

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Western Colorado Area Office
Grand Junction, Colorado

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Dallas Creek Eastside Trails Project

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR Part 1500-1508), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Dallas Creek Eastside Trails Project. The EA assesses three alternatives for construction of the proposed trails: 1) No Action, 2) Proposed Action, and 3) Option Alternative. Trail construction would take priority, followed by a vault toilet and small parking lot. The construction of a future additional parking lot will be dictated by observed need. Based on the following, Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action will not result in a significant impact on the human environment.

Increasing recreational demand in Ouray County has created a need for a plan to construct additional trails in the area. In response, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) created a Travel Management Plan which creates an additional 15 miles of trails on the eastside of Highway 550, across from the Dallas Creek Recreation Site. This BLM land is adjacent to Reclamation land which is ideal for recreational use. Reclamation wishes to create 5 miles of sustainable pedestrian and single track bike trails at Ridgway State Park (RSP) on the eastside of Highway 550, with the intention of connecting with the proposed BLM trails. This would create a total of 20 miles of new recreational trails in Ouray County.

A draft EA was prepared and distributed for public review and comment in May 2013. Comments from the public, agencies, and organizations were used to prepare the final EA in August 2013. Coordination on the project included informal consultation with the BLM, the Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) under the Endangered Species Act and the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, and with the State Historic Preservation Office, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW).

Under the No Action Alternative, CPW would not establish a pedestrian and bike trail system at RSP eastside of Highway 550, and the current use of this area would remain unchanged.

Under the Proposed Action, CPW would construct and maintain five miles of a sustainable pedestrian and single track bike trails at RSP eastside of Highway 550 for recreational use. The newly constructed trails would be connected to adjacent BLM trails. In addition, the newly constructed trails would be closed to all modes of travel

from December 1 to April 30 for the purpose of protecting concentrated wintering big game.

The Option Alternative includes construction of the proposed trails, including the connection to the adjacent BLM trails. However, the seasonal closure (December 1 to April 30) would close the park area east of Highway 550 to public access and use (not limited to the newly constructed trails) to protect wintering big game.

Conclusions and Environmental Effects:

The No Action Alternative will not meet the purpose and need as defined the final EA.

Under the Proposed Action, Reclamation along with CPW will construct and maintain five miles of sustainable pedestrian and single track bike trails, while implementing a seasonal closure (December 1 – April 30) of the newly constructed trail system to protect wintering big game.

In terms of environmental consequences associated with implementing the Proposed Action with planned environmental commitments, the Proposed Action will enhance recreation resources. The Proposed Action will have no effect on water rights and uses, water quality, cultural resources, Indian Trust Assets, and environmental justice.

The Proposed Action will affect land use and vegetation by keeping recreationists to established designated trails. Assuming a trail width of three feet, approximately two acres of vegetation would be cleared during trail construction. Best Management Practices would be implemented during trail construction to minimize impacts to soils and limit soil erosion. Trails would be monitored and maintained to keep impacts to soils to a non-significant level.

The Proposed Action is also predicted to have some positive impacts to socioeconomics through increased revenues from Ridgway State Park park passes, gas, food, lodging, and other tourism related businesses.

The Proposed Action will beneficially affect wildlife resources by establishing a seasonal closure in the area to protect wintering big game. The adverse effects on migratory birds would primarily relate to additional fragmentation of habitat, although appropriate habitat is common in the lands surrounding the project area. Construction will occur outside of the nesting season. Adverse impacts are predicted to be minimal.

The Proposed Action will have highly localized and short-lived impacts on air quality as there will be increases in particulate matter and vehicle emissions associated with trail construction. These impacts are predicted to be insignificant.

Mitigation and Environmental Commitments

Effects to land use, vegetation, and wildlife resources will be reduced and/or mitigated through the implementation of the following environmental commitments:

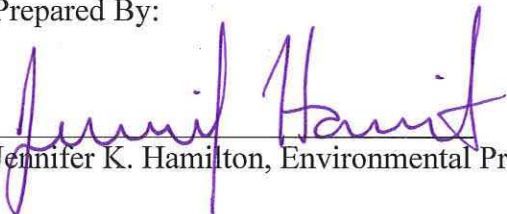
- Reclamation must approve final designs prior to any trail or other construction.
- Construction equipment and supply staging areas will be located within existing disturbed areas.
- Erosion-control Best Management Practices for drainage and sediment control will be implemented to prevent or reduce nonpoint source pollution during construction of the proposed trail system.
- Dust control will be undertaken in all areas disturbed during construction, as appropriate.
- No required Clean Water Act permits or notifications are anticipated. However, CPW or its contractor is responsible for obtaining any required permits under the Clean Water Act (Section 402 or 404 permits) or any other federal, state or local permits, as necessary.
- In the event of discovery of evidence of possible cultural or paleontological resources, the contractor shall immediately cease all ground-disturbing activities in the vicinity of the discovery and notify CPW and Reclamation. Work shall not be resumed until approved by Reclamation.
- Any land disturbed by trail construction will be smoothed, treated for erosion, and reseeded with a seed mixture approved by Reclamation.
- The new trails will be closed to public use on a yearly basis from December 1 to April 30. This closure will help protect the area's ability to sustain populations of wintering deer and elk.
- Reclamation and CPW will implement a seasonal public access and use closure of Ridgway State Park lands east of Highway 550, including adequate notice and posting. A 30 day advance notice for the closure will be provided in the local newspapers, signs will be posted at each entry point (gate) in the deer fence and other locations as deemed necessary, the entry point gates may be locked during the time period the closure is in effect, the area closed to public use and access will be monitored and patrolled by Park Rangers and staff.
- A second graveled parking area and vault toilet may be required by Reclamation in the future depending on the use of the new trail system.

- In the event of a change in location of any portion of the trail, construction will cease while Reclamation completes any necessary NEPA documentation regarding the change.

Based on review of comments received, analysis of environmental impacts, coordination with the Service under the Endangered Species Act, and the listed environmental commitments, Reclamation concludes that construction of recreational trails on the eastside of Highway 550 at Ridgway State Park will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment.


This Finding of No Significant Impact has, therefore, been prepared and is submitted to document environmental review and evaluation of the Proposed Action in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended.

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8-19-2013
Date

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