BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

MID-PACIFIC REGION
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA AREA OFFICE
TRINITY RIVER RESTORATION PROGRAM

WEAVERVILLE, CALIFORNIA

DRAFT - FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT – DRAFT

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended, and with the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), the Trinity River Restoration Program (TRRP) Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has found that Alternative 1, supported by the Canyon Creek Suite of Rehabilitation Sites Environmental Assessment/Environmental Impact Report (EA/EIR) will result in no significant impacts on the human environment. Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement to further analyze possible impacts is not required pursuant to Section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

Reference: Canyon Creek Suite of Rehabilitation Sites: Trinity River Mile 73 to 78

Environmental review by:

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Recommended by:

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DRAFT

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Canyon Creek Suite of Rehabilitation Sites: Trinity River Mile 73 to 78

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BACKGROUND AND NEED

The 2000 Record of Decision (ROD) for the Trinity River Mainstem Fishery Restoration Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (FEIS/EIR) directed Department of the Interior (DOI) agencies to implement the Preferred Alternative identified in the ROD for the FEIS/EIR to restore the Trinity River's anadromous fishery. The ROD directed the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), through the Trinity River Restoration Program (TRRP), to restore the Trinity River fishery by implementing a combination of higher releases from Lewiston Dam (up to 11,000 cubic feet per second [cfs]), floodplain infrastructure improvements, channel rehabilitation projects, fine and coarse sediment management, watershed restoration, and an Adaptive Environmental Assessment and Management (AEAM) Program. The Canyon Creek Suite of Rehabilitation Sites: Trinity River Mile 73 to 78 (Project) is part of the Channel Rehabilitation component of the ROD and is designed to increase shallow, low-velocity edge habitat for rearing salmonid fry over a wide range of flows. This Project would selectively remove fossilized river edge berms (berms that have been anchored by extensive woody vegetation root systems and consolidated sand deposits); provide revegetation and conditions for reestablishment and survival of native riparian vegetation; and recreate alternate point bars and complex fish habitat similar in form to those that existed prior to the construction of Lewiston Dam, although smaller in scale.

The Project would be the second, after the 2005 construction of the Hocker Flat Rehabilitation project, to implement the ROD's mechanical rehabilitation component and rework the Trinity River floodplain based on pre-dam channel morphology characteristics. The Project would expand the TRRP rehabilitation activities implemented at the site authorized in the Hocker Flat EA/EIR to include activities at four downstream locations. Collectively, the Hocker Flat and Canyon Creek Suite projects are intended to enhance river processes at their discrete locations and to synergistically enhance river processes in order to increase channel complexity and fisheries habitat throughout the mainstem Trinity River reach below Canyon Creek.

As a demonstration effort, the Hocker Flat Project provided design and implementation data that was incorporated in the Project. Certain aspects of the Hocker Flat Project are ongoing (i.e., revegetation) and will be used to refine the implementation of the Project.

Consequently, monitoring will continue and needed design/implementation adjustments will be incorporated into project design and implementation of future Trinity River channel rehabilitation efforts.

The Canyon Creek Suite of Rehabilitation Sites EA/EIR considered three alternatives: the Proposed Action, Alternative 1, and the No-Action Alternative. Under NEPA, no significant impacts were determined under any of these alternatives. However, under the California Environmental Quality Act, an unavoidable impact was determined for the Proposed Action during review of potential Aesthetics impacts. The planned work on private property would have been unacceptable to landowners. Details concerning the Proposed Action, Alternative 1, the No-Action Alternative, and alternatives considered but not carried forward for evaluation, are included within the Environmental Assessment/Draft Environmental Impact Report (EA/Draft EIR) (Volume 1, Chapter 2).

Alternative 1 is identical to the Proposed Action at two of the sites, Valdor Gulch and Pear Tree Gulch. However, Alternative 1 reflects stakeholder involvement and was developed to reduce impacts to private landowners at the Conner Creek and Elkhorn sites. Consequently, Alternative 1 minimizes aesthetic impacts and is preferred for implementation. The impacts of Alternative 1 are summarized below.

ALTERNATIVE 1

Alternative 1 from the Canyon Creek Suite of Rehabilitation Sites EA/DEIR was designed to provide suitable rearing habitat for anadromous salmonids and to reestablish geomorphic processes typical of an alluvial river. By removing on-site riparian berms and lowering the floodplain elevation in certain locations, Alternative 1 would allow some degree of channel migration and increase the likelihood of an inundated floodplain in association with 1.5-year recurrence interval flood flows (approximately 6,600 cfs for this project). In addition, several features have been designed to provide fisheries habitat and channel complexity at flows which are lower than the 1.5-year recurrence interval (e.g., low water side channels, benches, and alcoves).

