

Resource Management Plan/ Environmental Assessment Newlands Project, Nevada

The U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) Lahontan Basin Area Office (LBAO), is preparing a resource management plan (RMP) to guide management of approximately 442,000 acres of Reclamation-administered land in Nevada, predominantly in the Fallon and Fernley areas. The RMP will be prepared as a dynamic and flexible plan to allow management to reflect the changing needs of the planning area over the next 15 to 20 years.

The planning area includes all Reclamation lands managed as part of the Newlands Project, which encompasses four counties: Washoe, Storey, Lyon, and Churchill. The planning area is partially bordered by private, county, and tribal lands under the jurisdiction of several agencies.

The Newlands Project is one of Reclamation's first projects and is primarily an irrigation project as set forth in legislation. The Newlands Project, constructed in 1903, provides irrigation water from the Truckee and Carson Rivers for about 55,000 acres of cropland in the Lahontan Valley near Fallon and bench lands near Fernley, Nevada. The purposes of the Newlands Project were expanded in 1990 under Section 209 of Public Law 101-618. In addition to the existing irrigation purpose of the Newlands Project, the Secretary of Interior is authorized to operate and maintain the project for the purposes of: 1) fish and wildlife, including endangered and threatened species; 2) municipal and industrial water supply in Lyon and Churchill counties, Nevada, including the Fallon Indian Reservation; 3) recreation; 4) water quality; and 5) any other purposes recognized as beneficial under the law of the State of Nevada. Any additional uses of the Newlands Project: 1) must have valid water rights and follow State law for any water right transfers; 2) must not increase diversions of Truckee River water to the Newlands Project over those allowed under applicable operating criteria and procedures; and 3) must not conflict with applicable court decrees.

Reclamation holds State permits to store water in Reclamation reservoirs and does not own any water rights in the Newlands Project. All water rights are privately owned. Reclamation has a contract with the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District to operate and maintain the Newlands Project. Operations and maintenance of the Newlands Project will not be addressed through this RMP process.

No management plan currently exists for the Newlands Project lands that the LBAO administers. An environmental assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be prepared for the RMP pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Reclamation's authority to prepare the RMP is outlined in the Reclamation Recreation Management Act of 1992 (P.L. 102-575, Title 28).

The RMP will identify and develop resource management objectives. These objectives will be used as parameters for land use authorizations and conservation of natural resources on Reclamation lands within the Newlands Project Planning Area. The RMP will support the development of a conceptual framework for resource conservation and land stewardship objectives, which will include special management and protection guidelines. The RMP will meet the following requirements: 1) provide a document that guides future resource management decisions; 2) identify, inventory, document, and analyze natural resources on the Project; 3) identify and evaluate land use suitability and capability; 4) define rights, responsibilities, and authorities through contracts and legislation; develop and affirm land use policies, objectives, and guidelines; develop schedules to ensure that RMP goals and objectives are met; 5) provide for public input into planning processes; and 6) be compatible with RMPs and other management plans developed by BLM, Nevada Division of State Parks, the Navy, and other agencies.