mile radius. The survey was completed in June 2025. The buffer areas were constrained in some cases by landowners who refused access requests for the survey work. The survey map (**Figure 3**) indicates the actual spatial extent of the buffer areas included in the survey effort.

Figure 3. Raptor Survey Area



Two active nests were found during the survey, both showing clear evidence of mated pair bonding, site fidelity, and nesting activity. A map of the survey area is provided in **Figure 3**. Both sites are in the buffer areas and would not be directly affected by proposed fuels management activities.

A 0.5-mile area surrounding the four Fuels Management components was also assessed for potential cliff-nesting raptor habitat. There are no cliff formations visible within 0.5 miles that could support cliff-nesting raptors.

As discussed in Section 2.8, implantation of the irrigation infrastructure components of the Proposed Action would take place after September 1st, 2026. Due to the proximity of the ranches proposed forest fuels management to the San Juan National Forest, the Proposed Action follows MBTA timing restrictions outlined in the San Juan National Forest Salter Vegetation Management Project Environmental Assessment (USFS, 2021). Understory forest fuels timing restrictions precludes the removal of Gambel oak and associated brush from April 1st through July 31st. Overstory tree clearing and crown thinning would follow USFWS raptor timing restrictions for Osprey and Coopers hawk requiring a ¼ mile buffer around the nest locations from March 1st through August 31st on the Brown/Reddert and G5 Ranches.

After the fuel reduction prescriptions are implemented, there would be no ongoing/permanent disturbance within 0.25 miles of the nests. Project implementation on all project components occurs after September 1.

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no new effects on wildlife or special status species. The ditch companies and ranches would continue to operate as they have historically.

Proposed Action: Under the Proposed Action Alternative, small amounts of vegetation would be removed in the vicinity of the irrigation infrastructure components within the existing irrigation ditch prisms. A temporary increase in construction noise, dust, emissions, and a general increase in human activity would occur near the irrigation infrastructure components over the autumn construction season. Wildlife could be displaced by the increased human presence, though not during critical breeding seasons for most wildlife. The majority of the project area is within winter range for elk and deer established by the CPW and increased levels of human activity described above would be limited to the construction phase only. Once the Proposed Action is implemented, wildlife habitat would be substantially similar to pre-construction conditions. The implementation of the irrigation infrastructure improvements components are not expected to significantly degrade the habitat conditions that support winter elk and deer use, nor would the Proposed Action directly limit elk and deer use of the habitat during the winter.

The forest fuels management component of the Proposed Action would result in the loss of some wildlife habitat over the short-term and may limit the utilization in the treatment areas for elk and deer to some degree for a single autumn construction season. The Proposed Action would temporarily contribute to wildlife habitat disruption due to increased human activity during construction but would not contribute to any long-term trends in wildlife habitat loss after

construction is complete. The Proposed Action would not significantly affect the passive use of ecosystems, including stewardship, existence values, and bequest values.

The following Proposed or Experimental species were dismissed from analysis due to a lack of jeopardy: gray wolf, Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee, and monarch butterfly. There would be no potential to jeopardize the continued persistence of these species as addressed in more detail in the Biological Report (SGM, 2026). A minimal amount of vegetation removal is required for the irrigation infrastructure components of the proposed action resulting in little to no effect to the gray wolf, Suckley's cuckoo bumble bee, and monarch butterfly. The forest fuels management component of the proposed action would occur in ponderosa pine forests that typically do not support habitat for the bumble bee or the monarch butterfly. In addition, there is no gray wolf activity in Montezuma County, CO.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: There is no highly effective habitat for yellow-billed cuckoo in the riparian habitats encompassed within the various Project components. Vegetation removal for those Project components that occur in riparian corridors would be minimal due to the limited construction footprints of the proposed irrigation infrastructure upgrades. A conservation measure prohibiting riparian vegetation removal during the cuckoo's occupancy season (June 1 – August 31) is included to ensure that no indirect impact occurs to incidental migrating or foraging individuals. All riparian vegetation removal would be confined to the time period outside the cuckoo's occupancy season. Construction of the infrastructure components of the Proposed Action would no directly impact cuckoo habitat. There would be *No Effect* to the species based on the implementation of these conservation measures.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher: There is no highly effective habitat for the southwestern willow flycatcher in the riparian areas within the various Project components, which generally consist of modified/agricultural settings without sufficient density to support nesting. Vegetation removal for those Project components that occur in riparian corridors would be minimal due to the limited construction footprints of the proposed irrigation infrastructure upgrades. A conservation measure prohibiting riparian vegetation removal during the flycatcher's occupancy season (May 1 – August 31) is included to ensure that no impact occurs to nesting or foraging individuals, and that minor impacts to potential habitat would occur outside of the species' occupancy window. All riparian vegetation removal would be confined to the time period outside the Southwest Willow Flycatcher occupancy season. Construction of the infrastructure components of the Proposed Action would no directly impact cuckoo habitat. There would be *No Effect* to the species based on the implementation of these conservation measures.

Colorado River Endangered Fish: The Project area does not lie within the ranges of the Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback chub, and bonytail. Based on previously issued programmatic biological opinions that all depletions within the Upper Colorado and San Juan River Basins may adversely affect the four fishes, it is expected that the Proposed Action *May Affect, and is Likely to Adversely Affect*, the Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback chub, and bonytail. However, adverse effects resulting from these water depletions are mitigated by the Upper Colorado River Basin Endangered Fish Recovery Program and the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program ("Recovery Programs"), per the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) 1999 Colorado River Programmatic Biological Opinion and the USFWS' 1991

Animas-La Plata Project Biological Opinion (BOs). There would be no new effect to the Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback chub, and bonytail. In addition, MCD has coordinated with CPW on the diversion designs improving fish passage for the bluehead sucker, flannelmouth sucker, and roundtail chub Willis, Frank, and No. 6 diversions over existing conditions.

