

**Operation of
Flaming Gorge Dam
Draft Environmental
Impact Statement**

**Visual Analysis
Special Report
Technical Appendix**





VISUAL ANALYSIS SPECIAL REPORT

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

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Technical Appendix

Visual Analysis

Specialist Report

Prepared by Brent Hanchett
Landscape Architect
Ashley National Forest
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INTRODUCTION

This report addresses the scenic resources surrounding Flaming Gorge Reservoir and the Green River Corridor. The focus is on potential visual impacts to changes in shoreline exposure resulting from fluctuating ongoing water levels and downstream water flows. Discussion will include scenic resources on the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area and the Green River Corridor.

The U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have developed systems for the administration of scenic qualities on Federal lands (Scenery Management System, USFS, 1995, 1974; Visual Resource System, BLM, 1991). Both agency systems are addressed where applicable.

The Bureau of Reclamation has requested the report and is providing funding.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Flaming Gorge Reservoir is situated on the eastern slope of the scenic Uinta Mountains in Northeastern Utah. The concrete arch dam was constructed during the early 1960's. The heart of the Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area is a 91-mile long reservoir, created by Flaming Gorge Dam. There are over 300 miles of shoreline. An estimated 3,000 acres of shoreline are involved.

The Green River flows out of the dam, down through the lower reaches of Red Canyon, and into Brown's Park. The stretch of river covers approximately 20 miles. An estimated 100 acres of riverbank are involved.

Landscape Character

The landscape consists of a high plateau, about 8,000 feet in elevation, covered by Ponderosa pine, and pinyon-juniper; and is dissected by Red Canyon. The Green River flows through the deep Red Canyon beginning at Flaming Gorge, near Sheep Creek Flats and exits at Brown's Park, a broad open valley near the Utah-Colorado State line. Rock formations are prominent and soils are reddish in color. The Uinta Mountains form a high scenic backdrop to the west.

The Wyoming portion consists of a different land type, prominent grayish ledges and bluffs, where the Green River Corridor is not as deeply defined. Vegetative patterns are of a sage nature. Soils consist of a shale or clay type material. Open spaces are prominent.

Scenic Integrity

Visual qualities are perceived by those who normally recreate or spend time in a particular area who, in this case would be the Casual Forest Visitor. Much of their recreational experience relates to their concern for scenic quality and the condition of the view shed.

Scenic values and qualities within the Flaming Gorge NRA and along the Green River Corridor are high. With a background of the Uinta Mountains and distant vistas, this is the premier scenic showcase for northeastern Utah and southwestern Wyoming.

The normal goal for the Forest Service and BLM would be to manage the NRA and Green River Corridor for a "Naturally Appearing" landscape character. To go back in time about 50 years, there was a river, flowing through a series of canyons, including the Firehole regions of Wyoming, Flaming Gorge, Red Canyon and Brown's Park in Utah and on into Colorado. Human intrusions were minimal, with a few occasional dirt roads

and homesteads. The area was truly scenic, unaltered and natural in appearance.

During the mid-1960's, a dam was constructed in Red Canyon and backed up water for 91 miles. Along with the reservoir, a large influx of people desiring a recreational experience was anticipated. Highways were constructed. Bridges, boat ramps, campgrounds, visitor centers, restaurants, lodges, and service stations followed. A town site was constructed. Along with the dam, came power generators and transmission lines to serve distant communities. Utilities and lines, such as water, gas, sewer and electrical distribution, were needed to support the local facilities.

As anticipated, the public does visit the NRA and uses the facilities as listed above. They enjoy the "natural" scenery, camping, fishing, floating the river and hiking the trails. They truly enjoy the area. Scenic Byways extend along both sides of the NRA and Flaming Gorge Reservoir from Wyoming into Utah.

The scene has changed in the last 40 years. We now manage a "Cultural" landscape, at least on the Utah side, which has a high influence of recreational aspects. There are enough developed and dispersed overnight facilities within the NRA to accommodate over ten thousand people in any one night. The scenic values for the area still persist, as people are able to sort out and look beyond the negative scenic features.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum would call for this area to be managed for a Roded-Natural or Roded-Modified setting. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum for the area around Flaming Gorge Dam is close to an "Urban" setting.

