DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
SOUTH ATLANTIC DIVISION, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
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ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30303-8801

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

RECORD OF DECISION

LAKE SIDNEY LANIER, GEORGIA
OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

The Decision

We have reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of Lake Sidney Lanier, Georgia. In our review, we have carefully considered the following:

- Potential environmental and socio-economic effects from continuing O&M activities at Lake Sidney Lanier as presently conducted.
- Public input received during preparation of the FEIS and the Revised Shoreline Management Plan (SMP).
- Relevant statutes, regulations, and Executive Orders that apply to Shoreline Management Plans on U.S. Army Corps of Engineer (Corps) lakes.
- The Private Boat Dock Carrying Capacity study for Lake Sidney Lanier.

Based on this review, and in consideration of the views of the interested agencies and the concerned public, I find that the FEIS adequately addresses the impacts of continuing ongoing O&M activities and appropriate modifications to specific O&M programs. These activities in the form of a combined management program (the "Preferred Alternative") are necessary to operate and maintain Lake Sidney Lanier (Lake Lanier) according to authorized project purposes in an environmentally sustainable manner and in the overall public interest.

Description of the Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative reflects two levels of activity: (1) the minimal measures necessary for the O&M of Lake Lanier to meet current Corps standards and (2) proposed program improvements that include a large array of actions designed to enhance the environmental qualities of the project and to provide for long-term use and environmental sustainability of the resources at Lake Lanier.

The proposed O&M activities reflect public and agency input, as well as the professional judgment and experience of the USACE District staff. Cumulatively, the activities that constitute the proposed action represent a balance between serving present needs and conserving Lake Lanier's resources for future generations. There has been prolific growth of the metropolitan Atlanta area since the original project EIS was prepared in 1974. As a result, the recently updated SMP includes changes that promote environmental sustainability.

The following highlight pertinent points concerning the revised SMP (Appendix F of the FEIS):

1. Modern technology used to update project statistics. (Exhibit 2)

2. Increased public involvement due to the coordination of the SMP with the FEIS.

3. Completion of a Private Boat Dock Carrying Capacity Study which established a finite total number (10,615) for boat docks and calculation of community boat docks against this total at a ratio of two slips equivalent to one permit. (Section 12)

4. Defined conditions required for revocation of private boat dock permits. (Section 15)

5. Requirement for community docks on new residential developments. (Section 15)

6. Length of a vessel allowed at an individual dock will be determined by length of the dock, mooring safety requirements and site conditions. (Section 15)

7. Requirement that adjacent landowners have a minimum of 82 feet of public property frontage to qualify for an individual dock permit. (Section 15)

8. No new permits will be issued for platform or T-docks due to safety concerns and general unsuitability as a mooring facility. (Section 15)

9. A new minimum length for dock ramps at 16 feet. (Section 15)

10. A new facility inspection program where permittees will be required to contract the services of a Corps trained "candidate" or higher level inspector who has passed all written exams and continues to meet the requirements for either the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI) or the Georgia Association of Home Inspectors (GAHI). (Section 15)

11. Establishes new vegetation modification limits for underbrushing along pathways to the lake. (Section 20)

12. Establishes new water quality initiative requiring that septic systems located on public property below the maximum elevation of 1085 mean sea level (msl) be removed and that systems located above the 1085 msl on public property be inspected and certified by county health departments. (Section 23)

Alternatives Considered

The Corps has identified the No Action Alternative and the Preferred Alternative as the principle alternatives for detailed analysis. Both alternatives focus management actions on shoreline management activities, recreation, fish and wildlife, timber management, real estate, and water quality within the context of the larger water management scenarios that are

conducted to accomplish the project purposes of Lake Lanier. The development of selected management activities embedded in these two alternatives for the maintenance of Lake Lanier involved a screening analysis of resource-specific management alternatives. The screening analysis involved the use of accepted standards, guidelines, and policies, when available, as well as professional judgment and experience, to identify management practices to achieve the management objectives for Lake Lanier. The outcome of the screening analysis led to the development of the proposed action (Preferred Alternative).

There is an infinite number of combinations of specific management activities at the Lake Lanier project, and therefore, an infinite number of possible management alternatives. Consistent with the intent of the National Environmental Policy Act, the alternative development and evaluation process focused on considering a reasonable range of resource-specific management alternatives and using those alternatives to develop a plan that could be implemented in the foreseeable future. Any management alternative deemed to be infeasible was dropped from detailed analysis. Application of the screening process eliminated the need to define and evaluate alternatives that could not be implemented. As a result the FEIS formally addresses the two alternatives, the Preferred Alternative and the No Action Alternative. This approach was appropriate for evaluating the environmental effects of the Lake Lanier O&M program because, within those two alternatives, numerous combinations of individual management measures could be implemented.

