

## RECORD OF DECISION

Littlerock Reservoir Sediment Removal Project  
U.S. Forest Service  
Angeles National Forest  
Santa Clara/Mojave Rivers Ranger District  
County of Los Angeles, California

### DECISION

Based on my review of the joint Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR), I have decided to implement the Proposed Action as the Littlerock Reservoir Sediment Removal Project.

The Proposed Action will remove approximately 1,165,000 cubic yards of sediment that has accumulated within Littlerock Reservoir to restore design water storage capacity. Prior to sediment removal, to prevent disturbance upstream of Rocky Point and preserve critical habitat of arroyo toad (a federally-listed endangered species), a subterranean grade control structure would be constructed at Rocky Point. Sediment would then be removed annually by truck after Labor Day until seasonal water refill of the Reservoir suspends removal efforts (estimated between mid-November and January 31). Under the Proposed Action, annual sediment removal for approximately 7 to 12 years will be implemented to restore Reservoir design storage capacity. Sediment removal activities would occur six days per week, up to 12 hours per day, starting after Labor Day until seasonal water refill of the Reservoir suspends removal efforts (estimated between mid-November and January 31). Removed sediment would be reused as feasible and/or disposed at nearby exhausted mining quarries in the City of Palmdale. Following initial sediment removal to restore the Reservoir, an estimated 38,000 cubic yards of sediment would be removed every year to maintain design storage capacity.

A monitoring and enforcement program has been prepared for the project, which incorporates mitigation measures and standard project commitments (SPC) to proactively protect sensitive resources at the Reservoir and reduce or avoid environmental impacts associated with proposed activities. This monitoring program has been included in Appendix H (Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program) of the joint Final EIS/EIR.

The project would require the following federal, state, and local permits and authorizations prior to implementation:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service- Biological Opinion in compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act;
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers- Section 404 Permit in compliance with the Clean Water Act;
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife- Section 2081 Incidental Take Permit in compliance with the California Endangered Species Act; Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement;

- Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board- Section 401 Certification and Section 402 Permit in compliance with the Clean Water Act;
- Antelope Valley Air Quality Management District- Permit to operate;
- County of Los Angeles- Conditional Use Permit for sediment storage; County agreement regarding road damage and repairs; and
- City of Palmdale- Conditional Use Permit for sediment storage; City agreement regarding road damage and repairs.

The Forest Service will be amending the existing special use permit to Palmdale Water District to reflect the new grade control structure and include Operation and Maintenance plan that will include activities of sediment removal.

## BACKGROUND

The Littlerock Reservoir Sediment Removal Project was proposed by the Palmdale Water District for the purpose of restoring Littlerock Reservoir to 1992 water storage and flood control capacity. The project is located on National Forest System land, and Palmdale Water District would require a special use authorization from the Forest Service prior to implementation. Littlerock Reservoir is a critical part of the larger water resource, treatment, and distribution system operated by Palmdale Water District to provide service to customers in the City of Palmdale and the surrounding unincorporated communities; however, siltation and sedimentation has resulted in a substantial reduction in the Reservoir's water storage and flood control capacity.

Little Rock Creek upstream of the Reservoir provides habitat for the federally-endangered arroyo toad (*Anaxyrus californicus*). Sediment removal from the Reservoir could pose potential risks for "take" of arroyo toad and degradation of arroyo toad habitat upstream of the Reservoir beyond the Rocky Point area. The project has been designed to reduce or avoid this adverse impact. By constructing a grade control structure at the Rocky Point area prior to the removal of sediment from the Reservoir, sediment removal activities would not adversely affect the stream channel upstream of the grade control structure. In addition to reducing potential impacts to the upstream channel, the grade control structure would also reduce the potential for arroyo toad to enter the Reservoir and proposed work areas. Consequently, the risk of "take" of arroyo toad through habitat degradation would be minimized or avoided through design of the project.

## KEY ISSUES

The Final EIS/EIR includes analyses with respect to 12 resource areas. Key environmental issues associated with the project include potential adverse impacts to wildlife and the loss of recreational use during the annual sediment removal period. Additionally, seasonal construction activities would result in temporary increase of air pollutants emissions from equipment use, as well as traffic and noise associated with trucks hauling sediment between the Reservoir and disposal locations at nearby exhausted mining quarries in the City of Palmdale.

