Isabella Lake Dam Safety Modification Project

Draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment

for the

End of Emergency Deviation, Kern County, California

May 19, 2022

US Army Corps of Engineers
BUILDING STRONG®

Lead Agency:
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
South Pacific Division
Sacramento District

Cooperating Agency:
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service
Sequoia National Forest

Introductions and Orientation to WebEx

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:

Stephen Martinez, Program Manager

Art Kolodziejski, Project Manager

Yari Johnson, Environmental Lead

U.S. Forest Service

Public Engagement Process

The public review period for the draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment #10 will opened on **May 30, 2022, and will end on June 14, 2022**.

All comments received on the draft document will be considered and incorporated into the updated Final Supplemental Environmental Assessment, as appropriate.

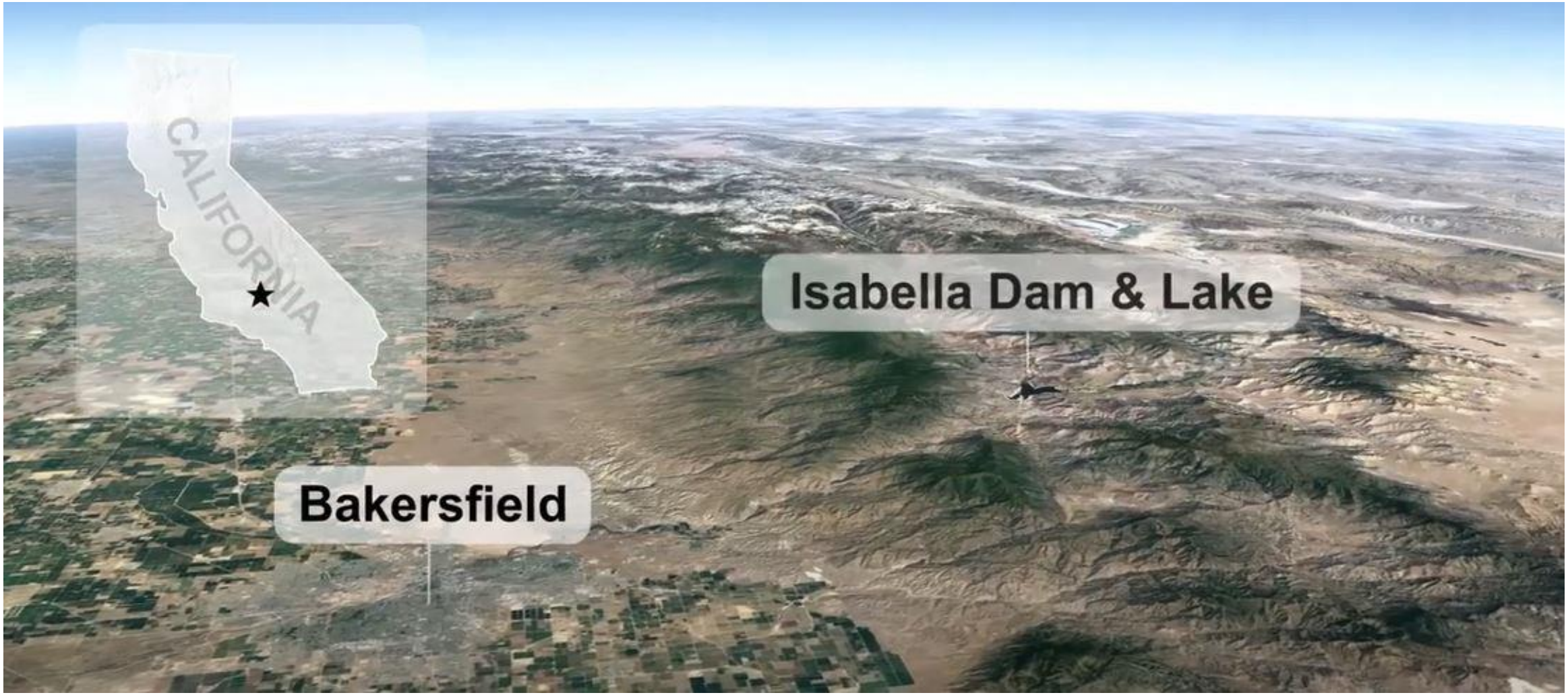
Please submit official comments relating to this draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment to:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District
Attn: Yari Johnson (CESPK-PDR-P)
1325 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Or by email to isabella@usace.army.mil

