



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
Lahontan Basin Area Office
705 N. Plaza Street, Rm 320
Carson City, NV 89701

IN REPLY REFER TO:

August 9, 2010

LO-650
ENV-6.00

Interested Parties (See Enclosed List)

Subject: Public Scoping for the National Environmental Policy Act Process for Walker River Basin Cloud Seeding Project in Nevada and California. (Action by August 27, 2010.)

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Bureau of Reclamation is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to address providing \$1.358 million in federal funding to the Desert Research Institute for the Walker River Basin Cloud Seeding Project located in Lyon, Douglas and Mineral Counties in Nevada and in Mono and Tuolumne Counties, California, and is requesting your input to help identify issues to be addressed in the EA. The proposed project is a federal action subject to the National Environmental Policy Act and other environmental laws and regulations. See Enclosure 1 for a description of the proposed project.

Written scoping comments on the proposed Walker River Basin Cloud Seeding Project must be received by close of business, August 27, 2010. Written comments may be submitted by mail to Jane Schmidt, Bureau of Reclamation, Lahontan Basin Area Office, 705 N. Plaza, Room 320, Carson City, Nevada 89701; by e-mail to jcschmidt@usbr.gov; or fax to (775) 882-7592.

Public Disclosure

Before including your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment - including your personal identifying information - may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

If you have any questions about this EA, please contact Jane Schmidt at (775)-884-8372.

Sincerely,

Acting For: Kenneth L. Parr
Area Manager

Enclosure

Enclosure 1 - Walker River Basin Cloud Seeding Project Description

Background: Congress has transferred federal funding to Reclamation to provide water to at-risk natural desert terminal lakes, specifically Pyramid, Summit, and Walker Lakes in the State of Nevada. Reclamation proposes to fund the Desert Research Institute (DRI) to conduct the Walker River Basin Cloud Seeding Project to benefit Walker Lake. The grant would allow DRI to extend the cloud seeding program which has been used in the upper Walker River basin from 1992-2009, with minor changes. The effects of the seeding operations would be evaluated using a hydrologic model developed specifically by DRI for predicting stream flow for the Walker River. The DRI Cloud Seeding Program is operated from the Desert Research Institute Division of Atmospheric Sciences, located in the Northern Nevada Science Center, Reno, Nevada.

Purpose and Need: The purpose of the Walker River Basin Cloud Seeding Project is to provide water to Walker Lake, an at-risk natural desert terminal lake at the terminus of the Walker River.

Proposed Alternatives: Reclamation is currently investigating the alternatives identified below.

Alternative A – No Action Alternative: Reclamation would not provide \$1,358,000 in Congressional funding for cloud seeding operations and post-operation evaluation by DRI for the Walker River basin. DRI's efforts over the last 18 years to implement cloud seeding operations in the Walker River basin would be curtailed in the foreseeable future due to reduced funding opportunities.

Alternative B – Walker River Basin Cloud Seeding Project: Reclamation would grant \$1,358,000 in Congressional funding to DRI for cloud seeding intended to augment precipitation to the Walker River basin and to provide additional water to Walker Lake.

Beginning in the fall of 2010 and continuing for 5 years through the spring of 2015, the cloud seeding project would include:

- During each winter season of the project, install and operate six ground-based seeding generators in the Walker River basin from November through April. Develop and implement a service contract for 50 hours of airborne seeding from December through March.
- Based on prior research results estimate changes in Walker River flows based on a DRI modeling system.

The proposed cloud seeding project would be implemented in the eastern Sierra Nevada and interior ranges of the Walker River basin, see Figure 1. Three (3) of the existing ground-based sites are located on public lands and authorized by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and 2 sites are located on private land. The sixth site (Site 5 Alternate) is proposed to be located on an existing concrete pad at the Conway Communications Site, located on BLM east of Conway Summit, see Figure 1 and Table 1.

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Each ground-based site consists of a cloud seeding device mounted on trailer, a propane tank and a 16' high lattice antenna. All sites are accessed by existing roads and maintenance would be performed by 4 wheel drive vehicle and snowmobile.

Cloud seeding ground-based generators burn a solution of silver iodide, sodium iodide, salt and acetone to release microscopic silver iodide particles which can create additional ice crystals, then snow in winter clouds. A seeding aircraft is used to augment ground seeding operations by releasing silver iodide from

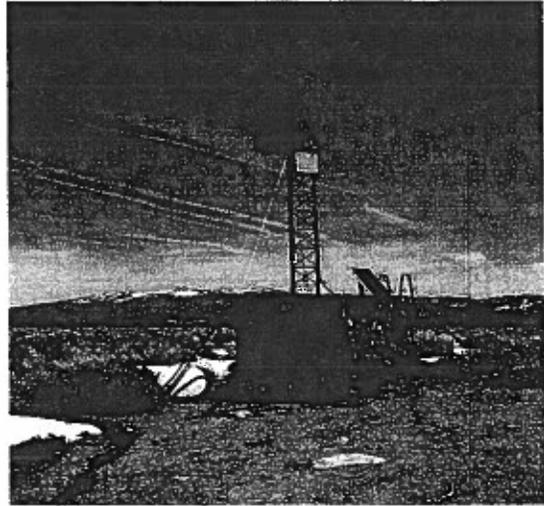


Photo 1: Example of cloud seeding generator site.

pyrotechnic flares or wing-mounted solution burners. All chemicals are mixed at the DRI maintenance facility in Reno. Stainless steel tanks holding the solution are transported to the seeding sites in accordance with Department of Transportation regulations. Secondary spill containment is provided by the trailer enclosure with a sealed floor and a 6 inch lip around the bottom that would contain all solution in the tanks, in the event of a leak.

