Decision Notice & Finding of No Significant Impact

Calamity Road Relocation Project

USDA Forest Service
Palisades Ranger District, Caribou—Targhee National Forest
Bonneville County, Idaho
Sections 7, 8, and 12, T 1 S, R 45 E

I. Decision and Reasons for the Decision

A. Background

The proposed project is located in southeastern Idaho; 55 miles southeast of Idaho Falls and 11 miles west of the Idaho-Wyoming border (see Figure 1-1, page 1-3). The closest city is Irwin, which is 7 miles downstream of the dam. The dam is in Bonneville County, Idaho, although the southern tip of the reservoir extends into Lincoln County, Wyoming. Palisades Dam is located on the South Fork of the Snake River.

The dam is part of Department of the Interior Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) Palisades Project. The Palisades Project helps control floods and develops a substantial block of electrical power.

In response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, Reclamation completed in-depth security assessments of its facilities and a full-scale evaluation of potential vulnerabilities to terrorist attacks at certain facilities. The Federal Safety, Security, and Law Enforcement Office identified vulnerabilities at a number of Reclamation dams, including Palisades Dam. The studies determined that motor vehicles traveling across the crest of Palisades Dam are a security risk and that an explosion could compromise the structural integrity of the dam and the safety of persons living downstream.

The Final environmental assessment (EA) evaluates the Palisades Dam Security Enhancement Project and documented the analysis of five alternatives developed to meet the need to correct security vulnerabilities associated with the Palisades Dam. The EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR Part 1500). The Forest Service was a cooperating agency in the development of the Final EA. The Final EA can be reviewed at the following website:

http://www.usbr.gov/pn/programs/ea/idaho/palisades/index.html

On March 22, 2011, the Bureau of Reclamation made a decision to construct a bridge below the Palisades Dam to improve security to the dam. This decision prompted the Forest Service to make a decision on the connected action of

realigning a portion of Forest Service Road 076 (Bear Creek Road) to provide continued public access to the Calamity Campground and Boat Ramp.

B. Decision

The EA considered the impacts of closing public access across Palisades Dam and analyzed 2 options for routing traffic to access the Calamity area. Figure 2-7. Alignment Options, page 2-15 of EA has been attached to show the access options.

Based on the analysis found in the EA, Biological Assessments and Biological Evaluations and specialist reports I have decided to implement Access Option 2. This option utilizes existing road FS Road 277 and FSR 076 instead of FSR 278. This will provide access that is at a more favorable grade, will be easier to maintain and will require less reconstruction than Option 1.

FSR 277 will require some minimal blading and widening. FSR 076 will require widening to improve sight distance and turning radius. The access road to Calamity Campground and Boat ramp will be relocated from it's current location to the location shown on the attached map. This relocation will involve the decommissioning of the existing access road, including ripping seeding and recontouring as much as possible the existing road bed. The section of FSR 076 from the new campground access point to the Palisades Dam will be closed to the public, which is about 0.9 miles. The new access road will be 0.5 miles of new road construction.

The net effect of this decision will be a decrease of approximately .5 miles of road open to public access. Currently in the Calamity Travel Management Polygon Area 2.8 miles are open for motorized road and trail use. This decision would decrease that to 2.3 miles, which is within the Forest Plan and Travel Plan allowable road densities.

C. Rationale for my Decision

I considered the no-action alternative and Alternative D, which has 2 transportation options within it. My decision only pertains to the connected action of providing public access to National Forest System lands that are unrelated to the dam as a result of the Bureau of Reclamation decision to implement Alternative D, therefore, I would have no decision connected to the selection of the other alternatives considered in the Final EA.

Alternative D – Proposed Action

The proposed action would allow continued access to the Calamity Campground and Boat Ramp when the access over the Palisades Dam is closed to the public.

Alternative - No Action

Under the No Action alternative, as described in the Final EA, there is no need to change public access in the Calamity Area.

For this Decision, the No Action alternative would consist of not improving the access connecting the new bridge to the Calamity CG and Boat Ramp. This would not meet the direction in the 1997 Revised Forest Plan or meet public needs, therefore I do not consider this a viable alternative and did not analyze as allowed in 36 CFR 220 §7(B)(2)(ii).

II. Public Involvement

Public involvement began in July of 2008 with a news release by Bureau of Reclamation. On September 29, 2009 a scoping document was mailed to approximately 240 federal, state and local government officials and other known potential stakeholders. An article was published in local newspapers describing the proposed security measures. A public open house on October 8, 2009 in Swan Valley was held to provide information to the public. The District Ranger of the Palisades Ranger District attended to participate and answer questions relating to the Forest Service part of the Palisades Security Enhancement Project.

