

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 Executive Summary

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate Resource Management Plan (RMP) alternatives addressing management of lands and public use facilities at Clark Canyon Reservoir and Barretts Diversion Dam in Beaverhead County, Montana. This EA evaluates potential environmental effects associated with a range of alternatives for implementing a resource management plan (RMP) for Clark Canyon Reservoir. **Reservoir operations are not a subject of the RMP and are thus not evaluated in this EA.** This EA is prepared to assist Reclamation in finalizing a decision on a preferred RMP alternative and to determine whether to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The RMP identifies goals and objectives for resource management, specifies desired land and resource use patterns, and explains the policies and actions that will be implemented during the life of the plan to achieve those goals and objectives.

Clark Canyon Reservoir is situated alongside Interstate 15 approximately 19 miles south of Dillon, Montana. Clark Canyon Reservoir has a water surface area ranging from 4,500 acres at a typical low pool to over 5,900 acres at full pool that can be realized after wet winters with high spring runoff. The RMP alternatives do not consider modifying reservoir operations rather the RMP options are plans to provide comprehensive land resource management plan options focusing on how to best manage the 4,350-acres of Reclamation lands adjoining the reservoir and 38 acres of Reclamation land at Barrett's Diversion Dam, located 11 miles downstream of the reservoir. There are 11 developed recreation sites including 11 campground facilities around the reservoir and at Barrett's Diversion Dam. These facilities attract approximately 57,000 visitors annually. Other than nearby foraging bald eagles, there are no other known occurrences of federally listed Endangered or Threatened species at the project. Similar to most valleys in Beaverhead County there is however, a continuing problem with noxious weeds.

Development of this EA began with a scoping process in fall of 2002. Public scoping meetings were held in Idaho Falls, Idaho, Dillon and Butte, Montana. Based on input gained from the scoping process along with the previous analyses, a range of alternative management and improvement measures were identified. The alternatives addressed in this EA are: No-action, representing a continuation of current management practices, Alternative A; moderate resource development that provides some improvements to most facilities around the reservoir, and Alternative B; a maximum resource development alternative that would bring all facilities up to current standards representing a close-to-build-out condition for the current facilities.

The impacts of maintaining the status quo management regime under No-action, are generally minor and generally represent a continuation of resource trends as described in the affected environment portions of the EA. The impacts of implementing Alternative A are also generally minor with several positive effects such as improving conditions for recreation use and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of management measures for terrestrial and recreation resources. Noxious weed

management and wildlife management efforts would lead to slightly improved conditions for biological resources at Clark Canyon Reservoir, while construction at recreation sites could lead to some short-term inconvenience to recreationists visiting sites during construction periods and could increase the potential for soil erosion and spread of noxious weeds. The environmental effects of implementing Alternative B are similar to those of Alternative A and would be slightly more severe in extent due to the more extensive construction and changes planned at recreation facilities, however such effects would still be minor and generally of short-term duration. The overall positive effects on recreation resources is highest under Alternative B.

Lastly, a monitoring program is considered in the EA. Periodic monitoring program would be conducted to provide periodic checks on the successes and outcomes of all management measures.