Alternative 1 includes up to 11 activity types that may occur within the boundaries of one or more of the sites. Defined rehabilitation activities are:

- A – Recontouring;
- B – Feathered Edge Construction and Riparian Berm Removal;
- C, D, and E – Floodplain Construction for 450 cfs, 2,000 cfs, or 6,600 cfs inundation;
- F and G – Side channel creation for 450 cfs or 6,600 cfs inundation;
- H – Alcove Construction for 450 cfs inundation;
- I – Excavation and Placement of Materials;
- J – Staging/Use Areas/Road building; and
- K – Revegetation.

Activities A–H would all occur within riverine areas included for rehabilitation activities under Alternative 1. Because these riverine areas extend for more than 3.5 miles along the Trinity River, the type and degree of activity would differ for each area. Under Alternative 1, more than 14 acres of riverine area would be affected and more than 80,000 cubic yards would be excavated. Activities I-K would be associated with the transfer, placement, and stabilization of material excavated from the riverine areas. The location and extent of material stockpiled, transported, and placed would differ for each area. The revegetation plan developed for Alternative 1 would be specific to each rehabilitation area and would include elements to ensure success over time. Monitoring of the Project over time will allow critical evaluation in order to adjust future rehabilitation plans to incorporate those practices that perform best in the field.

More detailed discussions of activities A-K are provided in Chapter 2 of the Project EA/DEIR.

FINDINGS

The Proposed Action and Alternative 1 were evaluated in the EA/DEIR with respect to their impacts in the following issue areas: land use; geomorphic environment; water resources; water quality; fishery resources; vegetation, wildlife, and wetlands; recreation; socioeconomics, population, and housing; tribal trust; cultural resources; air quality; environmental justice; aesthetics; hazardous waste and materials; noise; public services and utilities/energy; and transportation/traffic circulation. Based upon the following summary of the implementation effects of Alternative 1 (as discussed fully in the EA/DEIR), accomplishment of Alternative 1 would result in no significant impacts to the quality of the human environment.

Land Use

The Project is located within the Junction City Community Planning Area. Land use impacts resulting from Alternative 1 would be consistent with Trinity County's development standards for lands within the Junction City community and lying within the Flood Hazard Overlay zoning district.

Geology, Fluvial Geomorphology, and Soils

Construction activities and disturbance would increase the potential for short-term wind and water erosion; however, sediment control measures would be implemented to ensure that construction impacts to the river are minimal. Implementation of Alternative 1 is consistent with the 10 Trinity River healthy river attributes that provide a basis for the TRRP channel rehabilitation program in support of fish and wildlife populations.

Water Resources

Implementation of Alternative 1 would generally decrease the elevation of the Trinity River 100-year flood through the project reach as a result of project activities, including excavation on the floodplain. However, local increases in flood elevation of less than 1 foot are possible. The project is expected to have minimal, if any, effects on groundwater elevations or groundwater quality.

Water Quality

Project construction near the river channel could temporarily increase turbidity and total suspended solids in the water column. It could also result in a spill of hazardous materials (e.g., grease, solvents) into the Trinity River. Construction activities will be staged to minimize potential water quality effects, and appropriate measures will be implemented to minimize water quality impacts.

Fisheries Resources

To comply with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for anadromous fishes, Reclamation initiated informal consultation with NOAA Fisheries concerning project effects to the federally and state-listed (threatened) Southern Oregon/Northern California Coast (SONCC) evolutionarily significant unit (ESU) of coho salmon. NOAA Fisheries affirmed that certain non-flow measures, including the mechanical rehabilitation projects identified in the ROD, were considered in the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS') 2000 Biological Opinion issued in response to the FEIS/EIR. In that Biological Opinion, NMFS identified the mechanical rehabilitation projects as reasonable and prudent measures to minimize project effects on SONCC ESU coho salmon. Consequently, implementation of Alternative 1 is covered by the NMFS' 2000 Biological Opinion and no additional consultation was required. Reclamation will continue to coordinate with NOAA Fisheries as it implements the Terms and Conditions of the 2000 Biological Opinion.

Any temporary construction impacts on fish rearing habitat are expected to be offset by permanent beneficial changes to physical rearing habitat associated with implementation. Improved river access to the floodplain during elevated spring time flows is expected to increase the availability of slow, shallow edge habitat preferred by salmonid fry. Collective improvements in fluvial channel dynamics contributed by Alternative 1 and by planned future channel rehabilitation projects throughout the upper Trinity River are ultimately expected to improve rearing habitat diversity for all anadromous salmonids.

