



COLORADO

Parks and Wildlife

Department of Natural Resources

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July 1, 2022

Clayton Wein
Environmental Protection Specialist
Division of Reclamation, Mining, and Safety
1313 Sherman St. Room #215
Denver, CO 80203

Re: Rifle Gravel Pit #1 - File No. M-2021-052, Scott Contracting, Inc. Amendment Application (AM-1)

Dear Mr. Wein,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed Amendment Application from Scott Contracting, Inc. for the Rifle Gravel Pit #1. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has a statutory responsibility to manage all wildlife species in Colorado. This responsibility is embraced and fulfilled through CPW's mission to perpetuate the wildlife resources of Colorado and provide sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities that educate and inspire future generations. CPW fulfills this mission by responding to requests for comments on wildlife impact reports, land use proposals, and consultations through public-private partnerships.

Rifle Gravel Pit #1 (The Project) is located just Southwest of Silt, CO adjacent to Interstate I-70 within the alluvial plain of the Colorado River. Current conditions at the site are described as a level upland pasture with a shallow groundwater table that is connected to the Colorado River. Vegetation is dominated by noxious weeds and residual pasture grasses with a small riparian woodland consisting entirely of non-native Russian Olive with a sparse understory. CPW understands that The Project site is permitted at 19.63 acres and will be wet mined for sand and gravel utilizing a long-reach excavator to remove the material while avoiding any dewatering operations. The material to be mined is approximately 292,000 cubic yards of sand and gravel that will be placed on-site and allowed to drain before the sale or transport offsite. The property will be surrounded by a 5-foot earthen berm composed of topsoil and overburden to minimize noise and light impacts to the surrounding community. Materials will be sorted and sold on-site and access to the site is provided by gravel County Road 346 which becomes paved adjacent to the I-70 Interstate. The surrounding landscape includes agricultural operations, conservation efforts, oil and gas activity, and an active gravel mining operation currently operating on a property to the West within a half-mile of the proposed Project site.

CPW commends the project proponent for locating the impacted area outside of emergent wetlands located on the property and for amending operations to a wet mining scenario to avoid de-watering operations; however, wet mining operations will also have impacts on water quality and sediment transport both via surface flow and subsurface flow. Because the Project site is located in the alluvial plain of the Colorado River and hydrologically connected



to the river, much of the surrounding landscape is characterized as an emergent wetland as mapped by the National Wetland Inventory. Emergent wetlands support multiple species of raptors, migratory songbirds, rodents, bats, and snakes and provide critical support for aquatic and terrestrial species. These wildlife populations are integral to a well-balanced ecosystem. This development requires consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. CPW also recommends consultation with the Colorado Division of Water Resources, which has mapped this parcel as an alluvial aquifer and has several points of diversion in close proximity.

CPW has identified that this project is located within the following CPW-mapped [High Priority Habitats](#) (HPH). High-priority habitats are home to species for which CPW has sound spatial data and scientifically-backed Best Management Practices (BMPs). To protect those habitats for the species listed below, CPW recommends that no permitted or authorized human activities from December 1st to April 30th to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse impacts.

- **Mule deer severe winter range and winter concentration area**
 - **Severe winter range:** That part of the overall range where 90% of the individuals are located when the annual snowpack is at its maximum and/or temperatures are at a minimum in the two worst winters out of ten.
 - **Winter concentration area:** This part of the winter range where densities are at least 200% greater than the surrounding winter range density during the same period used to define winter range in the average five winters out of ten.
- **Elk Winter range and concentration area**
 - **Winter concentration area:** That part of the overall range of a species where 90% of the individuals are located during the average five winters out of ten from the first heavy snowfall to spring green-up, or during a site-specific period of winter as defined for each DAU.
 - **Winter concentration area:** That part of the winter range of a species where densities are at least 200% greater than the surrounding winter range density during the same period used to define winter range in the average five winters out of ten.

Although The Project is located outside of CPW aquatic High Priority Habitats, its proximity and connectivity to the Colorado River should be taken into consideration to attenuate sediment input and weed dispersal. After reviewing the application, CPW has identified the following construction and operation-oriented concerns and recommends the following BMPs to further avoid and minimize impacts to wildlife, wildlife habitat, and the Colorado River:

- During construction and operations, the contractor should prioritize control erosion measures identified within the NPDES Permit to minimize off-site sediment transport.
- Dust suppression should utilize fresh water only.
- All work equipment be cleaned and sanitized removing any existing dirt, vegetation, or seeds before leaving the work area.
- Follow the Noxious Weed Recommendation Plan included in the permit application that aims to treat topsoil stockpiles and materials at least biannually using a Colorado-

certified herbicide applicator. In addition, the project proponent should spot treat as needed to prevent any weed communities from seeding.

- Berms and slopes should be vegetated with a CPW-approved seed mix to minimize erosion.
- Surface water, groundwater, or stormwater discharged from operations within the permitted area to neighboring properties or to the Last Chance Ditch should first be treated by the site's sediment and erosion controls and ensure that it is within natural water standards.
- Any new fencing needed for the proposed project should be constructed with wildlife-friendly fencing. [Guidelines for appropriate wildlife fencing](#) are found on our website.
- Conduct operations between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to avoid excessive disturbance to wildlife species that utilize this area.

Protecting large landscapes that support such a wide variety of wildlife species, and have complex hydrological interactions with adjacent landowners, can only be accomplished by partnering with other conservation organizations and agencies. In addition to the consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Colorado Division of Water Resources, CPW has identified conservation efforts on adjacent or neighboring properties that would likely be affected by this project. Aspen Valley Land Trust holds conservation easements on the neighboring River Ranch LLC, and Island Park and should be consulted regarding the potential impacts on these protected lands. CPW recommends the following considerations to reclaim the property as a functional landscape for fish and wildlife in the surrounding region:

- The recreational pond should be constructed with bank slopes of 3H:1V ratios or with several available escape ramps to allow for any wildlife to escape from the pond.
- Establishing functional fisheries in the recreational pond with habitat structure and aquatic vegetation to support a multi-tiered ecosystem. Non-native species are a threat to native species in the Colorado River and the pond will need to have screens and safeguards to prevent those species from moving off-site at varying water levels. CPW recognizes that this project will take place 0.25 miles away from the river, but would like to emphasize that these barriers must be well maintained to avoid any chance of fish escaping at high water or via connected ditches.
- Fish stocking will be the owner's responsibility. Ben Felt, Aquatic Biologist with CPW will be available to provide information and guidance and can be contacted at 970-255-6126 or benjamin.felt@state.co.us.
- The application states that only native grasses will be replanted during the reclamation process. CPW recommends additional seeding and planting of native brush species (sagebrush, greasewood, rabbitbrush, etc.), as well as several cottonwood trees in any area disturbed by the proposed mining operation that will not be turned into grazing pastures. This is important to return the landscape back into a natural setting that will support wildlife.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife appreciates the opportunity to review this project and provide recommendations to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse impacts to wildlife. If there are

any questions or needs for additional information, don't hesitate to contact CPW District Manager Travis ByBee at 303-291-7223 or email travis.bybee@state.co.us or NW Region Land Use Specialist, Molly West, at (970) 255-6105 or by email at molly.west@state.co.us.

Sincerely,



Kirk Oldham,
Area Wildlife Manager

Cc. Ben Felt, CPW Aquatic Biologist
Travis ByBee, CPW District Wildlife Manager
Molly West, CPW Land Use Specialist
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