



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

October 31, 2008

Robert Epperson
Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Department of Interior
1243 N Street
Fresno, CA 93721

Subject: Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Lake Casitas Resource Management Plan, Ventura County, CA. (CEQ# 20080297)

Dear Mr. Epperson:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the above project. Our review and comments are pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and our NEPA review authority under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

The Lake Casitas Resource Management Plan (RMP) will establish management objectives, guidelines, and actions for the Lake Casitas Recreation Area for the next 25 years. EPA supports the development of a comprehensive RMP to guide future management actions. EPA commends the efforts by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to address key resource management issues such as (1) the increasing demand for use of trails, campsites, facilities, and the lake, and (2) the presence of unique vegetation and wildlife, including special-status species. We acknowledge Reclamation's commitment to avoid and minimize impacts to rare plants and oak trees, when possible, and to implement specific mitigation measures. We encourage prompt development of the proposed activity-specific management plans.

Although there are beneficial management actions proposed in the RMP, we have rated the DEIS as Environmental Concerns – Insufficient Information (EC-2) (see enclosed "*Summary of Rating Definitions*") due to the need for additional information regarding air quality, naturally occurring asbestos, water resources, biological resources, climate change, funding, and enforcement. While we recognize the programmatic nature of this DEIS, we recommend the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) provide additional data and more specific information regarding these matters to ensure all relevant issues and effects are considered during development of the RMP. Our detailed comments are enclosed.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this DEIS. When the FEIS is released for public review, please send one hard copy to the address above (mail code: CED-2). If you have any questions, please contact Laura Fujii, the lead reviewer for this project, at (415) 972-3852 or fujii.laura@epa.gov, or me at (415) 972-3521.

Sincerely,

/S/

Kathleen M. Goforth, Manager
Environmental Review Office

Enclosures:

Summary of EPA Rating Definitions

Detailed Comments

cc: Casitas Municipal Water District

**US EPA DETAILED COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
STATEMENT FOR THE LAKE CASITAS RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN, VENTURA
COUNTY, CA, OCTOBER 31, 2008**

Air Quality

Demonstrate general conformity to the applicable State Implementation Plan. Lake Casitas Recreation Area is located within the South Central Coast Air Basin which is classified as “nonattainment” for federal and state 1-hour and 8-hour ozone and particulate matter 10 microns or less in diameter (PM10)(p. 3-16). Proposed actions include allowing body contact water sports, such as water skiing, and increased boating capacity (p. 4-60), trail use, camping, and other recreational activities; including an associated increase in traffic. The draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) does not appear to evaluate whether the direct and indirect emissions from the federal actions conform to the applicable State Implementation Plan (SIP) as required by the General Conformity Rule (40 CFR 93.150).

Recommendation:

Include in the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) a description of the General Conformity regulatory framework and how it applies to the proposed RMP. If analysis of general conformity to the SIP is more appropriate at the project-specific level, we recommend the FEIS include a specific commitment to future project-specific general conformity analysis.

Describe and commit to aggressive air quality mitigation measures during future project-specific construction. The Lake Casitas Recreation Area is located in a nonattainment area for ozone and fine particulate matter (p. 3-16). Future construction-related emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx), a precursor for ozone, and particulate matter less than 10 and 2.5 microns in diameter (PM10 and PM2.5) could exacerbate nonattainment of air quality standards and contribute to adverse cumulative air quality impacts. Mitigation measures will be necessary to reduce these construction emissions.

Recommendation:

In addition to meeting all applicable local, state, or federal requirements, we recommend the FEIS include in an appendix a list of mitigation measures to consider when designing specific construction projects. Possible measures to include are:

Fugitive Dust Source Controls:

- Stabilize open storage piles and disturbed areas by covering and/or applying water or chemical/organic dust palliative where appropriate. This applies to both inactive and active sites, during workdays, weekends, holidays, and windy conditions.
- Install wind fencing and phase grading operations where appropriate, and operate water trucks for stabilization of surfaces under windy conditions.
- When hauling material and operating non-earthmoving equipment, prevent spillage and limit speeds to 15 miles per hour (mph). Limit speed of earth-moving equipment to 10 mph.

Mobile and Stationary Source Controls:

- Minimize use, trips, and unnecessary idling of heavy equipment.
- Distribute material hauling and disposal to minimize haulage miles.
- Maintain and tune engines per manufacturer's specifications to perform at EPA certification levels and, if engines have been modified, to perform at verified standards applicable to retrofit technologies. Employ periodic, unscheduled inspections to limit unnecessary idling and to ensure that construction equipment is properly maintained, tuned, and modified consistent with established specifications.
- Prohibit any tampering with engines and require continuing adherence to manufacturer's recommendations.
- If practicable, lease new, clean equipment meeting the most stringent of applicable Federal or State Standards. In general, only Tier 2 or newer engines should be employed in the construction phase.
- Utilize EPA-registered particulate traps and other appropriate controls where suitable to reduce emissions of diesel particulate matter and other pollutants at the construction site.
- Use electrical power for all stationary equipment.
- Use the most recent pollution control equipment for all off-road equipment.
- Utilize the cleanest available fuel engines in construction equipment and identify opportunities for electrification. Use ultra low sulfur fuel (diesel with 15 parts per million or less) in engines where alternative fuels such as biodiesel and natural gas are not possible.

