

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

NAME OF PROPOSED ACTION: Mid-Arkansas Water Alliance (MAWA), Water Supply Storage Reallocation, Greers Ferry Lake, Arkansas.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION: The Little Rock District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) proposes that 18,730 acre-feet (AF) of water in Greers Ferry Lake be reallocated from flood control storage to water supply storage to satisfy the municipal and industrial water supply needs of MAWA. Of that total, 174.0 AF of storage represents dependable yield mitigation storage (DYMS) required to provide constant yields for existing users. Originally, reallocation from Lake Ouachita was also requested but due to Dam Safety issues this part of the request will not be pursued at this time. If Lake Ouachita is considered for storage reallocation by MAWA in the future then further National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation such as a new or supplemental environmental assessment (EA) must be prepared.

ALTERNATIVES: Initially several alternatives were considered to meet the demands for water supply. These included; groundwater withdrawal, stream withdrawal, and the construction of a new lake and pipeline. These alternatives were eliminated from further evaluation due to the lack of water resources, financial feasibility, and/or environmental impacts.

In addition to the Proposed Action (reallocation from the flood control pool), reallocation of storage from the conservation pool was considered, as well as the No Action alternative.

Reallocation from the conservation pool (Alternative 2): Under this alternative, water supply storage would be reallocated from the conservation (hydropower) pool, causing both a reduction in existing storage and a reduction in yield for hydropower.

No Action: This alternative consists of no change in the current water allocation. No water would be allocated for water supply to meet the needs of MAWA. Existing users in MAWA would be forced to find alternate water supplies for municipal and industrial needs.

PUBLIC REVIEW COMMENTS: The public review period was held between 21 August 2006 and 21 September 2006. During this time, three Public Meetings/Workshops were held in the project area: 1) at Greers Ferry Lake on 12 September 2006, 2) at Lake Ouachita on 13 September 2006, and 3) at Little Rock on 14 September 2006. Response letters from the public review process (i.e., responses to the letters of solicitation of views and comments from the public meetings) are included in Appendix C of the EA. Revisions based on comments received during the public review process have been incorporated into the Final EA.

Comments received can be divided into three main categories, 1) those from official agencies and organizations with an interest in the project and/or project area, 2) those from cities or municipalities potentially affected by the proposed action, and 3) those from residents and business owners of the project area.

Of those from agencies and organizations, seventeen letters of support or no comment were received and six letters expressing concerns or requesting further information were received. Most of the concerns dealt with technical data involving calculations of water supply benefits and benefits foregone. Southwest Power Administration expressed concern over the Corps determination of the actual loss and value of hydropower capacity and energy, and the procedure used to determine hydropower credits. The Corps is undertaking continued dialog with all Power Marketing Agencies (PMA's) regarding the measurement and valuation of hydropower losses associated with water storage reallocations. In the case of reallocation of water storage at Greers Ferry, the Corps is proposing to implement the water storage reallocation in accordance with USACE policy and procedures. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service expressed concern over the usage of remaining water supply capacity and the implications for future increased water supply needs necessitating the damming of currently free-flowing rivers to form reservoirs for this purpose. Future dams, if constructed, would obviously change the terrestrial and aquatic habitats in the rivers and the surrounding flooded lands. However, it was determined that these actions and their resultant impacts are too uncertain at this time to be accurately defined in this document.

Twenty-one letters of support were received from municipalities.

Eight letters expressing concerns or questions were received from residents or business owners. Most of these were concerned with dropping water levels in the lakes over the past few years and the resultant adverse impacts to boating and fishing. One citizen expressed concern that the excellent trout fishing in the Little Red River at Greers Ferry Lake would be affected by the proposed project. However, no effect is anticipated to the outflow from the Greers Ferry Dam. Therefore, the trout habitat would suffer no adverse impacts in that area of the river.

ANTICIPATED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: Consideration of the effects disclosed in the EA, and a finding that they are not significant, is necessary in order to prepare a FONSI. This determination of significance is required by 40 CFR 1508.13. Additionally, 40 CFR 1508.27 defines significance as it relates to consideration of environmental effects of a direct, indirect or cumulative nature.

Criteria that must be considered in making this finding are addressed below, in terms of both context and intensity. The significance of both short and long term effects must be viewed in several contexts: society as a whole (human, national); the affected region; the affected interests; and the locality. The context for this determination is primarily local, as shown in Figure 1 of the EA. The context for this action is not highly significant geographically, nor is it controversial in any significant way. Consideration of intensity refers to the magnitude and intensity of impact, where impacts may be both beneficial

and adverse. Within this context, the magnitude and intensity of impacts resulting from this decision are not significant. The determination for each impact topic is listed below:

1. **The degree to which the action results in both beneficial and adverse effects.** A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial. The EA indicates that there will be beneficial effects such as the availability of increased water supply to meet municipal and industrial needs of the region served by MAWA until the year 2025, as well as adverse construction related effects from implementation of Alternative 1 (Proposed Action), but these will be minor in intensity and construction related only.
2. **The degree to which the action affects public health or safety.** No adverse effects to public health or safety will result from the Proposed Action. Under existing conditions, no significant amounts of hazardous materials are identified in the immediate area of the Proposed Action. Implementing the Proposed Action would not create hazardous conditions affecting public health or safety.
3. **The degree to which the action affects unique characteristics of the potentially affected area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** No such unique characteristics or resources have been identified in the project area.
4. **The degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The project will benefit the public, therefore the Little Rock District, Corps of Engineers does not regard this activity as controversial, and the expected public response to the EA confirms this.
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** Reallocation of water supply from Greers Ferry Lake has occurred several times in the past. Although this reallocation is one of the larger ones, there is no uncertainty involving the impacts or risks of this action.
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts.** The reallocation of water supply storage at Greers Ferry Lake is situation specific and will not establish any precedent for future action that has significant impacts.
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** Cumulative effects analyses for the physical and biological resources that would potentially be affected are presented in the EA. Cumulative effects on these resources focus on disturbed soils, vegetation loss, habitat loss, or other impacts relating to construction activities involved in the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would not result in any

cumulative impacts in regard to any reasonably foreseeable action in the project area.

8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect items listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or other significant scientific, cultural or historic resources.** As previously state in Item 3 above, no known historic structures or archaeological sites would be affected by the Proposed Action.
9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.** As disclosed in the EA, Section 4.4.3, coordination with the USFWS indicates that no T&E species are anticipated to be impacted by the Proposed Action.
10. **Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** No such violations will occur. Continued coordination with regulatory agencies will be ongoing to ensure compliance with all federal, state, regional, and local regulations and guidelines

CONCLUSIONS: The impacts identified in the prepared EA have been thoroughly discussed and assessed. No impacts identified in the EA would cause any significant adverse effects to the human environment as defined under NEPA. Therefore, due to the analysis presented in the EA and comments received from a 30-day public review period that began on August 24, 2006 and ended on October 25, 2006, it is my decision that the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as required by NEPA is unwarranted and a "Finding of No Significant Impact"(FONSI) is appropriate. The signing of this document indicates the Corps final decision of the proposed action as it relates to NEPA. The EA and FONSI will be held on file in the Planning and Environmental Division for future reference.

Donald E. Jackson, Jr
Colonel, US Army
District Commander

Date