The Scenic Integrity Level for the southern end of the NRA, including Cedar Springs, the dam, Dutch John, Antelope Flats, and Little Hole is considered Moderate to Low, because of related service developments as mentioned above. Scenic Integrity Levels for the Wyoming portion and Green River Corridor, below Little Hole would be considered as High to Moderate. The desired condition for the entire NRA and Green River Corridor would be "Natural Appearing" and "Cultural".

Bureau of Land Management Lands along the Green River Corridor, below Little Hole have a Class II Objective, “Change is visible, but does not attract attention.”

Constituent Information

Visitors to the NRA come from Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, and all over the United States. Most foreign Visitors are from England, Germany, France and Japan. They expect to view outstanding scenery, visit the dam, and catch trophy fish. The majority of recreation use occurs during the summer months, between Labor Day and Memorial Day, or approximately 100 days.

Recreational opportunities include driving for pleasure, viewing scenery, fishing, boating, floating, waterskiing, swimming, scuba diving, hunting, mountain biking and hiking. Winter activities include cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and ice fishing on the reservoir and stream fishing on the river. Facilities include visitor centers, boat ramps, campgrounds, trails, commercial lodges, service stations, and marinas.

The Green River, below the dam is classified as a Recreational River, within the Wild and Scenic Rivers Classification system. The trail from Spillway to Little Hole is classified as a National Recreation Trail. The Green River is a Blue ribbon trout fishery and is heavily fished throughout the year. Rafting is popular on the Green River from May through September. A popular Scenic Backway extends from the Utah Colorado State Line through Brown’s Park and into Vernal. Attractions along the Backway include John Jarvies Historical Ranch, campgrounds and picnic facilities.

The Flaming Gorge-Uintas National Scenic Byway, US Highway 191, begins in Vernal, Utah, and extends past Dutch John and to the Wyoming state line. Included is Highway 44, from Greendale Junction with US 191 to Manila, Utah. Intrinsic qualities include Scenic, Recreational, Natural, Historical, and Cultural. The Byway Theme is “Wildlife Through the Ages.”

The Flaming Gorge-Green River Basin Scenic Byway picks up at the Wyoming State line and

carries northward on Highway 530 to Green River, and US Highway 191 to Rock Springs. Designated by Wyoming in 2002, this byway has Recreational and Natural intrinsic qualities. The Byway Theme carries over from the Utah neighbor, “Wildlife Through the Ages.”

Landscape Visibility

Most areas within the NRA are seen by the public from one point or another. People in boats scrutinize all parts of the reservoir and shoreline from the water level. Other Forest visitors and fishermen view the reservoir from above and points around the NRA, such as Red Canyon Visitor Center, Flaming Gorge Dam and Visitor Center, campgrounds, marinas and dispersed areas.

People floating the Green River and hiking the trail have the perspective of Red Canyon at the water level. Only a few vista points along the river are available from roadways. These include views from Flaming Gorge Dam, Spillway Boat Ramp, Little Hole area, and at Brown’s Park.

APPLICATION

Flaming Gorge Reservoir

The visual management inventory for the Flaming Gorge NRA (Baird, 1985) calls for the area within the Flaming Gorge NRA as “Retention” of visual quality. This visual quality objective would provide for management activities that are not visually evident.

The Scenery Management System (SMS), adopted by the Forest Service in December, 1995, supercedes the Visual Management System and Forest Service directives called for future visual analyses to adopt the new Scenery Management System. Subsequent discussion for this visual analysis will use SMS.

As mentioned above, the desired visual resource management goal on the NRA would be for a “Naturally Appearing” landscape. We are in a

“Cultural” setting where concentrations of people and developments exist, such as the Cedar Springs area, at Flaming Gorge Dam and the Dutch John Townsite. Several factors need to be considered here.

Although a reservoir with draw down, some local entities have renamed it “Lake Flaming Gorge.” The perception is for many people to view the reservoir as a lake. The draw down levels of 20 or 30 feet below high water line is minor to the entire scale of the reservoir, especially as viewed from any one viewpoint.

