Conforth Ranch (Wanaket) Wildlife Mitigation Project

Draft Management Plan and Draft Environmental Assessment

This Draft Environmental Assessment
also serves as the
Final Environmental Assessment
since there were no comments or changes.

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Bonneville
Power Administration

Umatilla
Confederated Tribes

CONFORTH RANCH (WANAKET) WILDLIFE MITIGATION PROJECT

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Chapter 1: Purpose of and Need for Action

1.1 Underlying Need for Action

Development of the hydropower system in the Columbia River Basin has had far-reaching effects on many species of wildlife: One component of the system is McNary Dam, on the Columbia River at river mile 292 near Umatilla, Oregon (beginning operation in 1953). The impoundment extends 98 kilometers (61 miles) upstream, with a surface area of about 15 600 hectares (ha; 39,000 acres). The project flooded 6200 ha (15,502 acres) of terrestrial wildlife habitat: and 1096 ha (2,741 acres) of island wildlife habitat. *(USFWS, Wildlife Impact Assessment)*

In general, Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) needs to provide protection, mitigation, and enhancement of fish and wildlife affected by the development of Columbia River Basin federal hydroelectric projects, including McNary Dam, as allocated to the purpose of power production. (See Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 839 *et seq.*, Section 4(h)(10)(A)). Toward meeting this need, and in accordance with Northwest Power Planning Council (NPPC) procedure, BPA has acquired approximately 1140 ha (2817 acres) of land commonly known as the Conforth Ranch, located in Umatilla County, Oregon; see the map following page 20. (NPPC, *Fish and Wildlife Program Amendment*, section- 1003(b)(7)(C), and Goller, NPPC) BPA specifically, needs management of this land to protect, mitigate, and enhance wildlife affected by the development of McNary Dam.

1.2 Purposes

Purposes to consider in deciding how to best meet this need are:

- Consistency with the NPPC's Fish and Wildlife Program;
- Potential to achieve sound biological objectives, especially with regard to wildlife species identified by the NPPC as, "the starting point for identifying wildlife measures," *i.e.*, mMallard, Western meadowlark; Canada goose, sSpotted sandpiper, yellow warbler, downy woodpecker, mink, and California quail (NPPC, *Resident Fish and Wildlife Amendments*, Table 4);
- Consistency with the legal rights of appropriate Indian tribes;
- Potential to complement the existing and future activities of the federal and the region's state fish and wildlife agencies and appropriate Indian tribes;
- Cost-effectiveness; and
- Potential to create and maintain, conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony.

Chapter 2: Proposed Action and Alternatives

Table 1 summarizes the range of alternatives under consideration, as developed from public comment. Except for the No Action alternative, all alternatives would provide for transfer of property rights from BPA to the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR), which would manage the property in accordance with the specified management plan. CTUIR would name the property Wanaket, once a nearby place name meaning "water in trees." Detailed descriptions of each alternative follow.

Table 1: Summary of Alternative Management Plans

Alternative Management Plan	Habitat Management	Wildlife Management	Water System Management	Public Access Management
Proposed Action: **Balanced Use Management Plan**	Improve habitat by emphasizing native plant communities and controlling undesirable exotic plant species. May create new wetlands. Install artificial habitat structures. May add certain adjacent properties to wildlife conservation area.	Emphasize diversity of naturally occurring species. Primary reliance on natural predation for population control, with some artificial control measures (including regulated harvest).	Maintain, improve, and possibly expand water distribution system. Operate system to mimic natural hydrologic regime functions.	Regulated public access only, for limited recreation, hunting, education, and scientific study. Some seasonal and zone closures. No public vehicular access. Limited installation of visitor facilities such as parking, trails, signs, and blinds.
No Action (no management plan; sell property)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Status Quo Management Plan	Emphasize loss prevention. Control noxious weeds.	Maintain existing wildlife values.	Maintain operational water system to support existing pond and pasture irrigation.	Regulated public access for hunting, with seasonal and zone closures.
Wildlife Sanctuary Management Plan	Same as proposed action.	Similar to proposed action, except no harvest.	Same as proposed action.	No authorized public access.
Increased Multiple Use Management Plan	Similar to proposed action, but relying more on land uses with economic return (such as grazing) to achieve goals.	Similar to proposed action, but with less diversity on agricultural components of the property.	Same as proposed action.	Increase public use consistent with wildlife values, including economic uses (e.g., grazing and farming) and wide variety of recreation activities. Limited installation of visitor facilities.

2.1 *Proposed Action:* Balanced Use Management Plan

The proposed action emphasizes maintenance and enhancement of wildlife habitat and values balanced with regulated public access. Proposed management activities would be designed to maintain a diversity of plant and animal communities that interact with each other and their environment. The emphasis would be to manage for diverse native plant and animal communities. Specific activities would depend on feasibility analysis, cost effectiveness, and availability of funds. Management objectives would include the following:

- Provide quality habitat for migratory waterfowl and shorebirds;
- Protect and enhance habitat for Federal and State recognized threatened; endangered, or sensitive wildlife species;
- Protect and enhance native shrub/steppe/grassland habitats and associated wildlife species;
- Protect, enhance, and create wetland and riparian habitats on the property; and
- Provide a variety of cultural and recreational opportunities consistent with wildlife protection, enhancement, and mitigation.

Regulated public access would be allowed with designated areas for both consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife oriented recreational and cultural use activities. Opportunities for research and environmental education would also be available:

Prior to any new management activities, surveys and inventories of plant and animal communities would be conducted to help guide specific management action.