The Draft EA was mailed on January 26, 2011, to more than 122 Federal, State, local agencies, elected officials, Indian tribes, irrigation districts, interest groups and individuals for a 30-day comment period, which ended February 25, 2011. Comments were received from Bonneville County, Bureau of Land Management, United States Forest Service, Idaho State Parks and Recreation, Lincoln County Commissioners, Trout Unlimited and six individuals (for a total of twelve letters).

Based on a thorough review of the public comments received, Interdisciplinary Team Reports and analysis of the environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and implementation of all environmental commitments as presented in this Final EA and FONSI, I conclude that implementation of the proposed access route changes will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment or natural and cultural resources.

The issues analyzed in the EA that are related to this decision include:

- Transportation and Access – BORs construction of a new bridge downstream of the dam would not affect Public access to recreation sites other than the Calamity Campground and Boat Ramp. There will be some temporary impact to the access for the Riverside Campground (the recreation site at the downstream toe of the dam), but that will be addressed by modifying the un-improved road as explained in the Reclamation Decision. Reclamation will work closely with USFS, Bonneville County and others to establish a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that clearly identifies assumptions and responsibilities for upgrading and maintaining the access route and campground associated with the Riverside Campground.

- Recreation – The proposed action would cause only minimal short-term impacts during construction. Recreational access to the Calamity Campground and Boat Ramp will be maintained. The new road alignment will improve safety on the access road by maintaining easier grades and, improving site distances. The new road alignment is longer than the existing alignment and will increase travel time from Highway 26 to the Calamity Area. The issues are discussed in more detail in the EA, pages 3.1.1.

III. Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA and supported by the specialist reports, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

A. Beneficial and adverse impacts

My finding of no significant impact is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action (see EA pages 2.11).

B. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety

There will be no significant effects on public health, and this project will increase the potential safety of people downstream of the dam. The proposed action will remedy security vulnerabilities at Palisades Dam related to motor vehicles with explosives using the access road across the crest of the dam for the intent to imperil the inhabitants of the Snake River Valley (see EA page 2.11)

The new transportation routes will be upgraded to provide safe access to the Calamity Campground and Summer Home area. Without the road relocation and improvements, construction of the bridge below the dam would create a situation that would decrease public safety when traveling to the Calamity area.

C. Unique characteristics of the geographic area

There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because the project would not adversely affect any wetland and other waters of the United States, riparian areas, and floodplains within the project area.

No wetlands or stream channels will be impacted by the 0.5 mile road relocation and improvements..

D. The degree to which the effects on the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

Public comments did not point out any scientific controversy regarding our estimates of the impacts of this project.

E. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks

We have considerable experience with the types of activities to be implemented. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk.

F. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration

The action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because this action is only applicable to access to areas around Palisades Dam.

G. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts

The cumulative impacts of the changes to access as well as the construction of the bridge and it's associated effects have been disclosed in Chapter 3 of the Final EA.

H. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources

The area that would be impacted by the road relocation was surveyed for Cultural Resources. A determination of “no effect” was made and sent to the Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer. The Idaho SHPO concurred with the determination on August 15, 2011.

I. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973

The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973.

This project was streamlined with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on March 9, 2011. The Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the Forest Service determinations of “No Effect” on all plants and animals listed under the ESA.

A Final Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation of federally listed and Regionally Sensitive wildlife species was completed on April 29, 2011. A BA and BE were also prepared for federally listed and Regionally Sensitive plant species on November 8, 2011.

J. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or other requirements imposed for the protection of the environment

The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Specialist reports confirm the action is consistent with the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Revised Forest Plan.

IV. Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to relocate and improve FS Roads 277 and 076 as necessary to connect access from the new bridge to the Calamity campground, boat ramp and summer home area is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives listed on pages III-23 Forest Use and Occupation. The project was designed in conformance with Revised Targhee Forest Plan standards and guides.

All of my findings and conclusions are based upon my review of the EA and project record, which document consideration of the best available science[1] as follows:

- The effects analyses relied on relevant scientific information:
  - Custom Soil Resource Report for Targhee National Forest, Idaho, and Wyoming; Calamity Campground Road Relocation Project. Prepared by United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, pp 52.
  - Streamlining, 9 March 2011, pp 1-5
  - Biological Evaluations and Biological Assessments of Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive wildlife and plant Species.
  - Determination of Significance and Effect for Cultural Resources.
- Public comments did not point out any scientific controversy regarding our estimates of the impacts.
- The information used by the interdisciplinary team is adequate to determine that there are no reasonably foreseeable significant adverse effects on the human environment (refer to effects analyses cited above under III.A-J). Therefore, there is no incomplete or unavailable information that is essential to a reasoned decision among the alternatives. An Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

VII. Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, please contact Robbert Mickelsen, District Ranger, Palisades Ranger District, 3659 E Ririe Hwy, Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401. Phone: 208-523-1412.

12-19-11

ROBBERT G. MICKELSEN **Date**

District Ranger

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