

Environmental Assessment, Finding of No Significant Impact

Watershed Plan For Raft River Flood Protection and Groundwater Recharge Project Cassia County, Idaho

AGENCY ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). In accordance with the NRCS regulations (7 CFR Part 650) implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; 40 CFR 1500-1508), NRCS has prepared an environmental review of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action includes construction of intake suction lines, a pump house, and a 13-mile (68,872 feet) long north to south buried agricultural water management pipeline; construction of three groundwater recharge basins with a combined volume of 620 acre-feet; construction of a 25-megawatt substation; construction of a 85 acre-feet flood detention basin along Heglar Creek; improvements to existing diversions on Cassia Creek and Middle Fork of Cassia Creek; and bank restoration and stabilization measures on Heglar Creek.

NRCS DECISION TO BE MADE

As the delegated Responsible Federal Official for compliance with NEPA, I must make the following decision:

I must determine if the agency's Proposed Action (Action Alternative) will or will not be a major Federal action that requires the issuance of an environmental impact statement. The Raft River Flood Protection and Groundwater Recharge Project Watershed Plan-Environmental Assessment (EA) accompanying this finding has provided the analysis needed to assess the significance of

the potential impacts from the selected alternative. As per NEPA (Public Law 91–190 As Amended Through P.L. 118–5) all supporting data leading to this decision is incorporated by reference in the Raft River Watershed Plan-EA.

For information regarding this finding, contact: Dr. Jerome Faulkner, Acting State Conservationist, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Idaho Natural Resources Conservation Service, 9173 W. Barnes Drive, Suite C, Boise, ID 83079; (208) 378-5700.

Conclusion

This environmental document was initiated using the 40 CFR 1500-1508 (July 2020, as amended May 2024) and 7 CFR 650 regulations. These regulations have recently been rescinded and replaced with USDA regulations found under 7 CFR 1b. However, in a good-faith effort to fulfill NEPA’s requirements, including Congressional timeline and considerations of fiscal restraints, the agency decided to continue to use 40 CFR 1500-1508 (July 2020, as amended May 2024) and 7 CFR 650. This is permissible per the USDA policy guidance issued in the Interim Final Rule’s preamble. The Federal Register notice said: “To ensure an orderly transition without undue impact on the USDA mission, USDA subcomponents have discretion to continue using the versions of USDA and agency-specific NEPA regulations in place before publication of this interim final rule, as well as the 2020 version of the CEQ NEPA regulations, where it makes sense for proposals that are at a certain stage in the applicable NEPA process (categorical exclusion, environmental assessment, or environmental impact statement).” 90 FR 29644 (July 3, 2025). In the NRCS’s expert opinion, it has thoroughly considered the factors mandated by the statute and the regulatory frameworks it used; and that, in the responsible federal official’s

judgment, the analysis contained herein is adequate to inform and reasonably explain findings regarding the proposed action and selected alternative.

Based on the information incorporated by reference and presented in the attached Raft River Watershed Plan-EA, I find in accordance with NEPA, that the selection of the agency Proposed Action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment requiring preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. Thus, a finding of no significant impact has been created for this Federal action.

Signed

Dr. Jerome Faulkner
Acting State Conservationist

Date