

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

NAME OF PROPOSED ACTION: Millwood Lake Master Plan Revision

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The revised Master Plan updates Design Memorandum No. 5-B, Updated Master Plan for Development and Management of Millwood Lake approved in 1964. The Master Plan is the strategic land use document that guides the comprehensive management and development of all recreational, natural, and cultural resources throughout the life of the water resource project. It is a vital tool for the efficient and cost-effective stewardship and sustainability of project resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

With the proposed Master Plan revision, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Little Rock District, has conducted an environmental analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. The final Integrated Feasibility Report and Environmental Assessment (EA) dated June 30, 2022, for the Millwood Lake Master Plan Revision, addresses the comprehensive management and development of all recreational, natural, and cultural resources, opportunities and feasibility in the Millwood Lake area, located in the Gulf Coastal Ecoregion in southwest Arkansas in Howard, Hempstead, Little River, and Sevier counties. The final recommendation is contained in the report of the Chief of Engineers, dated June 30, 2022.

The Final EA, incorporated herein by reference, evaluated various alternatives that would evaluate existing conditions and potential impacts of land classifications considered in the listed alternatives. The recommended plan is the implementation of Alternative 2, as follows:

The Preferred Alternative (Alternative 2)—This alternative, which is now the Selected Alternative, is the Moderate Conservation alternative. Under this alternative, the land classifications would be revised to reflect current management practices and responses to agency and public comments received during the scoping phase. Changes included reclassifying undeveloped High Density land classifications (i.e. future/closed Corps parks) to Low Density and other land classifications; reclassifying some Wildlife Management lands to Environmentally Sensitive and Vegetative Management lands.

Alternative 2 proposes 1,018.5 acres in High Density recreation, representing a 365.8 acre decrease from the No Action Alternative. Low Density lands total 243.6 acres, representing an increase of 243.6 acres from the No Action Alternative. The majority of the decrease in High Density acreage would be due to reclassification to Low Density (increased from 0 to 243.6 acres). Environmentally Sensitive lands increased by 840.2 acres from the No Action Alternative, while Wildlife Management lands decreased by 661.3 acres. A portion of that converted to Vegetative Management lands (133.2 acres). With these changes, 82% of the shoreline would be protected from development.

In addition to a “no action” plan, one additional alternative was evaluated. The components of these alternatives are described in Section 3.1 of the EA.

For all alternatives the potential effects were evaluated, as appropriate. A summary assessment of the potential effects of the recommended plan are enumerated below.

ANTICIPATED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: Consideration of the effects disclosed in the EA, and a finding that they are not significant, are necessary to prepare a FONSI. This determination of no 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 term 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. 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 from implementation of the Selected Alternative to terrestrial and aquatic resources. The Selected Alternative would also allow for the continued potential development in the low density land classification, yielding a balanced approach in utilization of lake resources.

2. The degree to which the action affects public health or safety. No adverse effects to public health or safety will result from the Selected Alternative. Possible adverse environmental effects may occur from implementation of the No Action Alternative due to potential increased development in the unallocated lands, possibly resulting in more people and watercraft on the lake. Possible adverse economic and socioeconomic effects could potentially occur from implementation of Alternative 1, the Maximum Conservation Alternative.

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. The Selected Alternative does not threaten any known historic properties. Coordination with Federal, State, and local agencies and Federally Recognized Tribes will be required to avoid, minimize or mitigate potential unforeseen impacts. Park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas will not be impacted by implementation of the Selected Alternative.

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 through a balance of terrestrial and aquatic resource preservation with recreation provision. Therefore, the Little Rock District; Corps of Engineers does not regard this activity as controversial.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment is highly uncertain or involves unique or unknown risks. The uncertainty of the impacts of this action is low since land reclassification around the lake shoreline results in a projection of known and regulated activities as a result of the implementation of the Selected Alternative.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts. Because the Selected Alternative involves updating the existing Millwood Lake Master Plan, which provides checks and balances on future lakeshore activities, the action should not establish a precedent for significant future impacts.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. There are no other known individual actions associated with this project, therefore there are no cumulatively significant impacts identified with this action.

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. The Selected Alternative does not impact any known historic properties or other significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. Coordination with Federal, State, and local agencies and Federally Recognized Tribes will be required to avoid, minimize or mitigate potential unforeseen impacts.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat. The Selected Alternative should not adversely affect any Threatened & Endangered species, as areas where potential use by T&E species and species habitat are primarily classified as Environmentally Sensitive lands. The listed T & E species in the area include the Piping Plover, Red Knot, Eastern Black Rail, which are shoreline wading birds, but have not been documented in the Millwood Lake area. Other species are Ouachita Rock Pocketbook and Rabbits foot , which are mussel species inhabiting riverine areas above and below Millwood Lake.

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. All applicable Federal, state or local laws and regulations will be complied with during the implementation of the action.

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. Therefore, due to the analysis presented in the EA and comments received from four public comment periods (October 21, 2021 through December 6, 2021, January 10, 2022 through February 8, 2022, February 15, 2022 through March 16, 2022, and from April 12, 2022 through May 11, 2022), it is my decision that the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (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 Environmental Branch, Planning and Environmental Division

of the Little Rock District, Corps of Engineers for future reference. Consultation with regulatory agencies will be ongoing to ensure compliance with all federal, state, regional, and local regulations and guidelines.

Date

ERIC M. NOE, PMP
Colonel, EN
Commanding