2.1.1 WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM MANAGEMENT

The goal of water management at Conforth Ranch would be to manage water deliveries for benefits to native plant and animal communities. Within the framework of the authorized irrigation season (March 1 to October 31), water deliveries would mimic the natural hydrologic regime of spring/fall precipitation with dry summers. Irrigation practices would provide spring flooding, allow natural drawdown during summer months, and flooding again in the fall. In order to accomplish this goal, all components of the water distribution system would be maintained, upgraded (enhanced) and/or expanded

The basic components of the water distribution system are in place but need repair or replacement. Components include the irrigation pump station, the water delivery pipe; and the canal/ditch system including culverts, pipes, and control structures.

2.1.1.1 Pump Station and Delivery Pipe Upgrade

The pumping station, located on US Army Corps of Engineers property, would be upgraded to meet all easement requirements and safety and electrical codes. Existing pumps and motors would be repaired or replaced to improve overall pumping efficiency and reduce long term operation and maintenance costs. The existing water delivery pipe would be repaired and/or replaced. All intakes would be properly screened consistent with required fish protection measures and efficiency needs of the pumping station. The pump house structure would be upgraded to meet all safety standards including posting hazardous warning signs and installing security measures (i.e., fences, gates, and locks).

2.1.1.2 Canal/Ditch System Upgrade

The existing system of canals and ditches would be maintained and improved. Defective and damaged , control structures and culverts would be replaced or repaired. New control structures may be installed for revised water management scenarios. Some ditches may. be permanently retired, removed, and rehabilitated consistent with water rights transfer requirements. Other ditches may be relocated to improve water delivery efficiency and wildlife habitat values.

2.1.1.3 Expansion of Water Delivery System

A canal and ditch system may be. developed for water delivery to areas west of the feedlot complex and north of Highway 730, to protect and transfer water rights (previously allocated to irrigation and stock watering) and enhance wetland habitat. The transferred water rights may be used to create new wetlands.

2.1.2 HABITAT MANAGEMENT

To improve habitat conditions for many species of wildlife, projects may be planned to maintain, enhance, and restore native plant communities; control undesirable, non native plant and animal species; and install artificial structures.

Prior to implementation of any new habitat management activities, a comprehensive survey would be. conducted to determine the distribution of plant communities and existing habitats. Long term monitoring would occur to evaluate the success of management activities, and to ensure that baseline habitat units determined by the habitat evaluation survey were, at a minimum, being maintained.

2.1.2.1 Uplands (shrub/steppe/grassland)

The shrub/steppe/grassland plant communities in non irrigated areas. of the ranch would be protected, enhanced, and restored using a variety of, techniques. These techniques would be evaluated. and applied to promote wildlife objectives on a case by case basis. Techniques include but would not be limited to the following:

- Natural succession;
- Fire management (prescribed burns, fire prevention/control);
- Seeding, plantings, fertilizing;
- Farming/tillage techniques;
- Livestock management; and
- Mechanical, biological, and/or chemical control methods.

General guidelines for maintaining, enhancing, and restoring native plant communities include using. native seed and plant materials, preferably from local stocks. Management of a variety of native plant community types would help ensure species diversity. Where needed, native vegetation would be planted as a buffer between sensitive wildlife areas and human activities or adjoining properties.

2.12.2 Riparian tree/shrub

The existing riparian habitats would be protected, maintained, and enhanced through water management and restoration of native plant communities.

2.1:2.3 Wetlands

Wetlands would be protected, maintained, enhanced, and created using a variety of management techniques to mimic a natural hydrologic regime. Techniques may include (but are not limited to) expansion and enhancement of the existing water delivery system, employment of moist soil management strategies, construction of dikes and levees to create wetlands, retiring/relocating ditches, and restoring native plant species and communities.

The CTUIR would obtain all pertinent Federal and State permits for wetland activities.

2.1.2.4 Structural Habitat Improvement Projects

Habitat enhancement activities may include installation of artificial structures such as nest boxes and platforms, artificial islands, avian perch sites, guzzlers (wildlife watering devices), basking areas for turtles and waterfowl, bat .houses, brush and rock piles, and fencing. When practical, conservation groups and/or environmental education opportunities would be utilized in the construction; placement, and monitoring of these habitat projects.

2.1.2.5 Additional Lands

Two parcels of Federal lands are adjacent to the Conforth Ranch property. Both are withdrawn lands reserved for power development facilities. A 44 ha (111 acre) parcel is owned by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and presently controlled by BPA. Another 16 ha (40 acre) parcel is owned by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). Both land units contain wetlands and shrub/steppe communities. There is little or no active management on these parcels. Because of their location adjoining the Conforth Ranch and their high wildlife values, consistent management of these parcels would enhance the. ecosystem management potential of the wildlife mitigation lands. Pending feasibility review, these lands may be incorporated into the wildlife mitigation management area.

2.1.3 WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Management of wildlife populations (including fisheries) would focus on the diversity of species that naturally occur within the area and are. associated with the native plant communities, including key mitigation species, migratory birds, threatened or endangered species, and. non game species. Management would be centered primarily on the protection, maintenance, enhancement, and restoration of wildlife populations through habitat management.

2.1.3.1 Surveys, Inventories, Monitoring and Evaluations

Surveys, inventories and monitoring/evaluation studies of key mitigation species; native wildlife species; Federal or. State listed endangered, threatened, and sensitive species; game/non game species; and habitats would be conducted to establish baseline conditions and trends. Studies may include quantifiable habitat evaluations, population studies, photo points, inventories, breeding pair surveys, brood counts, predator/prey/depredation studies, wildlife use, harvest reports, research projects, and other studies necessary for management purposes.

Long term monitoring and evaluation of management activities would occur to determine if the objectives of the Management Plan are met and to evaluate the success of the Management Plan. Included in the monitoring and evaluation program:

- Use of the .U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Habitat Evaluation Procedures to analyze changes in habitat units in response to maintenance and enhancement activities;

- Monitoring of species presence and occurrence before, during, and after project implementation; arid

- Cost effectiveness of comparative methodologies during development and implementation of management activities.