Vegetation, Wildlife, and Wetlands

Construction activities associated with Alternative 1 would result in a temporary loss of riparian vegetation, but the value provided by this vegetation would be offset by restoring floodplain function and riverine values. The revegetation of alluvial features (i.e., floodplains) would speed reestablishment of riparian vegetation, and long-term changes in river inundation periods would increase both seasonal and perennial riparian habitats.

Informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concerning effects to the ESA-listed northern spotted owl was conducted by Reclamation. Habitat surveys for this species were conducted in the general project vicinity. While the majority of the habitat surveyed was not suitable for nesting, roosting, or foraging, some suitable habitat was determined. Consequently, protocol northern spotted owl surveys were conducted within 0.5 mile of each Canyon Creek project site during spring 2004. No owls were detected. Consequently, Reclamation determined that a biological assessment was not required since implementation of Alternative 1 would have no effect on northern spotted owls.

Recreation

The Trinity River was federally designated as a National Wild and Scenic River in 1981. Construction and implementation of Alternative 1 would not permanently affect the scenic or recreational values of the Trinity River for which it was protected. Implementation of Alternative 1 would result in a long-term benefit to the form and function of the Trinity River, thereby enhancing the Outstanding Recreational Values of its Wild and Scenic River status, including its anadromous fishery.

Socioeconomics, Population, and Housing

Alternative 1 could directly generate short-term income growth through the payment of wages and salaries, but would result in little increased long-term economic activity. A short-term increase in demand for housing in the general vicinity (i.e., Weaverville) could also occur as construction workers would seek lodging during the construction period.

Tribal Trust

The need to restore and maintain the natural production of anadromous fish in the Trinity River mainstem originates partly from the federal government's trust responsibility to protect fishing rights for ceremonial, subsistence, and commercial purposes of the region's Indian tribes. Construction-related impacts to Tribal Trust resources are expected to be short-term and to be outweighed by long-term increased numbers of anadromous fishes and rejuvenation of other trust assets, which are an expected beneficial by-product of the improved riverine health that would result from project implementation.

Cultural Resources

No cultural resources, other than dredger tailings, were identified within the Area of Potential Effect (APE) defined for the project; any unrecorded cultural resources are assumed to have been previously inundated, destroyed, or substantially damaged. If cultural materials or human remains are encountered during work for the project, the impacts would be negligible because construction would be halted and the proper agency contacted.

Air Quality

Construction associated with Alternative 1 requires the use of equipment that would temporarily contribute to air pollution in the Trinity River basin in the form of ozone precursors and particulate matter (PM_{10}). Reclamation will include provisions in construction contract documents that would minimize construction-related dust and PM_{10} emissions.

Environmental Justice

There is no evidence to suggest that Alternative 1 would cause a disproportionately high adverse human health or environmental effect on minority and low-income populations, compared to other project area or Trinity County residents.

Aesthetics

Implementation of Alternative 1 would complement the visual resources of the Canyon Creek area and would meet landowner approval. Design of Alternative 1 incorporates diversity of the landscape and vegetation types into the character of the rehabilitated riverine and upland areas. Excavated material would be placed in a manner that blends into the contours of existing tailings piles while not changing the nominal heights of the piles. Retention of existing topographic features would lessen the degree of visual impact and improve the aesthetic quality of this reach of the Trinity River.

Hazardous Materials

Implementation of Alternative 1 would potentially expose hazardous materials that could pose a public hazard. However, construction specifications will ensure that the contractor follows Best Management Practices to contain hazardous materials from release into the environment (e.g., oils, gasoline, etc.).

Noise

Construction activities would be scheduled between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. During working hours, the contractor would operate all equipment to minimize noise impacts to nearby sensitive receptors (residences, etc.).

Public Services and Utilities/Energy

Construction work and temporary road closures would be staged in a manner to allow for access by emergency service providers. If closures are required, they would occur during non-peak hours.

Transportation/Traffic Circulation

The use of heavy construction equipment to transport material to and from the project work site would be minimized. Equipment would be staged on site during construction. Since local roads are built to service occasional heavy equipment traffic, no measurable road wear would result. For safety reasons, the contractor would implement a traffic control plan to protect the public during construction.

SUMMARY

Implementation of Alternative 1, including the mitigation measures included to comply with CEQA requirements, would contribute to the long-term environmental quality and sustainability of the Trinity River ecosystem with no significant impacts to the environment.