Colorado River Endangered Fishes Critical Habitat: Consumptive loss of water in the Upper Colorado and San Juan River basins due to agricultural irrigation practices resulting in depletions from those basins, affecting downstream critical habitat for the listed fish species. The estimated historic average annual depletion rate due to operation of the Irrigation Infrastructure components totals 1,639 acre-feet. This amount would not change as a result of the irrigation infrastructure project components. Water depletions to critical habitat for Colorado River endangered fishes are also mitigated by the Recovery Programs. There would be no new effect to the Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback chub, and bonytail critical habitat.

Northern Goshawk: A single Project component (Rush Ditch) occurs on USFS land at suitable elevation and in proximity to potential nesting habitat to warrant consideration of this USFS Sensitive Species. No direct impact is proposed to any suitable foraging or nesting habitat. The same protective timing restriction is recommended as for other sensitive species, consisting of a construction prohibition prior to September 1, to ensure that no indirect impact occurs to occupied habitat in areas within 0.5 miles of the Rush Ditch site.

3.2.13 – Cultural Resources

Cultural resources are defined as physical or other expressions of human activity or occupation. Such resources include culturally significant landscapes, prehistoric and historic archaeological sites, isolated artifacts or features, traditional cultural properties, Native American and other sacred places, and artifacts and documents of cultural and historical significance. Woods Canyon Archaeological Consultants conducted a Class III cultural resource inventory of the proposed action's Areas of Potential Effect (McAndrews, Kelly. 2026). The proposed construction disturbance areas, access roads, and the proposed staging area, were inventoried.

Seven cultural resource sites were documented as a result of the Class III survey. Six of the sites are recommended or have been determined to be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (HRHP). Five sites are linear resource segments, all of which are eligible. None of the linear site segments support the eligibility of the entire linear resource. Twelve isolated finds were recorded, and none are recommended for eligibility to the NRHP.

The goal of the cultural resource survey was to provide recommendations for managing eligible cultural resources in proximity to the proposed undertakings. The proposed project modifications to water infrastructure are in alignment with guidance in the Colorado Statewide Programmatic Agreement on Water Control Features of 2022 between Reclamation and the State Historic Preservation Office. The project would have no adverse effect to historic properties, and no protection measures are necessary.

No Action Alternative: Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no changes to existing conditions, and no effect on cultural resources.

Proposed Action: There would be no adverse effects to historic properties as a result of implementing the Proposed Action, including impacts to education and knowledge, learning and interpretation, and research opportunities. Reclamation consulted with SHPO on the project's effect determination, and the SHPO concurred in an August 14, 2026 letter that the Proposed Action would have no adverse effect to historic properties (**Appendix C)**.

3.3 – Summary

Table 7 provides a summary of environmental consequences for the resources evaluated in this EA. Resource impacts are outlined for both the No Action and the Proposed Action Alternatives.

Table 7. Summary of Impacts for the Proposed Action

Resource	Impacts: No Action Alternative	Impacts: Proposed Action Alternative
Agricultural Resources and Soils	No Effect	No farmland would be permanently removed from production. No change in the configuration of irrigated lands. No interruption to agricultural production. No part of the irrigation season would be lost.
Air Quality	No Effect	Dirt work would result in particulate emissions and diesel emissions; however, releases would be temporary and minor. No change from existing conditions once construction is complete.
Noise	No Effect	Increased noise during construction phase, largely screened by topography and vegetation. No permanent change in noise levels.
Noxious Weeds	Continued weed pressure due to annual maintenance/ ground disturbance.	Weed pressure would increase temporarily during the installation of the Proposed Action due to expanded ground disturbance associated with construction. With revegetation efforts and weed mitigation, effects are expected to be short-term and minor and would not contribute to regional weed abundance.
Transportation & Public Safety	Wildfire within the forest fuels management area would continue to pose a safety risk for communities and landowners in the vicinity of the project area.	During the implementation phase of the Proposed Action, there would be minor increases in traffic on the county road network. Emergency services would not be hindered in their response. Implementation of the forest fuels management component of the Proposed Action would likely increase public safety by reducing the risk of wildfires.

Resource	Impacts: No Action Alternative	Impacts: Proposed Action Alternative
Vegetation	No Effect; continued sporadic treatment and clearing of riparian vegetation along ditches	All vegetation disturbance would occur within the ditch prisms for the irrigation infrastructure component of the project. There would be no permanent loss of vegetation. Forest fuels thinning would occur on four private ranches which would reduce wildfire risks and increase forest health. Areas disturbed would be revegetated after construction.
Visual Resources	No Effect	There would be no change to visual resources. Construction equipment and construction traffic would utilize the local road network over the short-term and construction operations would be completely hidden from public view by surrounding vegetation and topography. The level of change after project implementation would be imperceptible.
Water Rights & Use	No Effect	The irrigation infrastructure projects would result in better water management of the existing water rights.
Water Quality	No Effect	Beneficial effects on water quality. Implementing the forest fuels management would reduce the impacts of wildfires in the Mancos and Lost Canyon watersheds, reducing the potential for high levels of erosion and sedimentation from entering the associated streams. The irrigation infrastructure improvements would allow more efficient control and measurement of water diverted for agricultural purposes, reducing erosion and potential sedimentation.
Surface Water	No change to surface water	The irrigation infrastructure improvements would allow more precise measurement and distribution of existing irrigation water rights.