Information obtained from monitoring and evaluation would be used to develop and analyze management activities including effectiveness of habitat maintenance and restoration activities, and species occurrence and response to management actions. An adaptive approach to resource management in the mitigation management area would provide the flexibility and opportunity to alter management activities over time in response to the success or failure of management actions:

2.1.3.2 Species Management

Natural predation would be the preferred means of wildlife population control. However, native and non-native fish and wildlife species may be controlled if necessary and economically feasible. This may include control of carp, bullfrog, and other native/non native species if surveys and information. indicate that native wildlife species or habitats are threatened. Techniques utilized may include destruction or removal of individual species by scare devices, hazing, shooting, trapping, seining, netting, angling, or other capture techniques; and physical, biological or chemical controls. No activities would be undertaken unless compatible with management plan objectives and carried out so as to not cause adverse impacts on other species.

Wildlife may be captured, marked, and released on site, or retained as part of an approved and permitted wildlife or scientific research project. Only authorized and permitted personnel would participate in these projects. The CTUIR would obtain all pertinent Federal and State permits for wildlife management . activities.

2.1.4 PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION

Some regulated public access would be permitted if compatible with wildlife protection goals. Activities may include hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife viewing, photography, environmental education programs, dog training, tours, and other activities. Prior authorization would be required to access the property. Seasonal and/or zone closures maybe enacted to protect wildlife and habitat during critical periods. Safety zones and no access areas would be signed.

No vehicular traffic would be allowed except for administrative purposes. Designated parking areas may be developed and signed Viewing blinds, hiking trails, restroom facilities, and parking areas may be developed. Any planned facilities or trails would be located away from sensitive wildlife areas. Interpretive signs may be located adjacent to viewing areas to provide visitor information on natural and cultural resources.

All access and recreational opportunities would be evaluated for consistency with wildlife values. Access and recreational opportunities would be altered and adjusted in order to protect wildlife and wildlife habitat.

2.2 No Action

BPA would not directly or indirectly protect and manage the Conforth Ranch property to mitigate the loss of wildlife habitat caused by the development of Columbia River Basin hydroelectric projects. Instead, BPA would attempt to sell the property at fair market value.

2.3 Status Quo Management Plan

Under the Status Quo Management alternative, the wildlife mitigation management area would be managed to prevent the loss of wildlife habitat. As with other action alternatives, surveys and inventories of plant and animal communities would be conducted to help guide specific: management action. Baseline habitat conditions would be maintained. Activities would be directed at preserving existing wildlife values and maintaining the property's infrastructure. Activities may include irrigation for pasture and pond maintenance; fence maintenance; routine building and pump maintenance; weed and vector control; . and periodic monitoring of the area by authorized personnel. Little or no enhancement activities would occur. Public access would be allowed only for regulated hunting.

Adjacent federal lands would not be added to the wildlife mitigation management area.

2.3.1 WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM MANAGEMENT

The water distribution system would be maintained in operating condition. No major upgrades to the system would occur. Individual elements of the system would be replaced only when no longer functional:

2.3.2 HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Existing habitat values as determined by the baseline survey would be maintained. No habitat improvement projects or enhancements would occur. Only periodic monitoring surveys would be conducted to ensure maintenance of the existing habitat values.

2.3.3 WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Wildlife management activities would be limited to those needed to maintain existing wildlife values. Only general wildlife observations would be conducted. No active species management would occur. Periodic monitoring surveys for wildlife populations and habitat would be conducted to ensure the maintenance of the existing wildlife values.

2.3.4 PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION

Public access and recreation would be limited to a regulated hunting program, with seasonal and zone closures.

2.4 Wildlife Sanctuary Management Plan

As with the Balanced Use Management alternative, maintenance and enhancement of wildlife habitat and values would be emphasized. However, access would be restricted to authorized personnel for administrative purposes only. No public access for recreation or commercial purposes would be allowed. As with other action alternatives, surveys and inventories of plant and animal communities would be conducted to help guide. specific management action.

Adjacent Federal land may be incorporated into the wildlife management area.

2.4.1 WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM MANAGEMENT

As with the Balanced Use Management alternative, the, water distribution system may be maintained, upgraded (enhanced), and expanded (see section 2.1.1).

2.4.2 HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Habitat management activities would be the same as the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 2.1.2).

2.4.3 WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Wildlife management activities would the same as the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 2.1.3), except with no hunting or other harvest activities (public or Tribal).

2.4.4 PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION

No public access or recreation programs would be allowed in the wildlife management area. Access would be only for authorized personnel. Research projects may be allowed, but no environmental education opportunities would be permitted.

2.5 Increased Multiple Use Management Plan

Significant opportunities for recreational and economic activities may be allowed if determined compatible with wildlife values. As with other action alternatives, surveys and inventories of plant and animal communities would be conducted to help guide specific management action. Baseline habitat conditions would be maintained or enhanced Activities and uses such as livestock grazing, haying, farming,, hiking, horseback riding, dog trials, hunting, fishing, trapping, wildlife observation, or similar activities, may occur.

Adjacent Federal land may be incorporated into the wildlife management area.

2.5.1 WATER DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM MANAGEMENT

As with the Balanced Use Management alternative, the water distribution system may be maintained, upgraded (enhanced), and expanded (see section 2.1.1).