Comments from nine (9) entities were received during the public review period of the Draft EIS/EIR. Responses to comments primarily involved clarification of the analysis contained within the Draft EIS/EIR, which included:

- **Section C.3 (Biological Resources).** Language was revised to: (1) clarify that the Reservoir is not drained to accommodate OHV use; (2) provide a more thorough discussion of the avoidance measures incorporated for least Bell's vireo; and (3) provide further detail on the arroyo toad survey counts in the Project area.
- **Section C.9 (Recreation and Land Use).** Discussion of the Davis-Grunsky Contract was revised per comments of the Department of Water Resources. A detailed summary of Davis-Grunsky contracted facilities and a map of their location relative to the Reservoir was incorporated in Section C.9 (Recreation and Land Use). Seven (7) Draft EIS/EIR figures were revised to include the boundary of the Davis-Grunsky Area.
- **Section C.10 (Transportation and Traffic).** Standard Project Commitments TRA-1 (Prepare Traffic Control Plan) and TRA-2 (Pavement Rehabilitation – Public or National Forest Roadways) were revised per comments of the City of Palmdale to incorporate a 3- to 5-year Traffic Plan review and to clarify procedures for any necessary annual roadway repairs conducted by Palmdale Water District.
- **Section C.12 (Water Quality).** The discussion of the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Act and the Clean Water Act was revised per comments of the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board to better clarify this agency's responsibilities under both Acts.
- **Sediment Testing.** Draft EIS/EIR Appendix D Sediment and Fish Test Results was updated to show the sediment testing locations per comments of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

## DECISION RATIONALE

My decision to approve the Proposed Action is made with the full recognition of the annual temporary disturbance to resources within the sediment removal area, as well as to public recreational access to the Reservoir.

The Proposed Action would achieve the purpose and need of the project to restore the water storage capacity at an existing reservoir that has been reduced by siltation and sedimentation.

The Proposed Action is the preferred alternative because it would result in a shorter duration of impacts to public recreation. Under the Proposed Action, the Reservoir would be closed to the public starting after Labor Day until seasonal water refill of the Reservoir suspends removal efforts (estimated between mid-November and January 31).

Under Alternative 1, this annual closure period would start July 1, closing the Reservoir during the peak recreational period between July 1 and Labor Day.

The joint Final EIS/EIR includes mitigation to lessen the impacts to recreation through required coordination of project schedule and activities with the Forest Service staff, as well as providing compensation to the Forest Service for lost recreation opportunities directly attributable to the project.

Most adverse effects from implementing the Proposed Action would be reduced and/or avoided through the incorporation of mitigation measures and standard project commitments (described in Appendix A of the Final EIS/EIR). All practical means to minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative have been adopted.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

A notice of intent to prepare a joint EIS/EIR was published in the Federal Register on March 19, 2014 (79 FR 15305). The project was listed in the Angeles National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions in March 2014 and updated periodically during the environmental analysis. The public was invited to review and comment on the proposal through over 1,000 notice letters distributed to property owners, agencies, other interested parties, and to public repository sites. Advertisements regarding the public scoping meeting were placed in five local and regional newspapers from March 10 to 15, 2014. The EIS/EIR lists agencies, organizations, and people who received copies of the scoping notices on page F-4.

The following issues were identified from scoping comments and were used to determine the scope of the environmental analysis:

- Suggested alternatives to stabilize Little Rock Creek upstream of the dam; and
- Requested analysis of the long-term maintenance activities associated with the project.

A full description of issues relevant to the project appears in the EIS/EIR on page B-12. Scoping outcome summary is in Appendix E of the EIS/EIR.

A Draft EIS/EIR was published for public review and comment on May 6, 2016. Nine (9) comments were received during the public review period began on May 6, 2016. Responses to comments were included in Final EIS/EIR, Appendix G. Responses to comments clarified some aspects of the analysis contained within the Draft EIS/EIR. Based on comments received, no outstanding or controversial issues have been identified with the project.