Resource	Impacts: No Action Alternative	Impacts: Proposed Action Alternative
Wildlife & Special Status Species	No changes to the existing levels of anthropogenic disturbance.	A temporary increase in construction noise, dust, emissions, and a general increase in human activity would occur near the irrigation infrastructure components over the autumn construction season. Wildlife could be displaced by the increased human presence, though not during critical breeding seasons for most wildlife. Once the Proposed Action is implemented, wildlife habitat would be substantially similar to pre-construction conditions. There would be no effect to any federally listed threatened and endangered species. There would be no new effect to the Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, humpback chub, and bonytail critical habitat.
Cultural Resources	No Effect	There would be no adverse effects to historic properties, including impacts to education and knowledge, learning and interpretation, and research opportunities. SHPO's consultation confirms that the proposed action would result in no adverse effect to historic properties and is included in **Appendix C.**

CHAPTER 4 – ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS

This section summarizes the design features, BMPs, conservation measures, and other requirements (collectively, "Environmental Commitments") developed to further lessen the potential adverse insignificant effects of the Project. The actions in the following environmental commitment list would be implemented as an integral part of the Project and shall be included in any contractor bid specifications.

Note that in the event there is a change in the Project description, or any construction activities are proposed outside of the inventoried Project Area or the planned timeframes outlined in this EA, additional environmental review by Reclamation would be required to determine if the existing surveys and information are adequate to evaluate the changed project scope. Additional NEPA documentation may be required.

Table 8. Summary of Environmental Commitments

Environmental Commitment	Affected Resource	Authority
1. The irrigation infrastructure components of the Proposed Action will not interfere with water allocation, including winter stock water allocation, nor create any changes in allocation of water shares.	Water Rights & Use	Colorado Water Rights Protection Act
2. All irrigation infrastructure construction activities will be confined to existing ditch easements.	Access and Transportation	National Environmental Policy Act
3. All construction equipment will be power-washed and free of soil and debris prior to entering the construction site to reduce the spread of noxious and invasive weeds.	Noxious Weeds	Colorado Noxious Weed Act
4. Timely and consistent weed treatment will occur within the areas proposed for infrastructure improvements or wildfire fuels treatment.	Noxious Weeds	Colorado Noxious Weed Act

Environmental Commitment	Affected Resource	Authority
5. The individual ditch companies, ranches, and MCD will continue to be responsible for complying with the Colorado Noxious Weed Act and will obtain appropriate pesticide use permits in accordance with Section 402 of the Clean Water Act.	Noxious Weeds	Colorado Noxious Weed Act, Clean Water Act
6. In the event that threatened or endangered species are discovered during construction, construction activities shall halt until consultation is completed with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and protection measures are implemented.	Wildlife & Special Status Species	Endangered Species Act
7. If a change in plans will require work outside of areas inventoried for threatened and endangered species, Reclamation will be consulted to determine if additional surveys are required.	Wildlife & Special Status Species	Endangered Species Act
8. Woody vegetation removal will not occur between April 1 and August 15 to avoid effects to raptors and migratory birds. Pre-construction raptor and migratory bird surveys will be required if any vegetation clearing activities are required between April 1 and July 15 due to project contingencies.	Wildlife & Special Status Species	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
9. Riparian vegetation removal will not occur between June 15 and August 15 to avoid effects to federally-listed yellow-billed cuckoo. Pre-construction cuckoo surveys will be required if any riparian vegetation clearing activities are required between June 15 and August 15 due to project contingencies.	Wildlife & Special Status Species	Endangered Species Act
10. (Appendixwith input from CPW.	Wildlife & Special Status Species	Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Program

Environmental Commitment	Affected Resource	Authority
11. If a previously unknown active raptor nest is discovered within 1/2 mile of the Project Area during construction, construction shall cease until Reclamation can complete consultations with FWS and CPW.	Wildlife & Special Status Species	Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940
12. Monitoring and continued revegetation would occur as soon as practical following project construction, to prevent the establishment and spread of noxious weed populations.	Vegetation, Noxious Weeds	Colorado Noxious Weed Act
13. If previously undiscovered cultural or paleontological resources are discovered during construction, construction activities must immediately cease in the vicinity of the discovery and Reclamation must be notified. If the discovery is on USFS lands, USFS must be notified as well. In any event, the SHPO shall be consulted, and work shall not be resumed until consultation has been completed.	Cultural Resources	National Historic Preservation Act
14. Construction limits will be shown on plans provided to the contractors, and the limits of irrigation ditch easements on USFS land will be flagged. Ground disturbance and vegetation removal will be limited to the smallest portion of the Proposed Action area necessary to safely implement the project.	Agricultural Resources and Soils; Vegetation	National Environmental Policy Act
15. Existing access roads will be used to access construction, staging and stockpile areas. No new roads will be constructed.	Agricultural Resources and Soils; Vegetation	National Environmental Policy Act
16. Topsoil will be stockpiled and re-distributed after construction, to facilitate revegetation success.	Agricultural Resources and Soils; Vegetation	National Environmental Policy Act
17. Soil erosion will be minimized by using erosion control measures at the edges of ground disturbances.	Agricultural Resources and Soils; Vegetation	Colorado Water Quality Control Act

Environmental Commitment	Affected Resource	Authority
18. A non-invasive, drought-tolerant seed mix will be developed in coordination with adjacent landowners to revegetate areas disturbed by the project that do not require maintenance in a vegetation-free state (inspection road, etc.)	Agricultural Resources and Soils; Vegetation	National Environmental Policy Act
19. Straw wattles, silt curtains, cofferdams, dikes, straw bales, or other suitable erosion control measures shall be used to prevent erosion from entering water bodies during construction.	Water Quality	Clean Water Act of 1972 as amended

CHAPTER 5 – CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

5.1 – Introduction

Reclamation's public involvement process presents the public with opportunities to obtain information about a given project and allows interested parties to participate in the project through written comments. This chapter discusses public involvement activities taken to date for the Proposed Action.

5.2 – Public Involvement

Notice of the public review period and availability of the Draft EA was distributed to private landowners adjacent to the Proposed Action, and the organizations and agencies listed below. The Draft EA was made available for public review on Reclamation's website. Publicly available electronic versions of the Draft EA meeting the technical standards of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were also made available so that the documents can be accessed by people with disabilities using accessibility software tools. Comments received and Reclamation responses to all comments are in **Appendix A**.