2.5.2 HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Management would encourage the use of economic permittees to accomplish habitat management goals and to provide economic use opportunities. A greater emphasis would be placed on wildlife habitats with high potential to produce economic returns. Grazing, haying, and fanning may be emphasized to accomplish wildlife habitat goals. Existing habitat values as determined by the baseline survey would be maintained or enhanced

2.5.3 WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Wildlife management activities would be similar to the Balanced Use Management Alternative (see section 2.1.3), except incorporated with economic land uses.

2.5.4 PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION

Regulated public access would be permitted to the extent compatible, with existing wildlife values. All activities that may be authorized with the Balanced Use Management, alternative (see section 2.1.4) may also be authorized here; and may also include camping, trapping, and dog trials. A recreational plan would be developed to ensure consistency with wildlife values.

2.6 Alternatives Eliminated from Consideration and Detailed Analysis

Alternative management plans involving more intensive public use of the property are eliminated from further consideration because of probable conflict with achievement of the sound biological objectives. For example, public use of all terrain vehicles would be too disruptive of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Chapter 3: Affected Environment

The Conforth Ranch wildlife.mitigati6n property consists of approximately 1140 ha (2817 acres) adjacent to the south shore of the Columbia River along Lake Wallula between the Port of Umatilla (River Mile 295) on the west and Hat Rock State Park (River Mile 299) on the east.

The diverse topography of the area includes undulating surface features; scattered intermediate and permanent wetlands; small, closed basins (potholes); cliffs; basalt rock outcroppings; and areas of relatively flat, open meadows and pasture.

3.1 Soils

The soils are generally mapped as Starbuck Rock Outcrop. (USDA, Soil Survey.) Starbuck soil is shallow, well drained, and moderately permeable. Typically, the surface layer is brown very fine sandy . ,loam. The subsoil is brown sandy loam. Basalt is at a depth of 18 inches. Rock Outcrop consists of areas of exposed basalt. Because the soil is shallow and the topography of the area undulating, excess irrigation water tends to. accumulate in depressions. Decades of livestock grazing has compacted soils. Wind erosion has occurred in areas overgrazed by livestock, and by other ranch operation and maintenance activities.

3.2 Water

A flood. irrigation system is in place that irrigates pasture lands and some wetlands. The irrigation system consists of a pumping station on the Columbia River, approximately 366 m (1200 feet) of buried pipe, numerous culverts and pipes, and a complex open ditch system to irrigate the property by gravity flow.

The pump station is located by easement on property managed by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. The power source is electricity. The station consists of three electrical pumps including a 350 horsepower high lift turbine and two 150 horsepower centrifugal pumps. The intakes are screened for fish protection. However, the entire pumping station is antiquated and in considerable disrepair. All intake and outlet pipes are deteriorated, pumps/motors need repair or replacement, and electrical problems exist.

Parts of the ditch system are deteriorated. Maintenance needs include cleaning; brush removal; realignment and/or closure of some ditches; construction of new ditches; replacement of culverts, pipes, and other water control structures; and repair of leaks and breaches.

Property rights include rights for Columbia River water, to irrigate pasture and water stock. The existing right is to irrigate 321 ha (794 acres), not to exceed 1.88 m per ha (2.5 ft per acre), plus water for stock use (5.66 liters [0.2 cubic feet] per second per animal unit). Overall water withdrawal is not to exceed 220.87 liters (7.8 cubic feet) per second.

3.3 Vegetation

A Habitat Evaluation Procedure was conducted in 1990 by the USFWS as part of the property acquisition study. (USFWS, Feasibility Study) Several wildlife habitat types were identified on the ranch, including shrub/steppe/grass, pasture, emergent wetland, riparian herb, riparian shrub, sand/gravel/cobble/mud, and riparian tree.

The shrub/steppe/grass cover type comprises approximately 631 ha (1,560 acres), or about 58 percent of the property. Big sagebrush is the most common shrub. Its coverage varies from little to very dense. Rabbitbrush and bitterbrush also occur in this cover type. Cheatgrass is the dominant grass. Its density varies greatly.

Pasture is the only agricultural land within the ranch. It is comprised of. a grass/fort mix and flood irrigated to varying degrees. Pasture covers approximately 393 ha (970 aces), or about 34 percent of the total property.

Emergent wetlands are well defined and occur primarily as "pot holes" resulting from runoff into small closed basins. They range in size from 0.2 ha to 2 ha (0.5 acre to 5 acres). Wetlands comprise. approximately 69 ha (170 acres), about 6 percent of the total property. .

The riparian tree cover type consists of black cottonwood, willow, and Russian olive, and is associated with wetlands and irrigation ditches. :This cover type comprises less than 2 ha (5 acres), less than l percent of the total property.

Riparian shrubs include young willow and Russian olive less than 4.6 m (15 feet) high. They are often associated with riparian herb communities or irrigation ditches. The shrubs are usually sparsely spaced and occur on sites with relatively dense stands of forbs and grasses. Most of these areas are wetlands occurring as a result of irrigation. They comprise approximately 11 ha (27 acres), about 1 percent of the total property.

Riparian herb consists of low growing herbaceous vegetation adjacent to emergent wetlands or in other low areas receiving irrigation runoff. This cover type comprised just over 13 ha (33 acres), or about 1 percent of the total property.

Areas of sand/gravel/cobble/mud occur around the perimeters of emergent wetlands. These areas total less 9 ha (22 acres), less than 1 percent of the total property.

Approximately 36 ha (90 acres), about 3 percent of_ the ranch, is comprised of feed lots, outbuildings, and other similar areas relatively void of vegetation:

Non native, invasive plant species such as Russian olive, knapweed, thistle; and other common weeds are located throughout much of the property. A weed control program has been initiated with the Umatilla County Weed Department.

