

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Allatoona Lake Master Plan Update, Bartow, Cobb and Cherokee Counties,
Georgia

1. **PROPOSED ACTION:** The proposed action is to continue implementation of the previous Master Plan (MP) with updates to show the existing levels of development and inclusion of specific outgrant areas not previously included within the Allatoona Dam and Lake Project (Allatoona Lake) boundary. Allatoona Lake is located in Georgia on the Etowah River in Bartow, Cobb and Cherokee Counties, about 32 miles northwest of Atlanta and 26 miles east-southeast of Rome, Georgia. The MP provides a programmatic approach for the responsible stewardship of project resources for the benefit of present and future generations. It identifies conceptual types and levels of activities but is not a design document. All actions by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the agencies and individuals granted leases to project lands must be consistent with the MP. Therefore, the MP must be kept current in order to provide effective guidance in USACE decision-making.

Within the Allatoona Lake project boundary, there are 60 management areas described in the MP. These areas range from fully developed campgrounds to access points. Each area is described in detail in the Programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA) document. Thirty-one are currently managed by USACE, 21 are currently managed by public agencies, and eight marinas are managed by concessionaire lease. USACE receives support from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources in managing all of its wildlife management areas.

In general, the MP documents and continues the previous management of natural resources, noting the extent to which proposed development has been implemented or remains proposed but not completed, and describing any proposed changes as part of the update. The document also identifies additional development needs that will improve existing recreation areas within the project boundary. Additionally, a Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP) has been developed for the Allatoona Lake Project and is incorporated into the MP.

The MP also documents a renovation of the existing Red Top Mountain State Park managed by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Included in the renovation would be renovation of existing facilities and construction of new similar facilities (cottages, camp grounds, boat slips, fishing piers, lodge, picnic shelters, rest rooms, walkways, parking areas, maintenance building, visitor center, disc golf course).

While not a design document, the MP provides sufficient detail to make decisions regarding protection and enhancement of the natural environment as a result of project implementation. Location of proposed development, extent and types of development and their environmental impacts are determined. This approach will allow execution of Operational Management Plans and Annual Work Plans falling under the MP without additional National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation. In contrast, future proposed development outside the scope of the MP would require either a separate NEPA consideration or an update to the MP.

2. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED: Two alternatives to the proposed action were considered; the “No Action” alternative, and an alternative that would implement the proposed action but without the new features described for Red Top Mountain State Park. The selection of the proposed action over these alternatives was based on the effectiveness, practicability and impacts to the environment. No alternatives were considered at undeveloped locations around the lake since development on new sites was considered to have excessive environmental impacts, cost effectiveness and practicability issues compared to using sites currently existing.

No action would maintain the existing facilities in their current condition. Because the No Action Alternative would not allow the completion of previously planned improvements and at the same time not provide recreational or economic benefits or avoid environmental impacts (except negligible effects), it (No Action) was not considered as a viable alternative.

The continuation of the existing MP without Red Top Mountain State Park improvements would not allow the managing agency, Georgia Department of Natural Resources to provide additional recreational resources to the public. There would be no specific advantage to the alternative such as avoidance of important environmental impacts. Because the Proposed Action can be constructed without significant impacts, as described in the EA, and this alternative has none of the additional benefits to the public described in the Proposed Action, it was not considered a viable alternative.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: The impacts of the proposed MP update have been evaluated in an EA. Both beneficial and adverse impacts would occur; however, the recommended action will not significantly affect the quality of the environment. There would be short term adverse impacts to the aquatic environment including ground disturbing activities that could result in minor increases in water turbidity. This effect is expected to be localized to the immediate vicinity of the work, temporary in nature and would cease upon project completion. In addition, there would be adequate care taken to minimize soil disturbance and adequate Best Management Practices would be implemented that would result in minor amounts of increased turbidity. There would be increases in boat docking facilities and could indirectly place increased harvesting pressure on sport fish populations within the lake. However, none of the fisheries resources are currently overharvested and it is considered highly unlikely to occur in the near future under any scenario. Any indirect additional harvest of fish by implementation of the proposed action is considered to be a minor adverse impact. USACE determined that the proposed action would cause an affect to Federally-listed Threatened and Endangered Species of “may affect, not likely to adversely affect”. In order to avoid summer roosting habitat for the Gray bat and Northern Long-eared bat, any construction or implementation of the MP that requires removal of trees would be restricted to the months of October 15-March 31. By implementing such a restriction there should be no impacts to either bat species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred by letter dated August 30, 2016, with a plan that USACE will consult with them prior to development of each site within the MP. For each development site there would be minor adverse impacts to habitat occupied by various species of wildlife. Development of the sites in accordance with the proposed MP would result in permanent

removal of some of this habitat including trees and understory. Such habitat would be replaced with features such as trails, campsites, boat storage, etc. The project has been coordinated with FWS as noted above and due to the scope of the project and previously disturbed habitat, this mortality would be a minor impact, and any lost individuals would be replaced through natural increase following project completion.

There will be beneficial recreation opportunities for the recreational facilities (boat ramps, camping areas, and trails) because they would have increased availability upon completion of the proposed actions. The action would continue the existing use of recreation facilities for the benefit of the public.

The USACE, Mobile District has determined that the proposed actions will have No Effect to cultural resources. However, each proposed actions implementation plan will be reviewed by the Mobile District Archaeologist prior to construction to ensure Section 106 compliance. Additionally, any implications to the Historic Properties Management Plan will be taken into consideration during implementation, operation, and maintenance of the proposed action alternative.

During construction at individual sites, standard safety measures would be taken to ensure unauthorized persons do not have access to the site. This would include use of construction fencing, signage, prohibiting trespassers, etc. The USACE established safety program will reduce accidents to the extent possible.

4. FACTORS CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING THAT NO ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT IS REQUIRED:

The recommended action would result in no significant environmental impacts and would result in primarily long-term beneficial impacts. The project would be in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. The project has been coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and they have no objections. The project has been coordinated with the Georgia State Historic Preservation Officer and they have no objections. Among these recommendations, timing of construction and minimizing habitat disturbance are critical. Project construction will occur outside of the bat roosting period between October 15-March 31. Therefore, environmental impacts were determined to not be significant.

5. CONCLUSION: An evaluation by the attached EA describing the proposed update of the Allatoona Lake MP Update shows that the proposed actions would have no significant impact on the human environment and preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

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