

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
WESTERN COLORADO AREA OFFICE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

LICENSE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION AND DELTA
COUNTY FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PARKING AREA FOR THE PURPOSES OF
WILDLIFE VIEWING ON RECLAMATION PROPERTY, FRUITGROWERS PROJECT,
DELTA COUNTY, COLORADO

June, 2014

Bureau of Reclamation
Upper Colorado Region, Western Colorado Area Office

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), an Environmental Assessment was prepared to evaluate a proposed license agreement for the construction of a parking area at Fruitgrowers reservoir.

Background

The Fruitgrowers Project was authorized under provisions of section 4 of the act of June 25, 1910 (36 Stat. 835). Construction of the project was recommended by the Secretary of the Interior on January 5, 1938, and was approved by the President on January 11, 1938. Construction of the dam started in May 1938, and was completed in time for water to be delivered to project lands for the irrigation season of 1939. Orchard City Irrigation District assumed the operation and maintenance of project works on March 1, 1940.

The Fruitgrowers Project, located in Delta County in Western Colorado, provides supplemental irrigation water to 2,690 acres of land. Principal crops are fruit, small grains, corn, alfalfa, and pasture. The reservoir is also frequently used by other migratory birds including the largest nesting colony of western grebes in Colorado, and more than 200 other species of birds.

North Road crosses Reclamation lands, and the shoulder of the road is frequently utilized by bird enthusiasts for parking and accessing the reservoir. In addition, an annual "Crane Day" festival is held in the nearby town of Eckert, which draws large groups who use North Road during the event.

Delta County has requested approval to construct a parking area on Reclamation lands adjoining North Road. Delta County has requested authorization to construct and maintain the parking area on Reclamation project lands. The parking area would address part of the safety mitigation by removing parked cars and pedestrians from the shoulders of North Road. No other changes in land use are proposed.

Purpose and Need

The primary purpose of the license agreement is to authorize construction and maintenance of a parking area that will provide up to 20 parking spaces with associated fencing. The parking area will accommodate on-going wildlife viewing and address increasing safety issues associated with current parking along North Road.

Scoping/Public Involvement

A Draft EA was prepared and distributed on May 1, 2014 to eight local, state, and federal agencies and organizations, and 12 property owners adjacent to Fruitgrowers reservoir. The Draft EA was also posted on the Reclamation website, along with a Press Release announcing its availability for public review and request for comments. Comments were requested by May 30, 2014.

Proposed Action

Under the proposed action, Reclamation would issue a license agreement to allow Delta County to construct, operate and maintain a combined parking and viewing area that will accommodate up to 20-vehicles. The parking area would be graveled, and include adequate drainage to address irrigation runoff from adjacent agricultural fields and drainage from the county road. The parking area would be less than $\frac{3}{4}$ acre in size, and would consist of a maximum of 20 parking spaces. The parking area would be enclosed by a split-rail wood fence and include a gate opening for foot access to the reservoir area. Information signs or interpretive displays may be added to the parking/viewing area by the Black Canyon Audubon Society. Portable toilets may also be used at the site during special bird migrations, like during the sandhill crane days.

Summary of Findings

The Final EA evaluated a proposed action and no action alternatives. A summary of the finding is as follows:

1. The proposed action will have no effect on threatened and endangered species and cultural resources.
2. The proposed action will result in the conversion of up $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre of vegetation dominated by Russian knapweed to a parking lot. No other vegetation resources will be permanently affected.
3. Wildlife may avoid the area during construction. However, these impacts would be short in duration. The operation and maintenance of the parking area is predicted to result in no new impacts to wildlife resources. Public use will be monitored and additional management controls implemented if determined appropriate.
4. The proposed action will result in increased public safety by allowing adequate safe parking off of North Road.

Environmental Commitments

The following environmental commitments are incorporated into the proposed action.

- Access for construction activities would be confined to the project area, North Road, and the pre-disturbed North Road shoulder. Any construction activities outside of the inventoried proposed action area would require additional review by Reclamation to determine if the existing surveys and information are adequate to evaluate additional impacts.
- In the event that cultural and/or paleontological resources are discovered during construction, Delta County shall stop construction activities until Reclamation has completed consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and appropriate measures are implemented to protect or mitigate the discovered resource.
- In the event that threatened or endangered species are discovered during construction, Delta County shall stop construction activities until Reclamation has completed consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service and appropriate measures are implemented.
- Noxious weeds in the project area will be monitored and controlled.
- The existing steel stock gate will remain in the right-of-way fence for North Road, and may be used to enter Reclamation property for constructing the project area. However, after the project is completed, the gate will be closed and locked to prevent vehicle entry. Fruitgrowers Reservoir is closed to Off-Road Vehicles (ORV).
- Use of the parking area, adjacent lands to the project area, and pedestrian use of Reclamation land will be monitored. If monitoring reveals a significant increase in use and impacts to migratory birds or other impacts occur, Reclamation may evaluate implementing additional measures, including but not limited to: closing the steel stock gate that allows access to the site during the critical nesting season, seasonal locking of the gate in the wood post and rail fence around the parking area, a seasonal closure of the area around the parking/viewing area, or implementing other restrictions as appropriate. Implementing any of these measures may require evaluation, and will follow appropriate Federal regulations.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of environmental impacts, coordination with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer and other State, Federal, and local agencies, and a review of comments received, Reclamation concludes that implementation of a License Agreement for a parking area at Fruitgrowers reservoir will not result in significant impacts on the quality of the human environment or the natural resources in the project area.

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.

Prepared By:



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June 19, 2014
Date

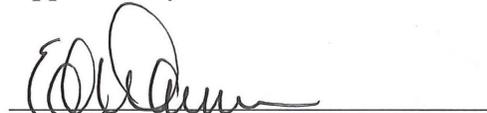
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6/19/14
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6-27-14
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