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

In addition to the Proposed Action, I considered two other alternatives. A more detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in the joint EIS/EIR on pages B-11 to B-22:

**Alternative 1 (Reduced Sediment Removal Intensity Alternative)** – Alternative 1 would remove approximately 1,400,000 cubic yards of sediment to restore and maintain design water storage capacity. Prior to sediment removal, a subterranean grade control structure would be constructed at Rocky Point. Sediment would then be removed annually by truck between July 1 and January. Sediment removal intensity and daily truck trips would be reduced under Alternative 1, requiring approximately 13 to 20 years of annual sediment removal to restore Reservoir design storage capacity. Sediment removal activities would occur five days per week, up to 8 hours per day. Removed sediment would be disposed at nearby exhausted mining quarries in the City of Palmdale. Following initial sediment removal, an estimated 38,000 cubic yards of sediment would be removed every year to maintain design storage capacity of the Reservoir.

**Alternative 2 (No Action/No Project Alternative)** – Under this alternative, sediment removal

activities would not occur. Sediment would continue to accumulate upstream of Littlerock Dam at the average rate of 38,000 cubic yards per year, reducing the capacity of the Reservoir by approximately 23.6 acre-feet annually. Continued sediment deposition could compromise the long-term integrity of the Dam. In this event, the California Department of Water Resources Division of Safety of Dams could require the Dam to be breached or demolished. Demolition of the Dam would eliminate water impoundment at the Reservoir and downstream flood-control.

## FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

**National Forest Land Management Plan.** This decision is consistent with the Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan. The project is also consistent with Forest Land Management Plan program strategies for Special Use Administration, Watershed Function, and Air Quality, and will help accomplish the Desired Conditions for Natural Areas in an Urban Context by using and restoring an existing facility instead of constructing a new one.

The project area falls within Land Use Zones that are designated Backcountry and Developed Area Interface. As defined in the Land Management Plan, Backcountry and Developed Area Interface zones are suitable for the project activities described in this project.

**Endangered Species Act.** The arroyo toad (*Anaxyrus californicus*) is a federally-listed endangered species that is known to occur in Little Rock Creek (above Rocky Point) and Santiago Creek. This species has been addressed and project commitments have been incorporated into the proposed action to minimize potential impacts. In compliance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 USC Section 1531 et seq.), the Forest Service prepared a Biological Assessment for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). All applicable conservation measures, reasonable and prudent measures, and terms and conditions from the project Biological Opinion in this decision will be incorporated.

**Clean Water Act.** The project is expected to meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Point source discharges are regulated by the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit process, outlined in CWA Section 402. For the project, NPDES permits would be issued by the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board. In order to comply with NPDES regulations, a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) would be prepared for project construction activities. In addition, a Section 404 permit would be required for project construction activities involving excavation or replacement of fill material into waters of the United States. The Section 404 permit program is regulated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. A summary of project information that is applicable to the Section 404(b)(1) permit application has been included in Appendix F of this joint EIS/EIR.

**Clean Air Act.** The project is located within an area of the Mojave Desert Air Basin (MDAB) that is under the jurisdiction of the Antelope Valley Air Quality Management District. This portion of the MDAB is in nonattainment for the federal and State ozone standards and the State PM10 standard. Potential air quality impacts have been assessed in Section C.2.4 of this EIS/EIR, including both short and long-term emissions of criteria pollutants resulting from project construction and operation. The annual NO<sub>x</sub> and VOC emissions for the project were calculated to be well below the General Conformity *de minimis* thresholds for the Antelope Valley portion of the MDAB.

**National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).** Section 106 of the NHPA applies to the project because proposed grade control construction and sediment excavation would occur on National Forest System land. No identified cultural resources would be impacted by the project. For unknown buried cultural resources that may be uncovered by the project, eligibility for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places will be evaluated, and a determination of eligibility will be made by the Forest Service in concurrence with the State Historic Preservation Office.

**Environmental Justice.** Executive Order 12898 requires an assessment of whether implementation of the project would disproportionately affect minority or low-income populations. Final EIS/EIR Section E.2.5 documents the analytical process used to comply with this executive order. As described in the Final EIS/EIR, the project area does not have a high percentage of minority or low-income population; therefore, this project will not disproportionately effect the minority and low-income population.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OPPORTUNITIES**

No objection was received during the objection period.

### **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

The project can be implemented upon the signing of this decision.

### **CONTACT**

For additional information concerning this decision, contact:

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Date

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