The Preferred Alternative reflects the proposed improvements to the O&M program. The alternatives were developed and analyzed based upon an assumption that they would be implemented into the foreseeable future, unless and until future conditions would warrant further revisions to O&M practices. Of the nine different dock spacing scenarios considered in developing the SMP and FEIS, only Scenario 2 complies with the provisions of ER 1130-2-406. As stated above, the preferred management approach would limit the total number of private boat docks permitted on Lake Lanier to 10,615. As stated above, two community slips will be equivalent to one permit when counted toward the total number of docks identified in the Preferred Alternative.

Under the No Action alternative, the Corps would make no changes in the ongoing O&M program at Lake Lanier. No new management actions would be adopted and no existing management activities would be modified. Shoreline allocations, actions on shoreline use permit applications, and administration of permits would continue as present with no updating of the SMP. The total number of boat docks that could ultimately be permitted on Lake Lanier would potentially be 25,327.

The Preferred Alternative is a response by the Corps to enhance the sustainability of Lake Lanier's resources in view of the significant changes that have occurred in the environmental setting surrounding the lake since the original project EIS was prepared in 1974. Explosive growth has occurred in the Greater Metropolitan Atlanta region, and the Corps has identified needed improvements in the O&M activities at the lake to respond to this growth and the corresponding pressures on the lake's resources. The Preferred Alternative includes improvements to the Corps O&M program that would protect vegetative communities and wildlife habitat along the shoreline, reduce the amount of Styrofoam and boat dock debris on

the shoreline, decrease shoreline erosion, and maintain island habitat for wildlife and recreation. Project staff would continue to modernize the heavily used recreational facilities on the lake and create additional recreational facilities to redistribute boating and recreational pressure from the southern part of the lake to the northern part. This redistribution could help reduce boating density in the southern portion of the lake. Limiting the number of boat docks that could be permitted on Lake Lanier will produce aesthetic benefits by creating a less cluttered shoreline, allowing for better navigation in coves and along the shoreline, contributing to better public safety, and providing greater public access to the shoreline.

Mitigation Needs

One significant adverse effect would be expected from implementation of the No Action alternative that would require mitigation. A significant, long-term, direct adverse effect on the aesthetics of the lake would result due to the large number of boat docks that could be permitted in the future under this alternative. To mitigate the adverse effects of a shoreline densely populated with private boat docks, the Corps would adhere to the dock installation and spacing requirements, continue to issue citations to owners of poorly maintained and dilapidated docks, and encourage or require the use of earth-tone or green-colored materials to help docks blend with the background.

No significant adverse effects are expected under the Preferred Alternative. Therefore, no mitigation measures are necessary for implementation of this alternative.

Compliance with Environmental Requirements

The O&M plan is in compliance with the requirements of all applicable environmental laws, regulations and statutes. The benefits to be gained with O&M activities on Lake Lanier under the Preferred Alternative were found to outweigh the adverse impacts associated with the No Action alternative.

Coordination

There has been considerable public involvement, as well as interaction and consultation with environmental resource agencies. All comments received on the Draft EIS were fully considered in the FEIS that was circulated for review and comment. There were ten letters of comment received on the FEIS. However, because of updates to the SMP that resulted subsequent to the circulation of the FEIS there was an additional 30-day public review period of the SMP that ended July 26, 2004. No comments were received during this additional public review. After the extended public comment period, an additional letter was received from a member of the public concerning inspections outlined in the SMP. This last letter was answered in early October 2004, and no further communications have been received on the FEIS or on the SMP.

There were no areas of significant conflict or controversy expressed on the FEIS or the SMP. As discussed in the FEIS and summarized above, all reasonable measures have been

incorporated to minimize impacts on Lake Lanier's resources and practicable alternatives have been evaluated.

Conclusion

Considering the analyses presented in the FEIS and associated supporting documentation as well as the results of public involvement and coordination, I have determined that the FEIS adequately addresses the impacts of implementing the Preferred Alternative for the O&M of Lake Lanier. No specific mitigation measures are required for the Preferred Alternative. The FEIS fully complies with the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act and other applicable environmental requirements. Accordingly, implementation of the O&M activities described as the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS may proceed.

22 Dec 04

Michael J. Walsh
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
Division Engineer

Date