3.4 Fish and Wildlife

Wildlife diversity at the property is high and includes many species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. It is a major and crucial late winter/early spring staging area for waterfowl and shore birds in the Columbia Basin area. The area is utilized by geese, ducks, swans and numerous species of shorebirds. It provides food, resting, breeding, nesting, and rearing areas for waterfowl, shore birds, upland birds, passerine species, and raptors.

Species listed by the USFWS as threatened or endangered that may occur at the Conforth Ranch include bald eagles (threatened) and peregrine falcons (endangered). (Peterson) Bald eagles are frequently sighted during winter months hunting and foraging on the extensive wetlands complex or nearby at the Columbia River.

Several state sensitive species have been observed utilizing the area during part of their life cycles. Burrowing owls (Critical listing) nest on the property. A significant population of western painted turtles (Critical listing) is present year round.

Fish species are present in several of the ponds. Species observed in the ponds include carp, walleye, smallmouth bass, crappie, and mosquitofish.

Game species include waterfowl, quail, pheasant, and small numbers of mule deer. Furbearers include muskrat, mink, and raccoon. Coyote and badger have been observed in the area.

Non native species present year round include common carp, bullfrog, and pheasant. Bullfrogs are believed to be a major factor in the decline of native amphibian and turtle populations in the Northwest.

3.5 Land Use

The Conforth Ranch property is transected from west to east by U.S. Highway 730, and abuts agricultural lands to the south. The ranch has been an active cattle operation for decades. and much of the property has experienced overgrazing. A large livestock feedlot covers approximately 36 ha (90 acres) of the ranch. All cattle have been removed from the property, and grazing is not presently allowed.

An additional 44 ha (111 acres) of land adjacent to the west end of Conforth Ranch and within the jurisdiction of the BLM was withdrawn by BPA in 1968 for potential transmission system use. The property is no longer needed for that use, and is not presently in active management.

Another adjacent property, 16 ha (40 acres) on the south side of Conforth Ranch, is within the jurisdiction of the BOR. Thus property is also not presently in active management.

3.6 Cultural Resources

Occupation by Native American cultures along the Columbia River dates back as far as 11,000 years. (Aikens, Archeology of Oregon) Because of the property's location and proximity to the Columbia River, there is a high potential for occurrence of cultural resources.

According to .the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, there are no known cultural sites currently eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places on the Conforth Ranch. (Kunowski)

Chapter 4: Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

Table 2 summarizes the potential impacts of alternatives. under consideration. Detailed impact analysis follows.

Table 1: Summary of Alternative Management Plans

	Balanced Use Management	No Action	Status Quo Management	Sanctuary Management	Incr. Mult. Use Management
Soils	Gradually less compacted soil structure and reduced erosion.	Probable continued soil compaction and increasing erosion.	Gradually less compacted soil structure and gradually reduced erosion.	Gradually less compacted soil structure and reduced erosion.	Some continued soil compaction and erosion.
Water	Improved water quality.	Somewhat reduced water quality.	Somewhat improved water quality.	Improved water quality.	Somewhat reduced water quality.
Vegetation	Restoration of native plant communities, with increasing biological diversity. Possible increased wetland vegetation.	Probable continuation of existing vegetation patterns. Possible continued spread of exotic species, and reduction of native species.	Gradual restoration of native plant communities, with some increase of biological diversity.	Restoration of native plant communities, with increasing biological diversity. Possible increased wetland vegetation.	Existing vegetation patterns substantially maintained. Noxious weeds controlled or reduced.
Fish and Wildlife	Increased populations of native waterfowl, raptors, amphibians, and other species of concern. Reduced populations of undesirable exotic species.	Possible increased populations of exotic species, and reduction of native species.	Possible increased population of native species.	Increased populations of native species, including species of concern. Reduced populations of undesirable exotic species.	Possible increased populations of native species. Reduced populations of undesirable exotic species.
Land Use	Primary use for wildlife conservation, with limited recreation, scientific, and education use.	Probable reversion to active cattle ranch with unknown additional uses.	Primary use for wildlife conservation, with very limited public recreation.	Primary use for wildlife conservation, with very limited scientific use.	Primary use for wildlife conservation, with compatible economic, recreation, and other uses.
Cultural Resources	Protected.	Not protected.	Protected.	Protected.	Protected.
Air Quality	Occasional local smoke.	None foreseeable.	Occasional local smoke.	Occasional local smoke.	Occasional local smoke.

4.1 Potential Environmental Impacts of Balanced Use Management

.The Balanced Use Management alternative (the proposed action) would emphasize protection and enhancement of wildlife and wildlife habitat, while permitting other compatible uses.

4.1.1 SOILS

Absence of livestock grazing would generally reduce future soil compaction, allowing soils to eventually recover to a natural, less compacted structure. Absence of livestock grazing would also help to restore native vegetation communities, as would vegetation restoration activities, thus reducing soil erosion. Management activities would be designed to avoid or minimize risk of soil erosion.

Vehicle parking to accommodate recreational use may cause soil compaction tin a total of up to 0.5 ha (1.2 acre) of land.

4.1.2 WATER

Water quality (especially suspended sediments and oxygen content) would eventually improve because of reduced erosion, continued absence of livestock and their waste products, reduction and control of carp populations, and improved efficiency of the water delivery system.

The quantity of water used would not change, only the type of use. Water previously used for livestock watering would instead be used to benefit wildlife.

4.1.3 VEGETATION

Control or eradication of non native invasive plant species would reduce competition for resources with those species and allow restoration of native plant communities. Absence of livestock grazing would also help to restore native vegetation communities. Vegetation restoration activities such as seeding, planting, and fertilizing would accelerate natural processes. Biological diversity of the plant community would therefore increase, as would the quality and quantity of wildlife habitat.