Agency
Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Colorado Water Conservation Board
Colorado Dept. of Archaeology and Historic Preservation
Apache Tribe of Oklahoma
Fort Belknap Indian Community of the Fort Belknap Reservation of Minnesota
Navajo Nation
Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Ute Mountain Ute
Colorado River Water Conservation District
Montezuma County Planning and Development

Agency
Montezuma County Road and Bridge
Montezuma County Commissioners
Empire Electric Association
The Journal
114 Landowners adjacent to the Proposed Action

CHAPTER 6 – PREPARERS

The following list contains the individuals who participated in the preparation of this EA.

Name	Agency	Title
Jennifer Ward	Bureau of Reclamation	Environmental Group Chief
Zachary Nelson	Bureau of Reclamation	Archaeologist
Alex Nees	SGM, Inc.	Senior Scientist I
Andrew Antipas	SGM, Inc	Senior Scientist II

CHAPTER 7 – REFERENCES

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CHAPTER 8 – ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviation or Acronym	Definition
APE	Area of Potential Effect
ATV	All-Terrain Vehicle
CDPHE	Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
CPW	Colorado Parks and Wildlife
CWA	Clean Water Act
EA	Environmental Assessment
EO	Executive Order
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
HUC	Hydrologic Unit Code
MCD	Mancos Conservation District
MBTA	Migratory Bird Treaty Act
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
Reclamation	U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Officer
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture

Abbreviation or Acronym	Definition
USFS	United States Forest Service
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	United States Geological Survey

APPENDIX A – Public Comment

Three comment letters were received during the comment period. The comment letters 3 distinct, substantive comments. The comments were primarily focused on Clean Water Act permitting requirements and potential project benefits to three native fish.

Reclamation reviewed each comment and classified them according to topic or comment category below. Summary comments and consolidated responses follow. Changes were made to supplement, improve, or modify the EA as a result of these comments and the reader is referred to the section of the EA where the changes occurred. References to sections in the Final EA where changes are not described indicate that the information was present in the Draft EA and no changes were necessary to address the comment in the Final EA.

Category: Clean Water Act Permitting

Comment Number: 1

Summary comment: The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) commented that the project proponent should work directly with the USACE to acquire necessary Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permits, if applicable.

Response: Reclamation previously coordinated with the USACE on this project, and the USACE determined in a March 13, 2026 letter that the proposed project activities fall under a CWA exemption and therefore no Section 404 permit is required for this project (see Appendix B). No change has been made in the Final Environmental Assessment.

Category: Fish

Comment Numbers: 2, 3

Summary comment: Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) commented that the Mancos River supports Colorado's "3-Species" fish species: bluehead sucker (*Catostomus discobolus*), flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*), and roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*). CPW identified that the combination of ongoing drought and agricultural diversions have the combined effect of limiting these species' ability to move up and down stream, and requested Reclamation consult with CPW to incorporate design criteria in the diversions associated with the proposed project to ensure CPW fish passage criteria are met. CPW also requested that all in-stream construction work occur outside of the May 1 – August 31 spawning season.

Response: The described movement issue is an existing issue due to ongoing drought conditions and existing diversions. Reclamation discussed CPW's design requests with the applicant, and the applicant is working with CPW on the current water diversion designs for Willis, Frank, and No. 6 diversions which would improve fish passage over current conditions for the bluehead sucker, flannel mouth sucker, and roundtail chub. Section 3.2.12 of the Final EA has been updated to describe the fish movement issue and how the proposed project would have a beneficial effect on the existing issue.

The Draft EA identified the in-stream construction work as occurring after September 1. Section 2.8 of the Final has been updated to clarify that no in-stream work would occur during the May 1 – August 31 spawning season. This timing restriction has also been included as an environmental commitment in the Final EA.

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] RE: Availability of Draft EA - Mancos Water Conservancy District's Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project

From SPA-RD-CO <SPA-RD-CO@usace.army.mil>
Date Thu 8/13/2026 9:12 AM
To Ward, Jennifer K <jward@usbr.gov>; CESPA-RD <cespa-rd@usace.army.mil>

This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.

Comment 1

Hello,
Thank you for requesting comment from our office regarding proposed projects or activities that may have the potential to impact aquatic resources. Therefore, the project proponent should work directly with our office to acquire necessary Corps permits, if applicable, as described in following general comment.

Our regulatory jurisdiction is under the authority of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act for the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States. Project features that result in the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States will require Department of the Army authorization prior to starting work.

Project proponents should submit requests through the Regulatory Request System at https://rrs.usace.army.mil/ .

Please note, our email address has been updated to cespa-rd@usace.army.mil . Please update your contact information as former email addresses will be discontinued in the near future.
Sincerely,
Albuquerque District Regulatory Team

From: Ward, Jennifer K <jward@usbr.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2026 9:58 AM
To: Ireland, Terry <terry_ireland@fws.gov>; SPA-RD-CO <SPA-RD-CO@usace.army.mil>; chad.cherefko@usda.gov; brian.magee <brian.magee@state.co.us>; rebecca.mitchell@state.co.us; Caleb Foy <cfoy@crwcd.org>; Raquel Flinker <rflinker@crwcd.org>; planning@co.montezuma.co.us; road@co.montezuma.co.us; tanderson@co.montezuma.co.us; contactus@eea.coop; news@the-journal.com; Foote, Peter <peter.foote@state.co.us>
Subject: [Non-DoD Source] Availability of Draft EA - Mancos Water Conservancy District's Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project

Hello,

Please find attached a letter announcing the availability of the Draft Environmental Assessment for Mancos Water Conservancy District's Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project.
The public comment period extends through Friday, September 11, 2026.

Thank you,
Jenny

Jenny Ward
Environmental Group Chief
Western Colorado Area Office
Bureau of Reclamation
(970) 248-0651

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] Re; Draft EA, Mancos, CO, from Jerry Gunter

From JER G <jrgunter3@yahoo.com>
Date Fri 9/11/2026 3:16 PM
To Ward, Jennifer K <jward@usbr.gov>

This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.