Several natural conditions exist, some as a result of man’s activities of dam construction. Man has built the dam and has caused water to back up in Red Canyon. As a result of this action, natural processes are taking place, such as a buildup of calcium bicarbonate in the water, which tends to coat rocks and other features with a white film in which it comes in contact.

Another natural process is the weather patterns for Utah and Wyoming, and more specifically, the Green River Corridor. Provided that we experience normal or wet weather patterns every year, it could be feasible to manage at the high water level within the reservoir through time. Because of dry cyclic conditions, such as we are currently experiencing, there is a natural draw down of the reservoir surface. The surface elevation will either rise or drop, according to available natural water supply.

A third natural condition, or possible act of man, is to simulate historic natural spring flooding downstream in order to maintain habitat for endangered and sensitive species. These seasonal flows seem to tax a lot of storage reserve, which adds to changing water levels during the summer recreational season.

Many of the access points to Flaming Gorge Reservoir were visited and photographed by this writer. (See photographs in this report.) The visual effect of the draw down and white mineral coating is most apparent in the lower regions of the reservoir, specifically from Red Canyon Visitor Center and the Dam Visitor Center. The view from Red Canyon Visitor Center and overlook is from a

distance and height that a few miles of shore line is visible. The view from the Dam Visitor Center is at water level. The white line does not stand out as much from many other locations around the reservoir.

This author visited visitor centers and information outlets around Flaming Gorge NRA and at Brown’s Park. Facilities visited include 1. Dam VIS Center, 2. Red Canyon VIS Center, 3. Flaming Gorge NRA Headquarters in Manila, 4. Dutch John Forest Service Office, 5. Rock Springs Chamber of Commerce, 6. Green River Chamber of Commerce and Forest Service Office, 7. Lucerne Valley Marina, 8. Red Canyon Lodge, and 9. John Jarvie’s Historical Ranch in Brown’s Park (BLM). At least 10 people at these information outlets were interviewed (see attachment), and most comments concerning the low water level indicated public concern about the dry climate conditions of the area and low water levels as a result. The public registers and comment forms -for the past several months were reviewed at Red Canyon Visitor Center and Dam Visitor Center. All comments entered were of a positive nature expressing the awesome scenery of the area. (See attached comment forms for the Dam Visitor Center.) Only one verbal comment concerning visual concerns was received by Bill Shane, Information Specialist at Red Canyon Visitor Center. Bill indicated that a lady asked, “Who painted the white line?”

At State Line Cove, near Manila, Utah, and at various other places in Wyoming around the reservoir, people choose to camp within the high water line of the reservoir. The lower the water level, the better it is for more places to camp and more space between units.

Many of the photographs of Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area, which have been taken by professional photographers, show the reservoir and white line. These are award winning photographs, transferred to post cards and on sale at the commercial outlets around the area. They are popular sale items and Forest visitors don’t seem to hesitate to purchase them.

People do notice the draw down level of the reservoir, along with white line, but it does not

detract from their overall recreational experience in the area. The low water marks and white line effects are only noticeable along some segments of the entire 300 miles of shoreline. During winter months any impacts are naturally mitigated with a covering of snow.

Visual effects are negligible as compared with the inherent scenery of the area.

The Green River

The Forest Service visual management goal for the Green River Corridor would be for a “Natural Appearing Landscape Character.”

The BLM has completed a Visual Resource Analysis along the Green River, downstream from the Forest Boundary to Brown’s Park, which calls for Class II management. Some altering of the landscape can occur within Class II areas, but management activities and structures should not attract a viewer’s attention.

In viewing the low-water stream flows along the Green River, there are few to no visual effects on the stream banks, from the perspective of the casual visitor. Some mud banks and exposed rocks stick out of the water, however they appear as a natural occurrence under low water conditions. Very few indications of white buildup are apparent on the cobble rocks or along the stream banks.

To summarize, the visual effects of low water flows along the Green River are negligible. Any effects are well within management prescriptions for the area.

ATTACHMENTS

Compilation of Visitor’s Comments by Information Specialist, Brent Hanchett, 2002.

Visitor Comments at Flaming Gorge Dam. Hard Copy, 2002.

Photographs of Flaming Gorge and Green River, 2002.