Up to about 405 ha (1,000 acres) of 'irrigated pasture vegetation may eventually be replaced with wetland vegetation, riparian tree/shrub vegetation, and native shrub/steppe/grassland vegetation. New wetlands may replace up to about 81 ha (200 acres) of native shrub/steppe/grassland vegetation north of Highway 730 (T5N, R29E, S 18). Rehabilitation of the feedlot complex in Box Canyon (currently barren or weed infested) would restore about 36 ha (90 acres) of native shrub/steppe/grassland vegetation. Vehicle parking to accommodate recreational use may remove shrub/steppe/grassland vegetation from a total of up to 0.5 ha (1.2 acre) of land. On balance, pasture vegetation may eventually decrease by 100 percent, wetland and riparian vegetation may eventually increase by about 100 percent, and native shrub/steppe/grassland may eventually increase by about 50 percent.

4.1.4 FISH AND WILDLIFE

Many wildlife species would benefit from increased plant diversity, and improved forage; nesting, rearing, brooding,, and cover habitats. Increased and improved wetland habitat would benefit waterfowl, raptors, amphibians, and other wildlife, including bald eagles (threatened species), peregrine falcons (endangered species), western painted turtles (State critical species). Placement of nest boxes, perch sites, guzzlers, rock/brush piles, basking habitat, island habitat, and similar structural improvements would increase the available habitat for native wildlife species and improve chances for successful reproduction.

Control of undesirable non native fish and wildlife populations (such as carp and bullfrog) through trapping, netting, or other techniques would benefit native species .by reducing their competition for resources. Waterfowl and western painted turtles would especially benefit from control of non native species.

Public recreation activities may occasionally disturb wildlife and their habitat, but seasonal and/or zone public access restrictions and closures would limit the potential disturbance. While regulated hunting could help to manage local. numbers of game species, there would be no noticeable effect on general species populations because the species are migratory.

On balance, benefits would accrue to all target indicator species (mallard, Western meadowlark, Canada goose, spotted sandpiper, yellow warbler, downy woodpecker, California quail, and mink); threatened,. endangered, and critical species; and many other desirable species. Populations of undesirable, non-native species (i.e., carp and bullfrog) would probably decline. .

4.1.5 LAND USE

The Conforth Ranch property would be primarily managed to benefit wildlife. To avoid adverse impacts to wildlife habitat, management would continue to regulate public access, including recreational opportunities. Past land uses of pasture production, livestock grazing, and intensive recreational activities (such as dog trials and off road vehicle use) would not return. Some roads and trails may be retired arid rehabilitated. Gates, fences, and signs would restrict vehicle traffic to parking lots. Some public hunting and other recreational activities would be allowed, but with seasonal and zone closures, access by permit only, and similar restrictions as necessary to protect, maintain, and enhance wildlife habitat values.

The use of adjacent BLM and BOR lands that may be incorporated into the wildlife management area would not substantially change, except that unauthorized use would be reduced or eliminated. The use of other nearby properties would be unaffected, because no buffer zones or similar. land use controls are proposed.

4.1.6 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Potential adverse impacts to cultural resources would be avoided. Prior to any ground disturbing activities the area of potential impact would be surveyed for the presence of cultural resources. Activities would be designed to avoid disturbing discovered resources, and public access would be restricted.

4.1.7 AIR QUALITY

Controlled burns to reduce unwanted vegetation (irrigation ditches, noxious weeds, etc.) would occasionally produce local smoke. The relatively small amount of vegetation that may require burning, the infrequency of burns, and avoidance of burning on stagnant air days would cause only negligible effects on air quality.

4.2 Potential Environmental Impacts of No Action

With the "No Action" alternative, BPA would sell the property at fair market value. If sold, commercial use of the property would likely resume. Zoning and geographical limitations would probably restrict commercial use to livestock and agricultural operations.

4.2.1. Soils

Soil compaction from livestock would probably continue. Wind erosion would increase because livestock grazing and trampling would remove vegetative cover.

4.2.2 WATER

Water would be used for forage production and stock watering. Water quality would deteriorate because of livestock grazing and wastes. The quantity of water used would not change.

4.2.3 VEGETATION

Existing vegetation patterns would probably continue. Cattle grazing would limit the diversity of plant species and inhibit restoration of native plant communities, including riparian and shrub/steppe species. Exotic plant species would probably continue to spread.

4.2.4 FISH AND WILDLIFE

Probable continued competition with exotic fish and wildlife species could further reduce populations of native species. Species using pasture habitat and grazed areas would probably benefit seasonally. For example, Canada geese use fall "green up" in grazed pastures: Resumed grazing would be detrimental to species requiring residual cover, dense nesting cover, and escape cover.

4.2.5 LAND USE

Because of zoning restrictions, the dominant land use would probably revert to active cattle ranching and agriculture. Whether a new owner would allow other uses is speculative.

4.2.6 CULTURAL RESOURCES

There would be no regulatory protection of cultural resources, but no impacts are foreseeable.

4.2.7 AIR QUALITY

No foreseeable impacts expected.

4.3 Potential Environmental Impacts of Status Quo Management

The Status Quo Management alternative would emphasize wildlife habitat protection, with little or no enhancement activities and public access only for regulated hunting.

4.3.1 SOILS

Impacts on soils would be similar to the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.1), except some active erosion would probably continue longer without vegetation restoration activities.

4.3.2 WATER

Water quality would improve similar to the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.2), except to a lesser degree without carp control or water system improvements. The quantity of water use would not change.