My name is Jerry Gunter. My property is at 42699 Hwy 160 near Mancos, CO. My water is the first head-gate off the Weber Ditch.

This presents a great many issues to deal with.Among them are:

- Presently there is what appears to be a stabilizing barrier across my head-gate which i presume is to reduce the pressure on the bank.

- I am a disabled person that has many challenges, one being the ditch is up hill and across the highway where the water has to be filtered and piped under the U.S. Highway.
I tried to get my water into the Ratliff & Root ditch, which runs thru my property and has recently been put in pipe. Another issue is the damage to my fields from the lack of proper filling following the piping of the Ratliff & Root water. If these issues were possible I would be much more abled and the land better used. Perhaps your organization can find better or different solutions to these difficulties.
Thank You All for all that you do!

Mr. Gunter's comments are not in reference to work proposed under this Environmental Assessment (EA) and therefore are not considered to be substantive comments requiring response under this EA.

Please call or stop-by anytime.
Sincerely,
Jerry Gunter
(970) 749-0484

COLORADO
Parks and Wildlife
Department of Natural Resources

Southwest Region Office
415 Turner Drive
Durango, CO 81301
P 970.375.6703 | F 970.375.6705

September 15, 2026

Mr. Bart Deming
Area Manager- Western Colorado Area Office
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
445 West Gunnison Avenue, Suite 221
Grand Junction, Colorado 81501

RE: Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project- Draft Environmental Assessment

Dear Mr. Deming,

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the Western Colorado Area Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) regarding the proposed Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project Draft Environmental Assessment (Draft EA). CPW has a statutory responsibility to manage all wildlife species in Colorado; this responsibility is embraced and fulfilled through CPW's mission to perpetuate the wildlife resources of the state, to provide a quality state parks system, and to provide enjoyable and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities that educate and inspire current and future generations to serve as active stewards of Colorado's natural resources. CPW has reviewed the Draft EA and offers the following comments to minimize potential impacts on wildlife from this project.

The proposed projects are located at 17 different locations on both public (U.S. Forest Service) and private lands in Montezuma County, primarily northeast of Mancos, Colorado. The lands are inhabited by diverse wildlife, including mountain lion, black bear, wild turkey, mule deer, elk, migratory birds, and various raptor species. The current open ditches provide additional water sources for wildlife during the irrigation season (April-October) and leakage/seepage from the ditches supports the surrounding vegetation, therefore CPW appreciates that these ditches will be left open and will continue to provide

Laura Clellan, Director, Colorado Parks and Wildlife
Parks and Wildlife Commission: James 'Jay' Tutchton, Chair · Gabriel Otero, Vice-Chair
Jessica Beaulieu · Frances Silva Blayney · Tai Jacober · John Le Coq ·
Peter Maguire · Dallas May · Jack Murphy · Rebecca 'Becky' Niemiec · Richard Reading

an additional water source to wildlife. The Mancos River also supports Colorado's "3-Species" fish species: bluehead sucker (*Catostomus discobolus*), flannelmouth sucker (*Catostomus latipinnis*), and roundtail chub (*Gila robusta*). These three native fish are endemic to the Upper Colorado River Basin and its tributaries, including the Mancos River watershed.

The proposed project would involve upgrading agricultural diversion structures, replacing aging flumes and headgates, installing remote metering and telemetry equipment, and performing 650 acres of fuels thinning on private land. Overall project objectives include improving the efficiency of water delivery infrastructure, and ultimately improving water quality in the Colorado River Watershed. CPW applauds Reclamation's efforts to invest significantly in water infrastructure in the Mancos River watershed.

While CPW supports these water efficiency infrastructure and fuels thinning projects, the aquatic environment and native fisheries, specifically the 3-Species, could see even greater benefits through implementation of the following project elements:

Comment 2

- As discussed, the Mancos River, particularly the mainstem below the confluences of the Middle Fork, West Fork, and East Fork, supports valuable 3-Species habitat, with very little to no introgression from white suckers and very few, if any, non-native predators for competition. One of the major concerns for these species in the Mancos River watershed is reduced annual flows as a result of prolonged drought and agricultural diversions. These two factors have combined to further limit these species' ability to move up and down stream[1]. Ditches along the mainstem of the Mancos River with proposed diversion rebuilds, such as the Frank Ditch, Willis Ditch, and No. 6 Ditch, are all in 3-Species habitat. These diversions should all be designed and constructed to allow for native fish passage. The design criteria for the 3-Species are more rigorous than what trout may require, therefore CPW requests that Reclamation consults with CPW regarding diversion structure design to ensure that passage criteria are met.
    - Generally, the design criteria should be no more than a 5% gradient, and an average velocity of 2.5 feet/second (not to exceed 4 feet/second) under various flow conditions. Increased roughness and the creation of vortices and resting zones can also help facilitate small bodied fishes and juveniles passing structures.

Comment 3

- To avoid critical spawning times for native fish such as the speckled dace and the 3-Species, which begin spawning in the spring and continue through summer[2], CPW recommends that all in-stream construction occur outside of May 1st-August 31st.

[1]Natural Resource Conditions at Mesa Verde National Park: Findings and Management Considerations for Selected Resources. https://doi.org/10.36967/2311540

[2]Range-Wide Conservation Agreement and Strategy for Roundtail Chub, Bluehead Sucker, and Flannelmouth Sucker. https://ocs.fortlewis.edu/drd/pdf/Appendix-D%20_Rangewide-3-Species-Conservation-Agreement_3-7-12.pdf

CPW appreciates the opportunity to be actively involved throughout this planning process and would happily discuss this project and our recommendations at any time. If you have any questions, please contact Land Use Coordinator, Tucker Feyder, at (970) 375-6716.

