RECORD OF DECISION
MATILIJA DAM ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PROJECT
VENTURA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

The Final Feasibility Report and Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (FR/EIS/EIR) for Matilija Dam Ecosystem Restoration, California, dated September 2004, addresses ecosystem restoration and recreation opportunities for Matilija Creek and the Ventura River in Ventura County, California. Based on this report, along with the views of interested agencies and the concerned public, and the review of my staff, I find the plan recommended by the Chief of Engineers to be technically feasible, environmentally sound, economically justified, and in the public interest.

The recommended plan would restore ecosystem and hydrologic functions to the Ventura River by removal of the Matilija Dam. The plan consists of removal of approximately two million cubic yards of fine sediments via a slurry line and restoration of a sinuous pre-dam channel in the area behind the dam; removal of the 190-foot high dam; and natural evacuation of the remaining approximately four million cubic yards of coarser-grained sediments. Removal of the dam requires modification of two existing downstream levees and the construction of one new levee to restore pre-project levels of flood protection to local communities, removal and replacement of two bridge crossings, acquisition and removal of several residences immediately downstream of Matilija Dam, addition of a sediment bypass to the Robles surface water diversion facility located about two miles downstream of Matilija Dam, addition of a locally preferred desilting basin (associated feature) and the addition of two wells at Foster Park. The plan also includes removal of approximately 250 acres of invasive reed, *Arundo donax*, and construction of about 7 miles of multi-use non- motorized recreation trails, parking areas with trailheads, and interpretive signs. The recommended plan would restore approximately 2,280 acres of habitat area, reconnect about 16 miles of river below the dam with 17 miles of creeks located upstream of the dam, and restore natural sand transport to the ocean.

A total of seven action alternatives and the no-action alternative were examined in detail to evaluate potential measures to improve the aquatic functions of Matilija Creek and the Ventura River through removal of Matilija Dam. The action alternatives considered two different methods to take down the dam, three different measures to dispose of the accumulated sediments trapped behind the dam, and include various features to prevent project-induced flooding and adverse effects to municipal water supply intakes. Significant aquatic habitat gains would result from all action alternatives. These alternatives were fully discussed in the feasibility report and EIS/EIR and are incorporated herein by reference. Of the alternative plans considered, the National Ecosystem Restoration (NER) Plan was selected as the recommended plan (as well as the environmentally preferable plan), since it would provide the largest overall increase in habitat value and result in the most net benefits to the ecosystem.

The recommended plan would have net beneficial effects on the environment. All practicable means to avoid and/or minimize adverse environmental impacts were included in plan formulation and have been incorporated into the project. The plan would have relatively few adverse impacts on environmental resources, land use, aesthetics, and traffic. The plan could have temporary, significant increases in noise levels and air emissions during construction. The potential adverse effects would be more than offset by the benefits associated with increased access to floodplain habitat and aquatic habitat improvements that would result from ecosystem restoration measures. The FR/EIS/EIR contains a full description of environmental commitments for the project.

The Endangered Species Act-listed steelhead trout will benefit from the recommended plan. The National Marine Fisheries Service has identified the Ventura River steelhead population as essential for the successful recovery of the endangered southern California steelhead. The removal of Matilija Dam is expected to favor long-term viability of the Ventura River population of endangered steelhead as well as the entire Southern California Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of endangered species. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that the proposed project is not likely to jeopardize any threatened or endangered species and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify critical habitat. The project has been extensively coordinated with the public and with resource agencies and is in compliance with environmental requirements, including the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act.

Technical, environmental, and economic criteria used in the formulation of alternative plans were those specified in the Water Resources Council's *Principles and Guidelines*. All applicable laws, Executive Orders, regulations and local plans were considered in evaluating the alternatives. The recommended plan is the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative and incorporates all practicable features to avoid, minimize, rectify or reduce adverse environmental and social effects. I find that the ecosystem restoration benefits gained by construction of the recommended plan outweigh the costs and any adverse effects. This Record of Decision completes the National Environmental Policy Act process.

April 9, 2007
Date

John Paul Woodley, Jr.
John Paul Woodley, Jr.
Assistant Secretary of the Army
(Civil Works)