4.3.3 VEGETATION

Continuing noxious weed control and absence of livestock grazing would continue slow, natural restoration of native plant communities with a resulting increase in biological diversity of the plant community. Restoration would be slower than with more aggressive vegetation restoration activities, and some invasive species may continue to spread, so the increase in biological diversity would likely. be less than with the Balanced Use or Sanctuary Management alternatives. Biological diversity of the plant. community would slowly increase, as would the quality and quantity. of wildlife habitat

4.3.4 FISH AND WILDLIFE

Continued competition with exotic fish and wildlife species could further reduce populations of some native species. For example, non native bullfrogs may further reduce western painted turtle populations and native amphibians by predation. Carp could further alter wetland habitat and compete with waterfowl for nutrients. If evaluation and monitoring indicates a decline in these wildlife values, management action would be taken to reverse the trend.

Public recreation activities may occasionally disturb wildlife. and their habitat, but seasonal and/or zone public access restrictions and closures would limit the potential disturbance. While regulated hunting could help to manage local numbers of game species, there would be no noticeable effect on general species populations because many of the species are migratory.

On balance, there would be little near terra change to existing fish and wildlife populations, but indicator species, threatened, endangered, and critical species, and other desirable species would benefit over time.

4.3.5 LAND USE

The land would be used almost exclusively for wildlife habitat, with very limited. recreational use and no additional uses. As with the Balanced Use Management alternative, there would be no effect on the use of adjacent lands.

4.3.6 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Potential adverse impacts on cultural resources would be avoided, similar to the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.6).

4.3.7 AIR QUALITY

Impacts on air quality would be substantially the same as the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.7).

4.4 Potential Environmental Impacts of Wildlife Sanctuary Management

The Wildlife Sanctuary Management alternative would protect and enhance wildlife and wildlife habitat, exclusive to virtually all other uses.

4.4.1 SOILS

Impacts on soils would be substantially the same as the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.1), except without the impacts potentially caused by vehicle parking.

4.4.2 WATER

Impacts on water would be substantially the same as the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.2).

4.4.3 VEGETATION

Impacts on vegetation would be substantially the same as the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.3), except without the impacts potentially caused by vehicle parking.

4.4.4 FISH AND WILDLIFE

Impacts on fish and wildlife would be similar to the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.4): Also, absence of recreational activities would avoid most human disturbance of wildlife arid wildlife habitat.

4.4.5 LAND USE

Impacts on land use would be substantially the same as the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.3.5), except without recreational uses.

4.4.6 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Impacts on cultural resources would be substantially the same as the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.6), except no public access would reduce potential vandalism.

4.4.7 AIR. QUALITY

Impacts on air quality would be substantially the same as the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.7).

4.5 Potential Environmental Impacts of Increased Multiple Use Management

The Increased Multiple Use Management alternative would allow increased public use consistent with wildlife values, including commercial uses(i.e., grazing and crops) to help achieve wildlife habitat goals.

4.5.1 SOILS

Soil compaction from livestock would continue. Grazing would also potentially contribute to continued erosion, although grazing management and vegetation management would help to limit erosion severity.

4.3.2 WATER

Water quality would somewhat improve with erosion control measures, but cattle grazing and waste could cause some degradation.

4.5.3 VEGETATION

As with the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.3), control or eradication of non-native invasive plant species would reduce competition for resources with those species and allow some restoration of native plant communities. However, the presence of livestock grazing would inhibit some vegetation restoration. Therefore, biological diversity of the plant community would somewhat increase, as would the. quality and quantity of wildlife habitat.

About 405 ha (1,000 acres) of existing pasture vegetation would be, maintained, and some pasture grasses mowed to encourage fresh growth. Grazing would also be managed to .encourage fresh growth of grasses. New wetlands may replace up to about 81 ha (200 acres) of native shrub/steppe/grassland vegetation north of Highway 730 (T5N, R29E, S18). Vegetation would not be restored in the Box Canyon feedlot. Vehicle parking to accommodate recreational use may remove shrub/steppe/grassland. vegetation from a total of up to 0.5 ha (1.2 acre) of land. On balance, pasture vegetation would remain unchanged, wetland and riparian vegetation may eventually increase by about 100 percent, .and native shrub/steppe/grassland may eventually decrease by about 10 percent:

4.5.4 FISH AND WILDLIFE

As with the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.4), many wildlife species would benefit from increased plant diversity, improved forage, nesting, rearing, brooding, and cover habitats, and installation of artificial structures. However, potential net benefits would be somewhat less because there would be less restoration of native plant communities.

Control of undesirable non native fish and wildlife populations (such as carp and bullfrog) through trapping, netting, or other techniques would benefit native species by reducing their competition for resources. Waterfowl and western painted turtles would especially benefit from control of non native species:

Public recreation activities may occasionally disturb wildlife and their habitat, but seasonal and/or zone public access restrictions and closures would limit the potential disturbance. While regulated hunting could help to manage local numbers of game species, there would be no noticeable effect on general species populations because the species are migratory.

On balance, some benefits may accrue to all target indicator species (mallard, Western meadowlark, Canada goose, spotted sandpiper, yellow warbler, downy woodpecker, California quail, and mink); threatened, endangered, and critical species; and many other desirable species. Populations of undesirable, non native species (*i.e.*, carp and bullfrog) would probably decline.

4.5.5 LAND USE

Impacts on land use would be similar to the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.5) except that past uses of pasture production and livestock grazing would return, dog trials would be allowed, and existing roads and trails would be kept.

4.5.6 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Impacts on cultural resources would be similar to the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.6), but with greater potential for unintentional disturbance because of more ground disturbing activity and greater public access.

4.5.7 AIR QUALITY

Impacts on air quality would be substantially the same as the Balanced Use Management alternative (see section 4.1.7).