Sincerely,

Brian Magee - SWR

Brian Magee
Senior Resource Manager
Southwest Region

CC:
Jenny Ward, Environmental Group Chief, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
SW Region File; Area 15 File

APPENDIX B – US Army Corps of Engineers

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS ALBUQUERQUE DISTRICT REGULATORY DIVISION
SOUTHERN COLORADO BRANCH, DURANGO OFFICE
1970 EAST 3RD AVENUE, SUITE 109
DURANGO, COLORADO 81301-5025

January 16, 2026

Regulatory Division

SUBJECT: No Permit Required (SPA-2025-00442)

Mancos Conservation District
Attention: Danny Margoles
604 Bauer Avenue
PO Box 694
Mancos, CO 81328
Danny@mancoscd.org

Dear Mr. Margoles:

This letter responds to your request for a determination of Department of the Army permit requirements for the proposed Mancos Conservation District Smart Water Grant projects located within the Upper Mancos River watershed in Mancos, Montezuma County, Colorado. The work, as described during a pre-application meeting on November 18, 2025, and clarified by email correspondence yesterday, will consist of:

Location Name	Latitude/ Longitude	Scope of Work
Chicken Creek Outlet	37.396934, -108.274527	Installation of telemetry outside waters of the United States.
Crader Ditch	37.396934, -108.274527	Installation of telemetry outside waters of the United States.
Crystal Creek Inlet Canal	37.408099, -108.256865	Installation of telemetry outside waters of the United States.
Crystal Creek Outlet Canal	37.383407, -108.268453	Installation of telemetry outside waters of the United States.
East Mancos Highline	37.360370, -108.206191	Installation of telemetry outside waters of the United States.
Field Diversion	37.373183, -108.256187	Replacement of existing flume.
Giles	37.370137, -108.237196	Replacement of existing flume.
Lee and Burke Ditch	37.378550, -108.257585	Replacement of existing flume.
Lee Ditch	37.351607, -108.268893	Replacement of existing headgate.
Long Park Ditch	37.397596, -108.204065	Replace existing headgate and relocate flume; telemetry installation outside waters of the United States.

No. 6 Ditch	37.3413, -108.3114	Improvements to existing diversion.
Rush Ditch (Chicken Creek Split 1)	37.486633, -108.206746	Replacement of existing flume.
Rush Ditch (Chicken Creek Split 2)	37.486633, -108.206746	Replacement of existing flume.
Frank Ditch	37.3445, -108.2903	Improvements to existing diversion.
Willis Ditch	37.34272, -108.29564	Construction of new flume.
Weber Reservoir	37.3988, -108.2294	Installation of telemetry outside waters of the United States. Installation of new staff gauge.
Brown/Reddert Ranch	37.405109, -108.29122	Forest thinning: vegetation cutting and removal.
RSL Ranch, LLP	37.440892, -108.390992	Forest thinning: vegetation cutting and removal.
Colyer Property	37.405109, -108.250349	Forest thinning: vegetation cutting and removal.
G5 Ranch	37.417252, -108.287643	Forest thinning: vegetation cutting and removal.

We have assigned Action No. SPA-2025-00442 to this project. Please reference this number in all future correspondence concerning the above projects. Based on the information provided, we have determined that a Department of the Army permit is not required for the following:

1. Installation of telemetry at Chicken Creek Outlet, Crader Ditch, Crystal Inlet Canal, Crystal Outlet Canal, East Mancos Highline, Long Park Ditch, and Weber Reservoir; since these project activities do not involve a discharge of dredged or fill material in accordance with 33 CFR 323.2.

2. Forest thinning at Brown/Reddert Ranch, RSL Ranch LLP, Colyer Property, and G5 Ranch; since these project activities involve only the cutting or removal of vegetation above the ground in waters of the United States where the activity neither substantially disturbs the root system nor involves mechanized pushing, dragging, or similar activities that redeposit the excavated material. [33 CFR 323.2(d)(3)(ii)].

3. Irrigation-related activities within waters of the United States proposed at Field Diversion, Giles, Lee and Burke Ditch, Lee Ditch, Long Park Ditch, No. 6 Ditch, Rush Ditch (Chicken Creek Split 1), Rush Ditch (Chicken Creek Split 2), Frank Ditch, Willis Ditch, and Weber Reservoir; since the activities are exempted from regulation by a specific provision of the Clean Water Act as implemented by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) regulations at 33 CFR 323.4(a) because these activities consist of construction or maintenance of irrigation ditches or the maintenance of drainage ditches in accordance with 33 CFR 323.4(a)(3).

Please note that the Corps did not make a determination of geographic jurisdiction under any of our permitting authorities for this project.

Please also note that a Corps' permit decision does not constitute approval of project design features, nor does it imply that the construction is adequate for its intended purpose. Additionally, a Corps permit decision does not authorize any injury to property or invasion of rights or any infringement of federal, state, or local laws or regulations. The responsible party and/or any contractors acting on behalf of the responsible party must possess the authority and any other approvals required by law, including property rights, in order to undertake the proposed work.

This determination applies only to this project. Other project proposals require a new determination. If your plans change, please contact our office for a reevaluation of permit requirements.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (970) 259-1764 X 1 or by e-mail at kerri.l.zdimal@usace.army.mil. At your convenience, please complete a Customer Service Survey on-line available at https://regulatory.ops.usace.army.mil/customer-service-survey/.

