

INYO/LOS ANGELES STANDING COMMITTEE

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MEMORANDUM

Date: November 3, 2021

To: Inyo/Los Angeles Standing Committee

From: Inyo County and Los Angeles Department of Water and Power staff

Subject: Agenda Item 3: Update on Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area Interim Plan activities

Background

The Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area (BWMA) is one of the four physical features of the Lower Owens River Project (LORP), implemented by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) and managed jointly by LADWP and Inyo County (County) post-implementation. Under the LORP, a primary management objective for the BWMA is to create and maintain diverse natural habitats consistent with the needs of “habitat indicator species.”

The LORP was implemented in late 2006 and the acreage flooded in the BWMA has been set every year by the Standing Committee according to guidance in the 1997 MOU. Since implementation, management of BWMA under this legal direction has created and maintained waterfowl habitat as intended, but has also resulted in considerable cattail and bulrush encroachment, reduced open water in the units, and a subsequent decline in habitat quality following the first year of flooding each waterfowl unit.

In 2019, LADWP and the County evaluated the effectiveness of the year-round flooding approach defined in the 1997 MOU, and subsequently developed a 5-year Interim Management and Monitoring Plan for the BWMA (Interim Plan) to further improve conditions for the LORP habitat indicator species. The Interim Plan proposes a seasonal flooding regime to flood a fixed 500 acres of the BWMA each year from fall to mid-spring with full dry down in the summer months, and to enhance forage for indicator species through moist soil management.

At their May 26, 2021 meeting, the Standing Committee set the BWMA flooded acreage for 2021-2022 in accordance with the Interim Plan, implementing it as adaptive management for a period of 5 years.

Update on Interim Plan Activities

Implementation

Dry down of the BWMA waterfowl units began in May 2021. LADWP Operations and Construction crews completed all necessary preparatory work in the East Winterton, Waggoner, and Thibaut Units by August 31, 2021, including disking of cattails and tules,

reinforcement of berms, and upgrading flow measuring stations. Flooding of these units commenced September 15, 2021 on schedule with the Interim Plan.

Monitoring

1. LADWP and County staff commenced biweekly avian surveys September 22 and will be conducting 8 surveys through the fall, winter, and spring at all three waterfowl units.
2. The County has begun remote sensing work to monitor flooding of the units and to assess habitat characteristics of the cells.
3. LADWP and Inyo County staff will document the wetted extent of the BWMA flooded acreage November 1, 2021. Operations will be adjusted as necessary to achieve the target acreage of 500 acres flooded until March 1, 2022 under the Interim Plan.

Preliminary observations indicate that the seasonal flooding regime is successfully attracting target species. County and LADWP staff will give a presentation to the Standing Committee on avian monitoring and remote sensing since implementation of the Interim Plan.