Administrative controls:

- Identify all commitments to reduce construction emissions, and update the air quality analysis to reflect additional air quality improvements that would result from adopting specific air quality measures.
- Identify where implementation of mitigation measures is rejected based on economic infeasibility.
- Prepare an inventory of all equipment prior to construction and identify the suitability of add-on emission controls for each piece of equipment before groundbreaking. (Suitability of control devices is based on: whether there is reduced normal availability of the construction equipment due to increased downtime and/or power output, whether there may be significant damage caused to the construction equipment engine, or whether there may be a significant risk to nearby workers or the public.)
- Develop a construction traffic and parking management plan that minimizes traffic interference and maintains traffic flow.
- Identify sensitive receptors in the project area, such as children, elderly, and infirm, and specify the means by which you will minimize impacts to these populations. For example, locate construction equipment and staging zones away from sensitive receptors and fresh air intakes to buildings and air conditioners.
- Identify available air quality emission credits.

- Schedule and sequence work so there is not a significant overlap with other activities that contribute to air quality emissions.

Provide a description and impact analysis of air emissions from the expanded marina and increased number of boats and boating activity. Action alternatives, especially Alternative 3 – Recreation Expansion, would allow for a significant increase in boating and recreational activity. Marinas and boats are significant sources contributing to ozone or carbon monoxide (CO) nonattainment.¹ Part of the emissions are aromatic hydrocarbons, including polyaromatic hydrocarbons, which, as a group, are considered to be the most toxic component of petroleum products. Aromatic hydrocarbons are also associated with chronic and carcinogenic effects. The proposed increased use of boats could increase pollutant emissions in locations that may have inversion conditions and periods of poor air dispersion; contributing to the existing nonattainment for ozone.

Recommendations:

The FEIS should provide a description and impact analysis of the potential accumulation of hazardous pollutants and ozone from the expanded marina and increased number of boats and boating activity. Of specific concern are potential increases of emissions in use areas subject to inversion conditions.

Naturally Occurring Asbestos

Provide information on the presence of naturally occurring asbestos (NOA) on trails and roads and the potential effects on recreation. Asbestos-bearing ultramafic rocks are found in at least 44 of California's 58 counties. Disturbance of rocks and soils that contain NOA can result in the release of asbestos fibers to the air and exposure to the public. Asbestos is a known human carcinogen and represents a potential human health risk for those exposed while using roads or trails where it occurs. For information on the occurrence of NOA and health impacts, see EPA's NOA webpage at <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/pubs/clean.html>. The Draft EIS does not indicate whether NOA has been identified in the Plan Area. Nor does it evaluate potential risks to current and future visitors who may be exposed to NOA on existing and proposed trails and roads through recreational activities.

Recommendations:

Determine whether or not NOA is present on trails or roads within the Plan Area. Assess the potential for exposure to elevated levels of NOA from common activities such as hiking, mountain biking, camping, and patrols and road maintenance activities. Provide information in the FEIS.

If NOA is found to be present, review the California Air Resources Board (CARB) regulations and guidance at <http://www.arb.ca.gov/toxics/asbestos/asbestos.htm>, which address California's Asbestos Airborne Toxic Control Measures for Surfacing Applications that apply to unpaved roads. Additional road surfacing recommendations are available in the

¹ EPA Fact Sheets on Spark-Ignition Engines, Equipment, and Vessels; Snowmobiles, Dirt Bikes, and ATVs; and Marinas/Boating. <http://www.epa.gov/OWOW/NPS/marinas.html>.

Department of Toxic Substances Control report "Study of Airborne Asbestos From A Serpentine Road in Garden Valley, California" (April 2005) at: <http://www.dtsc.ca.gov/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&pageid=33546>.

Evaluate existing trails and roads for sediment production and drainage in areas where NOA is likely to be present.

If appropriate, post signs informing visitors that NOA is present, what the risks are, and how visitors can avoid exposure. EPA will be happy to assist your office in developing signage for these areas.

If appropriate, these measures should be incorporated into the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS and committed to in the Record of Decision (ROD).

Water Resources

Provide an estimate of two-stroke engines used on the lake and consider rapid phase-out of these engines. The use of carbureted two-stroke engines in boats and personal watercraft has resulted in measurable water quality degradation due to their elevated levels of hydrocarbon emissions (p. 3-3). Although personal watercraft are not allowed on Lake Casitas and boat rentals are four-stroke engines, older boats with carbureted two-stroke engines would still be used on the lake (p. 3-4). The DEIS does not appear to describe or evaluate the potential water quality effects of these remaining two-stroke engines, which is a concern given the potential significant increase in the number of boats and boating activity.