Sincerely,

Kerrianne Zdimal

Kerrianne Zdimal
Regulatory Specialist
Southern Colorado Branch

cc:
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, cdphe_df_wqcd@state.co.us
SGM, Andy Antipas, andrewa@sgm-inc.com

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
ALBUQUERQUE DISTRICT
4101 JEFFERSON PLAZA NE
ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87109-3435

March 13, 2026

Regulatory Division

SUBJECT: No Permit Required (SPA-2025-00442)

Mancos Conservation District
Attention: Danny Margoles
604 Bauer Avenue
PO Box 694
Mancos, CO 81328
Danny@mancoscd.org

Dear Mr. Margoles:

This letter responds to your request for a determination of Department of the Army permit requirements for the proposed *Mancos Conservation District Smart Water Grant* projects located within the Upper Mancos River watershed in Mancos, Montezuma County, Colorado for two locations. The work, as described by email dated March 2, 2026, consists of:

Location Name	Latitude/ Longitude	Scope of Work
Lee Ditch	37.351607, -108.268893	Replacement of existing headgate that is leaking and replacement of the existing Parshall flume.
Willis Ditch	37.34272, -108.29564	Replacement of the existing flume and reconstruction of the diversion.

We have assigned Department of Amry number SPA-2025-00442 to this project. Please refer to this number in all future correspondence concerning the above projects. Based on the information provided, we have determined that a Department of the Army permit is not required for the irrigation-related activities within waters of the United States proposed at Lee Ditch and Willis Ditch since the activities are exempted from regulation by a specific provision of the Clean Water Act as implemented by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) regulations at 33 CFR 323.4(a) because these activities consist of construction or maintenance of irrigation ditches or the maintenance of drainage ditches in accordance with 33 CFR 323.4(a)(3).

Please note that the Corps did not make a determination of geographic jurisdiction under any of our permitting authorities for this project.

Please also note that a Corps' permit decision does not constitute approval of project design features, nor does it imply that the construction is adequate for its intended purpose. Additionally, a Corps permit decision does not authorize any injury to property or invasion of rights or any infringement of federal, state, or local laws or regulations. The responsible party and/or any contractors acting on behalf of the responsible party must possess the authority and any other approvals required by law, including property rights, in order to undertake the proposed work.

This determination applies only to these projects. Other project proposals and/or projects not covered herein will require a new determination. If your plans change, please contact our office for a reevaluation of permit requirements.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (970) 259-1764 X 1 or by e-mail at kerri.l.zdimal@usace.army.mil. At your convenience, please complete a Customer Service Survey on-line available at https://regulatory.ops.usace.army.mil/customer-service-survey/.

Sincerely,

Kerrianne Zdimal

Kerrianne Zdimal
Regulatory Specialist
Southern Colorado Branch

cc:
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, cdphe_df_wqcd@state.co.us
SGM, Andy Antipas, andrewa@sgm-inc.com

Outlook

[EXTERNAL] RE: Availability of Draft EA - Mancos Water Conservancy District's Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project

From SPA-RD-CO <SPA-RD-CO@usace.army.mil>
Date Thu 8/13/2026 9:12 AM
To Ward, Jennifer K <jward@usbr.gov>; CESPA-RD <cespa-rd@usace.army.mil>

This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.

Hello,
Thank you for requesting comment from our office regarding proposed projects or activities that may have the potential to impact aquatic resources. Therefore, the project proponent should work directly with our office to acquire necessary Corps permits, if applicable, as described in following general comment.

Our regulatory jurisdiction is under the authority of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act for the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States. Project features that result in the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States will require Department of the Army authorization prior to starting work.

Project proponents should submit requests through the Regulatory Request System at https://rrs.usace.army.mil/ .

Please note, our email address has been updated to cespa-rd@usace.army.mil . Please update your contact information as former email addresses will be discontinued in the near future.
Sincerely,
Albuquerque District Regulatory Team

From: Ward, Jennifer K <jward@usbr.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2026 9:58 AM
To: Ireland, Terry <terry_ireland@fws.gov>; SPA-RD-CO <SPA-RD-CO@usace.army.mil>; chad.cherefko@usda.gov; brian.magee <brian.magee@state.co.us>; rebecca.mitchell@state.co.us; Caleb Foy <cfoy@crwcd.org>; Raquel Flinker <rflinker@crwcd.org>; planning@co.montezuma.co.us; road@co.montezuma.co.us; tanderson@co.montezuma.co.us; contactus@eea.coop; news@the-journal.com; Foote, Peter <peter.foote@state.co.us>
Subject: [Non-DoD Source] Availability of Draft EA - Mancos Water Conservancy District's Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project

Hello,

Please find attached a letter announcing the availability of the Draft Environmental Assessment for Mancos Water Conservancy District's Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project.
The public comment period extends through Friday, September 11, 2026.

Thank you,
Jenny

Jenny Ward
Environmental Group Chief
Western Colorado Area Office
Bureau of Reclamation
(970) 248-0651

APPENDIX C – Cultural Resources

History Colorado

August 14, 2026

Bart Deming
Area Manager
Western Colorado Area Office
Bureau of Reclamation
445 West Gunnison Avenue, Suite 221
Grand Junction, CO 81501
ZNelson@usbr.gov

RE: Consultation Under Section 106 of the NHPA for the Mancos Conservation District (MCD) Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project, WaterSMART Program, Colorado (HC# 87882)

Dear Mr. Deming,

We appreciate the additional information and documentation provided by Jennifer Ward through email on August 12, 2026 continuing consultation for the above referenced undertaking under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and its implementing regulations 36 CFR 800. Our office has reviewed the submitted materials, and we offer the following comment.

Identification of Historic Properties
We concur that 5MT.11644, 5MT.16637, 5MT.19140, 5MT.16963, 5MT.22815, and 5MT.25392 are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under Criterion A; 5MT.16637.2, 5MT.19140.18, 5MT.22815.9, and 5MT.22815.10 support the eligibility of their respective resources for the NRHP; 5MT.25391 and isolated finds 5MT.25393-25404 are not eligible for the NRHP; and 5MT.11644.3 and 5MT.16963.1 do not support the eligibility of their respective resources for the NRHP.

Assessment of Adverse Effects
Based on the documentation and information provided including through the August 12, 2026 email, we agree with your finding that the undertaking will result in no adverse effect, 36 CFR 800,5(b), to historic properties.

