

## INTRODUCTION

This FONSI (Finding of No Significant Impact) describes the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's environmental conclusions regarding a proposal to allow the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (District) to apply herbicide to Horsetooth, Soldier Canyon, Dixon Canyon, and Spring Canyon Dams (dams) by aerial spraying for up to five years. Environmental effects of the Aerial Spraying Alternative and the No Action Alternative were evaluated under the provisions of NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act), and are documented in an EA (Environmental Assessment).

The purpose of the Aerial Spraying Alternative is to hinder the establishment of invasive and noxious plants, which competitively inhibit the growth of desirable species, while minimizing risks to personal safety. This action is necessary because areas of bare ground, due to recently completed Safety of Dams renovations, are conducive to invasive and noxious plant growth. Leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula* L.) and other broadleaf weeds pose a threat to the area. The alternative of applying herbicide by walking on the face of the dam, as is necessary for backpack or pump and hose spraying, can pose a personal safety hazard to applicators due to the slope, presence of large rocks, and uneven terrain of the dam faces.

During the environmental review process, Reclamation staff scoped the potential environmental effects that the two alternatives pose. These potential effects were used by Reclamation to help focus the environmental review process and to structure the EA.

## PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Reclamation has selected the Aerial Spraying Alternative, aerial application of the herbicide to the dams by means of a helicopter, as the Preferred Alternative. This alternative entails the following:

- Herbicide application must be carried out by a licensed pesticide applicator according to Vanquish's Directions of Use;
- Prior to spraying, the target area will be clearly delineated so the applicator will not affect the landscaping work that has occurred adjacent to the dam faces;
- Signs will be posted around the target area instructing recreationists not to enter until 24 hours after the spraying;
- The spraying will occur Monday-Thursday during the summer and/or early fall months;
- Annual herbicide treatments for approximately 5 years or until the invasive species threat is controlled.

## FINDING

Having evaluated potential significant impacts associated with the Preferred Alternative, Reclamation has determined that no significant impacts are anticipated to occur. Furthermore, Reclamation makes the following specific findings:

- Scoping determined that the Proposed Action would have no impacts on environmental justice, (adverse effects to a particular social-economic group, including low-income or minority populations), Indian trust assets (legal interests in property and rights held in trust by the U.S. for Indian tribes or individuals), recreation, water quality, wetlands, and wildlife.

- No significant adverse impacts to vegetation are expected as a result of the Proposed Action, based on the following:
  1. The austere faces of the dams, due to the recent Safety of Dams renovations, are anticipated to harbor noxious species that inhibit the establishment of native grasses and thereby alter the ecosystem. Aerial application of herbicide will decrease the threat of invasive species and preserve the existing condition of the adjacent ecosystem.
  2. Delineation of the target area will protect the areas adjacent to the dam faces that are undergoing revegetation as outlined in Reclamation's Landscape Management Plan for the area.
  
- No significant adverse impacts to air/noise quality are expected as a result of the Proposed Action, based on the following:
  1. Dust is only expected to be generated during the two anticipated landings and takeoffs in the field, not during the application of the herbicide.
  2. Herbicide impacts to air quality would be localized and only occur during spraying; no impacts are expected once the herbicide has landed on plant and ground surfaces. As herbicide will be applied by a licensed handler and in accordance with labeling/directions, spray drift is expected to be minimal.
  3. In the immediate area there would be an increase in noise levels from the helicopter, but impacts would be short term (approximately 10 minutes per site). Herbicide applications would occur Monday-Thursday to minimize potential disturbance to local residences and recreationists.
  
- Aerial herbicide application is not the type of undertaking that would have an effect on cultural resources because physical features will not be disturbed.
  
- There is no habitat present in the vicinity of the target area for any of the endangered species identified by Reclamation that may be affected by the Preferred Alternative. The dam faces consist of heavily disturbed, imported soil and rock, which currently contain minor amounts of vegetation. Therefore, Reclamation has determined that the Preferred Alternative would have no effect on endangered species or their critical habitats.

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.

Approved By:

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 Area Manager  
 Eastern Colorado Area Office

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 Date