The seeding generator located at the proposed site east of Conway Summit will have no physical effect on communications equipment because it would always be downwind of existing tower structures during seeding operations.

All operational guidelines, safety restrictions and suspension criteria previously developed for the project would be used. The guidelines ensure that the weather conditions are present in which a seeding event can be initiated and also hazardous weather conditions (for example potential flooding situations) in which no seeding can be conducted. DRI would comply with the California Department of Water Resources and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration filing and reporting requirements.

Some of the cloud seeding ground sites are within sage grouse habitat. Special conditions in the BLM permit direct that equipment be removed only after the grouse have left the area, and to lower the antenna in the spring to prevent birds of prey from using it as a perch to hunt sage grouse.

The results of the cloud seeding project on streamflow would be evaluated by hydrologic modeling. An annual report on project operations, including the estimated amount of snow water augmentation and the stream flow results from the modeling study, would be completed by July 31 of each year.

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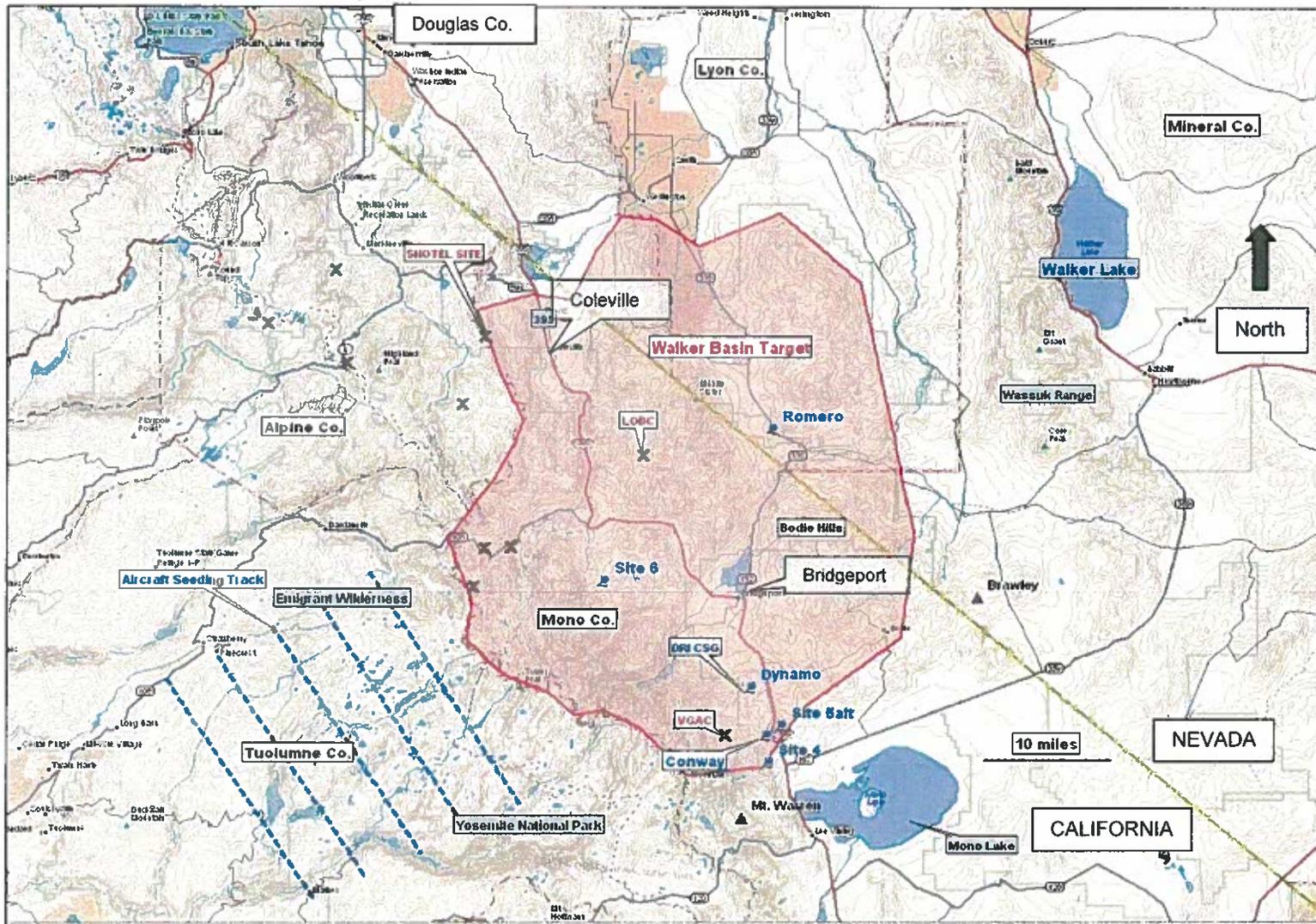


Figure 1. Walker River Basin Cloud Seeding Project.

Map shows the Walker River basin target area (red shading). Blue pins show DRI cloud seeding generator (CSG) sites. Site 5 alt pin is proposed CSG site at the Communications Site east of Conway Summit. Blue dashed lines are aircraft seeding flight tracks. Red X's are SNOTEL sites which provide temperature and snowfall data.