

RECORD OF DECISION

SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT MISSOURI RIVER FISH AND WILDLIFE MITIGATION PROJECT, MISSOURI, KANSAS, IOWA, AND NEBRASKA

This Record of Decision find Alternative A (the Preferred Action), contained in the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the Missouri River Fish and Wildlife Mitigation Project (Mitigation Project), to be environmentally justified and in the public interest. Implementation of this alternative will provide the greatest opportunity for environmental restoration and mitigation of fish and wildlife habitat lost as a result of construction and operation of the Missouri River Bank Stabilization and Navigation Project (BSNP). The Corps has reviewed and evaluated documents concerning this proposed action; has considered the views of other agencies and the general public and responded to comments containing those views; and has examined the various practicable means to avoid and/or minimize environmental harm from implementation of the preferred action.

The purpose of the Mitigation Project is to restore a portion of the fish and wildlife habitat that has been lost due to the construction and operation of the BSNP. The Corps has determined that by 2003, approximately 522,000 acres of fish and wildlife habitat in the natural channel and meander belt of the Missouri River will have been lost as a result of the BSNP. Prior to construction of the BSNP, the Lower Missouri River was uncontrolled and meandered across the floodplain and created a highly dynamic ecosystem through the physical processes of erosion, deposition, and accretion. The construction and operation of the BSNP has resulted in a significant change to the Missouri River ecosystem.

Three alternatives, including the "No Action" alternative, were evaluated in detail in the SEIS. Alternative A, the Preferred Action, is the environmentally preferable alternative and will provide the greatest benefits to the Lower Missouri River ecosystem, including the Federally listed endangered pallid sturgeon, of the three alternatives considered in the SEIS. This alternative includes the acquisition and development of fish and wildlife habitat on an additional 118,650 acres of land along the lower Missouri River. Alternative A provides the largest increase in wetlands, terrestrial habitat, and shallow water habitat while having the fewest significant adverse impacts of the three alternatives considered. Only Alternative A includes development of 7,000 to 20,000 acres of shallow water habitat to address pallid sturgeon habitat goals established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in its November 2000 Biological Opinion on the Missouri River. Alternative A is the only alternative that will achieve a significant level of recovery of the Missouri River floodplain ecosystem and assist the Corps of Engineers to meet our obligations under the Endangered Species Act. The Mitigation Project is the most comprehensive tool within the Corps' authorities to address habitat mitigation along

the Lower Missouri River. Alternative B (the No Development alternative) would include the acquisition of 118,650 acres of land, but without any planned and constructed development of fish and wildlife habitat, including shallow water habitat for the pallid sturgeon. Alternative C ("No Action") would allow for no further land acquisition and no additional development of fish and wildlife habitat, including shallow water habitat for the pallid sturgeon. Both Alternative B (the No Development alternative) and Alternative C ("No Action") would not accomplish the goals of fish and wildlife ecosystem restoration and compliance with the Endangered Species Act on the Lower Missouri River.

Implementation of the Preferred Action will increase the amount of fish and wildlife habitat mitigation on the Lower Missouri River from Sioux City, Iowa, to the mouth near St. Louis, Missouri, by 118,650 acres as authorized by the Water Resources Development Act of 1999. The 118,650 acres for the Mitigation Project would be obtained through acquisition of private land in fee title or easement from willing sellers, and development of public land through donated easements. Implementation of the Preferred Action is anticipated to be in excess of 30 years. Under the Preferred Action, shallow water habitat would be included in the 118,650 acres and could potentially range from a minimum of 7,000 acres to a maximum of 20,000 acres. Restored habitat types would include wetlands, bottomland forest, native prairie, chutes and side channels, shallow water habitat, backwater areas, and slack water habitats.

All practical means to avoid, minimize, and mitigate significant adverse effects for the Preferred Action have been considered and will be adopted during the planning and development of individual mitigation sites. These measures include; limiting the amount of land acquired within a levee/drainage district, acquiring entire levee/drainage districts if all members are willing sellers, and working with levee/drainage districts to realign levees and reduce district costs. Potential adverse impacts could also be reduced if affected levee/drainage districts received payment from of the annual Federal Payment in Lieu of Taxes; however, this is outside the authority of the Army Corps of Engineers. I have concluded that the public interest will best be served by implementing Alternative A as described in the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. This Record of Decision completes the National Environmental Policy Act process.

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Date



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