Chapter 5: Persons and Agencies Consulted

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office

U. S. Bureau of Reclamation

U. S. Fish and Wildlife. Service

Chapter 6: References

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Conforth Ranch (Wanaket)
Wildlife Mitigation Project
Draft Environmental Assessment
and
Draft Management Plan

Appendix A:

Environmental Consultation, Review, and Permit Requirements

Appendix A

Environmental Consultation, Review, and Permit Requirements

A.1 National Environmental Policy

This environmental assessment (EA) was prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) and implementing regulations, which require Federal agencies to assess the impacts that their proposed actions may have on the environment. Under NEPA, BPA has the option to prepare an EA to provide evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) or a finding of no significant impact. BPA will decide whether to prepare an EIS based on the potential environmental effects presented in this EA and its attachments.

A.2 Endangered and Threatened Species and Critical Habitat

BPA has consulted with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the potential effects of Conforth Ranch (Wanaket) ***management*** on plant and animal species arid critical habitat protected by the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1536). Federally listed and proposed endangered and threatened species that may occur in the area include: Bald eagle (threatened); Peregrine falcon (endangered), Chinook salmon (endangered) and Snake River Sockeye salmon (endangered). (R. D. Peterson, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, December 9, 1993.) .

BPA and CTUIR have prepared a biological assessment analyzing potential effects on the listed species, concluding that management alternatives under consideration would have no effect on Federally listed species or their habitats. BPA has forwarded the biological assessment to the USFWS arid the National Marine Fisheries Service.

A.3 Fish and Wildlife Conservation

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act of 1980 (16 U.S.C. 2901 et seq.) encourages Federal agencies to conserve and promote conservation of non game fish and wildlife species and their habitats. All alternatives under consideration (except No Action) would conserve fish and wildlife. The Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (16 U:S.C. 661 et seq.) requires Federal agencies undertaking projects affecting water resources to consult with the USFWS in order to conserve or improve wildlife resources. BPA has consulted with the USFWS about endangered and threatened species, and has forwarded copies of this EA for USFWS review.

A.4 Heritage Conservation

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 470) requires Federal agencies to take into account the potential effects of their undertakings on properties on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. According to the Oregon State Historic Preservation Officer, there are no such properties known to exist that may be affected the any of the alternatives under .consideration. (H. Kunowski, Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, January 13, 1994.) Therefore, there would be no effect on National Register or eligible properties., However, if cultural resources are discovered during project implementation, BPA and the CTUIR would avoid or minimize adverse effects on those resources pending further consultation.

A.5 State, Areawide, and Local Plan and Program Consistency

The Conforth Ranch wildlife mitigation property is identified in the Umatilla County Comprehensive Plan as an exclusive farm use zone. According to the Plan, wildlife conservation is consistent with that zone.

A.6 Coastal Zone Management Consistency

There are no coastal zones within the area of potential effect.

A.7 Floodplain Management

The Columbia River floodplain is the only floodplain within the area of potential effect, but would be unaffected because none of the alternatives under consideration involve its development or modification.

A.8 Wetlands Protection

Executive Order 11990 and Department of Energy regulations require BPA to minimize the destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands, and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands. None of the alternatives under consideration would destroy or degrade wetlands. All action alternatives would preserve wetlands. Balanced Use, Sanctuary, and Increased Multiple Use management alternatives may, help to enhance wetlands.

A.9 Farmland Protection

Although some farmland may be converted to non agricultural uses, it has not been classified as prime or unique, nor identified as having statewide or local importance for crop production. Any of the alternatives under consideration would therefore be consistent with the Farmland Protection Policy Act (7 U.S.C. 4201, et seq.).

A.10 Recreation Resources

There are no components of the National Trails System, the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, wilderness or roadless areas, Bureau of Land Management Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, or other designated recreation resources. within the area of potential effect.

A.11 Permits for Structures in Navigable Waters

The existing irrigation intake and pump station is authorized under a U.. S. Army Corps of Engineers permit. The only activity that may involve work in, under, or over a navigable water of the United States is maintenance of the existing irrigation intake, so a new .permit under the Rivers and Harbors Appropriations Act would not be required.

A.12 Permits for Discharges into Waters of the United States

None of the alternatives under consideration involve discharge of dredge or fill material into waters of the United States, so a U. S. Army Corps of Engineers permit under the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) is not required.

A.13 Permits for Rights of Way on Public Lands

Three of the action alternatives (Balanced Use Management, Wildlife'Sanctuary Management, and Increased Multiple Use Management) may incorporate adjacent Federal lands into the wildlife mitigation

management area. The specific means of incorporation is presently uncertain, and would require further consultation with the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Reclamation.

A.14 Pollution Control at Federal Facilities

A.14.1 Procurement
Neither the proposed action nor the alternatives involve procurement of goods, services,. or materials from a facility on the Environmental Protection Agency List of Violating Facilities. Therefore, contract compliance provisions of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts do not apply.

A.14.2 Clean Air Act
The area of potential impact does not include any areas protected under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The CTUIR would obtain special letter permits from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality Eastern Region for occasional field or weed burning.

A.14.3 Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act
None of the alternatives would result in discharge of pollutants into waters of the United States, nor would they involve pollutants which could reach drinking water supplies.

A.14. 4 Resource Conservation and Recovery Act arid Toxic Substances Control Act
Prior ranch operations left the Conforth Ranch property with solid waste and potentially toxic or hazardous waste. This material will be removed, transported, and disposed of in accordance with applicable Federal and State procedures, including all necessary permits.

A.14.5 Noise Control Act
None of the alternatives would cause unusual or excessive noise emissions.

A.14.6 Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act
Some herbicides maybe used to control noxious weeds and other undesirable vegetation. The CTUIR would ensure compliance with all applicable standards for use of herbicides.

A.14.7 Energy Conservation at Federal Facilities
None of the alternatives involve construction, operation, or maintenance of Federal buildings.

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