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Draft **Finding of No Significant Impact**

O.C. Fisher Lake Ecosystem Restoration Project **San Angelo, Texas**

At the request of the City of San Angelo and under the authority of Section 1135 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986, as amended (33 USC 2201), the Fort Worth District Corps of Engineers has conducted an ecosystem restoration study of conditions at O.C. Fisher Lake to evaluate measures for improving the functional stability and integrity of important ecological resources, to identify opportunities to improve the quality of these important ecological resources, and to recommend a cost effective ecosystem restoration project, if applicable. The study results are presented in the Detailed Project Report and Integrated Environmental Assessment for O.C. Fisher Lake Ecosystem Restoration Project.

The phreatophytic nature of the existing invasive brushy species within the study area dictates the removal and reduction of the existing invasive brushy species across the study area in order to restore and sustain the hydrological function to the ecosystem. Various removal methods were evaluated for each invasive brushy species. Several vegetative planting alternatives, including woody and herbaceous vegetation, were evaluated, as well as a “no action” plan.

The Recommended Plan includes removing saltcedar and reducing mesquite, willow baccharis and prickly pear. Aerial herbicide application by helicopter will be utilized to remove saltcedar and reduce willow baccharis. Mesquite reduction will be performed by mechanical means, excavation or hydraulic shearing with herbicide application, dependent upon results of cultural resource surveys. Prickly pear will be reduced through fixed wing aircraft herbicide application. Degraded riparian woodlands will be planted with native tree and shrub seedlings. Prescribed burning and grazing will be used to sustain the project. Construction of the plan will take place over a six-year period to allow for a prescribed burn rotation and any follow-up herbicide applications necessary.

The Recommended Plan will result in significant benefits to the ecosystem. With full implementation of the recommended plan, perennial surface water would increase from 453.6 acres to 3,840.9 acres. The progressive loss of riparian woodland habitat would halt, conserving the existing 89.4 acres of remnant woodland and restoring 160.4 acres of remnant woodland towards the historical condition. The recommended plan would also restore 8,666.9 acres of habitat to a more natural, historic and sustainable condition which is critical to the hydrological regime of the ecosystem.

The Recommended Plan will involve activities subject to the requirements of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The restoration activities recommended meet the conditions of Nationwide Permit 27, Wetland and Riparian Restoration and Creation Activities. The State of Texas has issued a water quality certificate for Nationwide Permit 27 and

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therefore, no further coordination is required under Section 401. The proposed project is in compliance with Executive Order 11990 as it does not adversely impact nor result in any loss of wetland areas.

The richness of cultural resources within the study area requires special consideration. Without special consideration, a potential exists that implementation of the Recommended Plan could result in significant detrimental impacts to the cultural resources within the study area. The State Historical Preservation Officer has reviewed the restoration project and provided recommendations which will be followed in order to prevent adverse impacts upon the cultural resources within the study area. In addition to 39 recorded cultural resources sites, an additional 2,455 acres within targeted mesquite removal zones were identified to exhibit medium to high potential to contain cultural resources. Cultural resource surveys will be conducted within these areas before mesquite removal will take place. Mesquite removal within any potentially National Register eligible sites will utilize hydraulic shearing with herbicide application to minimize ground disturbance. Vegetative plantings will involve minimal ground disturbance because only seedlings will be planted within riparian woodland as approved by SHPO.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department participated in all aspects of the restoration study. Both agencies strongly support the Recommended Plan.

Based upon the environmental assessment, the results of coordination with appropriate resource agencies, and consideration of public comments, I have concluded that the Recommended Plan will not have a significant adverse impact upon the natural or man-made environment, and therefore an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The project, as proposed, will substantially improve the habitat and benefit fish and wildlife resources.

Date: _____

John R. Minahan
Colonel, Corps of Engineers
District Engineer

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