Should unidentified archaeological resources be discovered in the course of the project, work must be interrupted until the resources have been evaluated in terms of the National Register eligibility criteria (36 CFR 60.4) in consultation with our office pursuant to 36 CFR 800.13. Also, should the consulted-upon scope of the work change, please contact our office for continued consultation under Section 106 of the NHPA.

We request being involved in the consultation process with the local government, which as stipulated in 36 CFR 800.3 is required to be notified of the undertaking, and with other consulting parties. Additional information provided by the local government or other consulting parties might cause our office to re-evaluate our eligibility and potential effect findings. Please note that our compliance letter does not end the 30-day review period provided to other consulting parties.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions, please contact Matthew Marques, Section 106 Compliance Manager, at (303) 866-4678, or matthew.marques@state.co.us.

Sincerely,

Dr. Holly Kathryn Norton

Digitally signed by Dr. Holly Kathryn Norton
Date: 2026.08.24 10:17:44 -06'00'

(for) Dawn DiPrince
State Historic Preservation Officer

Southern Ute Indian Tribe

Cultural Preservation Department
Tribal Historic Preservation Office
Phone: (970) 563-2983 Fax: (970) 563-1098
P.O. Box 737
Ignacio, CO 81137

August 07, 2026

ATTN: Dept. of Interior | Bureau of Reclamation | Durango Field Division
185 Suttle Street Suite 2
Durango Colorado 81303

Dear Dr. Zachary Nelson,

We have reviewed your Consultation Request per the National Historic Preservation Act regarding the **Mancos Conservation District Mancos Watershed Resiliency Project, WaterSMART Program, Colorado project** and offer the following response as indicated by the box that is checked.

☐ **DEFER**

☐ **NO EFFECT:** I have determined that there are no properties of religious and cultural significance to the Southern Ute Indian Tribe that are listed on the National Register within the area of potential effect or that the proposed project will have no effect on any such properties that may be present.
Comments:

☑ **NO ADVERSE EFFECT:** I have identified properties of cultural and religious significance within the area of effect that I believe are eligible for listing in the National Register, for which there would be no adverse effect as a result of the proposed project.
Comments: Thank you for this invitation to consult. While no sites were identified through this survey, the multiple isolated finds indicate that this was a hunting area. Should any previously unidentified cultural resources be identified during this undertaking, please stop work and contact the SUIT THPO immediately.

****

☐ **ADVERSE EFFECT:** I have identified properties of cultural and religious significance within the area of potential effect (APE) that are eligible for listing in the National Register. I believe the proposed project would cause an adverse effect on these properties.
Comments:

☐ **REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** The Southern Ute Indian Tribe requests additional information on the planned site for its impact on properties of religious and cultural importance to the Tribe as follows:

Please respond to our department at suthpo@southernute-nsn.gov and refer to *SUCPD_FY2026_NHPA_0406* in future correspondence with this office so that administrative record is accurately managed.

Toghoyaqh,



Audrey Andrews, Ph.D. (she/her)
Tribal Historic Preservation Officer
Cultural Preservation Department
Southern Ute Indian Tribe
Office: 970-563-2989
Mobile: 970-442-1852
aandrews@southernute-nsn.gov | suthpo@southernute-nsn.gov

APPENDIX D – US Forest Service Coordination

USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | San Juan National Forest
Mancos/Dolores Ranger District | 29211 Highway 184
Dolores, CO 81323
(970) 882-7296
(970) 882-6841

File Code: 2710
Date: February 17, 2026

Mancos Conservation District
Danny Margoles
District Executive Director
PO BOX 694
Mancos, CO 81328

Dear Mr. Margoles,

I have reviewed your proposal dated February 9, 2026 for the Rush Ditch and the Long Park Ditch. In your WaterSMART project proposal you describe that The Rush Ditch needs two new ramp flumes above and below the diversion structure and associated telemetry for the purpose of providing accurate water measurements to aid in water right management. The proposal also mentioned that the Long Park Ditch needs work on the diversion, headgate, and relocation of the existing Parshall flume closer to the headgate, and installation of telemetry equipment. As described, all disturbance and equipment will be contained within the ditch right of way of the existing ditch. My review of these activities indicates there are no resource conflicts for the proposed projects as they fall within existing ditch rights of ways for the Long Park and Rush Ditches. Therefore, your request fits maintenance activities as described below.

> *2711.7 Uses for which special use authorizations are not required*
>
> *10. Routine Operation and Maintenance Activities Within the Scope of Statutory Right-of-Way or Documented Linear Right-of-Way. Routine operation and maintenance activities within the scope of a statutory right-of-way for a highway pursuant to R.S. 2477 (43 U.S.C. 932, repealed Oct. 21, 1976) or for a ditch or canal pursuant to R.S. 2339 (43 U.S.C. 611, as amended), or routine operation or maintenance activities within the express scope of a documented linear right-of-way, when these uses do not occur within a Congressionally designated wilderness area. A formal grant or document is not required under these authorities. Observe the boundaries that existed at the time the grant was accepted, unless State law existing at the time of acceptance provides for a different width.* ***(Chapter 2710 FSM 2700- Special Uses Management 18 (2020)).***

It is my understanding that the Mancos Conservation District is actively communicating with the Long Park and Rush Ditch Companies and will ensure that neither ditch will be enlarged, relocated, or altered in such a way that may endanger or terminate current ditch rights on National Forest System Land.

If your proposal changes from what you have described, please contact Daniel Chavez our Realty Specialist at Daniel.Chavez2@usda.gov or via phone at (970) 882-6814 to determine if your use will continue under maintenance that does not require a special use authorization. Likewise, if any factors associated with NFS lands, resources, or programs change and this determination is no longer an option, I or someone from my office will contact you to rescind this letter. If this happens, there may be alternate mechanisms to permit your activity.

Sincerely,

Digitally signed by NICHOLAS MUSTOE
Date: 2026.02.17 13:40:39 -07'00'

NICHOLAS MUSTOE
Dolores District Ranger