Recommendations:

We recommend the FEIS provide an estimate of the current and projected number of two-stroke engines used on Lake Casitas. EPA supports phase-out of these two-stroke engines as soon as feasible because of the significant air and water quality benefits.

Biological Resources

Provide description and evaluation of potential effects on habitat fragmentation or the disruption of wildlife corridors. There does not appear to be an evaluation of potential impacts on habitat fragmentation or the disruption of wildlife corridors from increased recreational activity and associated infrastructure construction. EPA is concerned with potential impacts to biological resources from increased noise, human presence and activities, habitat fragmentation, and disruption of wildlife corridors.

Recommendations:

The FEIS should provide a description and evaluation of potential effects on habitat fragmentation and the disruption of wildlife corridors. We also recommend summarizing studies and data regarding the noise and human presence level of tolerance of typical wildlife species such as deer, coyote, bald eagles, other raptors, bobcats, mountain lions, and black bear.

Climate Change

Discuss climate change and its effects on the Lake Casitas Recreation Area, RMP and proposed actions. A number of studies specific to California have indicated the potential for significant environmental impacts as a result of changing temperatures and precipitation.² The discussions of cumulative effects in the DEIS does not appear to address the effects of climate change on the project area or on the implementation of the proposed RMP.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently released a report entitled, “Climate Change: Agencies Should Develop Guidance for Addressing the Effects on Federal Land and Water Resources” (August 2007). According to the GAO report, federal land and water resources are vulnerable to a wide range of effects from climate change, some of which are already occurring.

We believe a discussion of climate change and its potential effects on the project area, RMP, and proposed actions would better serve long-term management planning for the Lake Casitas Recreation Area.

Recommendations:

The FEIS should include a discussion of climate change and its potential effects on the Lake Casitas Recreation Area, implementation of the RMP, and impacts of proposed actions.³ Of specific interest are potential effects on Lake Casitas water levels, recreational carrying capacity, fire and invasive species management, and ability to operate consistent with the primary purpose of Lake Casitas for water supply.

We recommend the discussion include a short summary of applicable climate change studies, including their findings on potential environmental and water supply effects and their recommendations for addressing these effects.

Funding

Include a description of funding and management resources to ensure implementation of RMP priority actions. The DEIS does not appear to provide a list of proposed actions, the responsible Agency/Group, or an estimated implementation timeframe. Nor does the DEIS describe funding sources and resources to support implementation of these actions or to address the consequences of not meeting RMP objectives and guidelines.

Recommendations:

The FEIS should include a list of proposed actions, the responsible Agency/Group, and an estimated implementation schedule, if feasible at this time. We recommend including a brief description of funding and management

² For example: Our Changing Climate: Assessing the Risks to California, A Summary Report from the California Climate Change Center, July 2006; Climate Change and California Water Resources, Brandt, Alf W.; committee on Water, Parks & Wildlife, California State Assembly, March 2007.

³ We recommend reviewing “Addressing Global Warming (Climate Change) in CEQA and NEPA Documents in Post AB 32 Regulatory Environment, Jones & Stokes for Climate Change Focus Group, January 1, 2007.

resources available to support implementation of the high priority proposed actions. The FEIS should also describe the consequences of not implementing high priority actions, especially if sensitive or valuable resources may be at risk.

Enforcement

Describe measures to enforce RMP guidelines. The DEIS describes activity-specific management plans (e.g., boating management plan) and the potential need for additional staff to monitor and enforce RMP requirements (p.4-63). EPA remains concerned with the ability to adequately enforce RMP requirements.

Recommendation:

The FEIS should describe in more detail the enforcement program to ensure implementation and compliance with RMP regulations.

General Comments

Evaluate the effects of pets and their management. The DEIS does not appear to address the management of pets of recreational users or from adjacent developments.

Recommendation:

Describe and evaluate in the FEIS the potential effects of pets, and RMP measures to manage these animals.

Consider promoting mass transportation to provide access to Lake Casitas Recreation Area. There is no current public transportation to Lake Casitas provided by the nearby City of Ventura or City of Ojai (p. 3-80).

Recommendation:

Given the projected increase in visitation (p. 3-77), consider promoting mass transportation to provide access to Lake Casitas Recreation Area. Electric or hybrid shuttles could be a valuable service for park visitors and reduce air pollution. At a minimum, include information on why mass transportation is not feasible.

Provide more details on the size, energy usage, and features of the expanded water park. The action alternatives would expand the existing water park (p. 2-15). The scope of this expansion is not clear.

Recommendations:

Describe the scope of the proposed water park expansion. At a minimum, describe the anticipated expansion size and energy usage. EPA supports the use of green building practices, where feasible, including designing for energy efficiency and incorporating recycled materials into building design. We recommend considering practices recommend by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program.