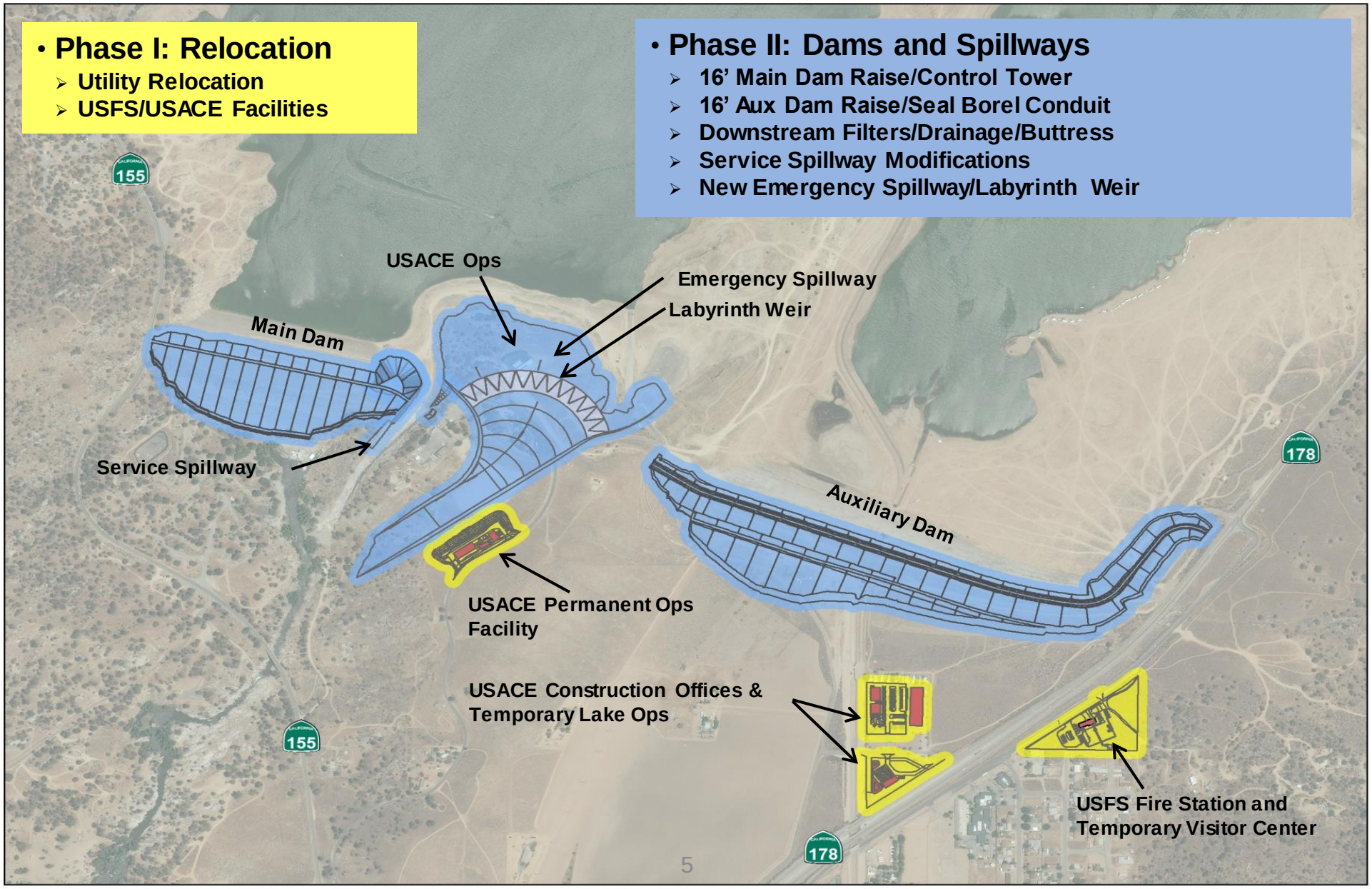
General inquires can be directed to the Public Affairs Office at 916-557-5100

ISABELLA DAM(S) AND LAKE



For more information on the Isabella DSM Project, visit bit.ly/isabelladam

Isabella DSMP – Construction Phase I/II



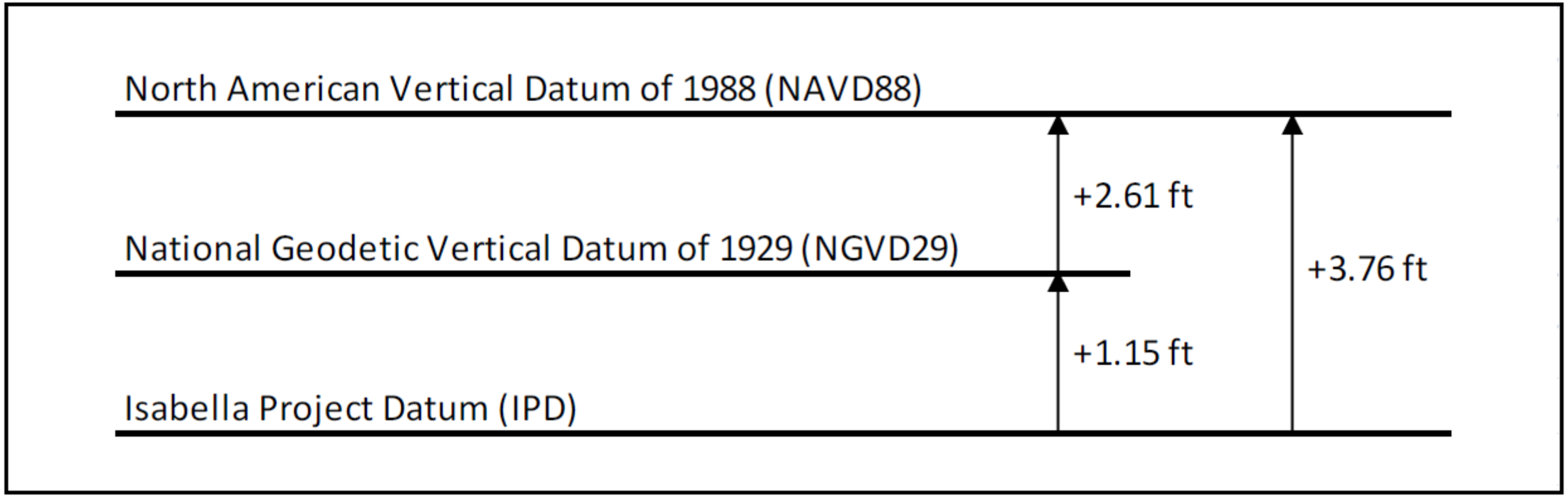
Draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment for the End of Emergency Deviation

The Draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment evaluates the environmental effects of ending the Interim Risk Reduction Measures that were put in place to restrict the reservoir elevation at Isabella Lake, Kern County, California, to 2585.5 feet (Isabella Project Datum; 2589.26 feet North American Vertical Datum 1988 [NAVD 88]) above mean sea level until the Isabella Lake Dam Safety Modification Project is complete.

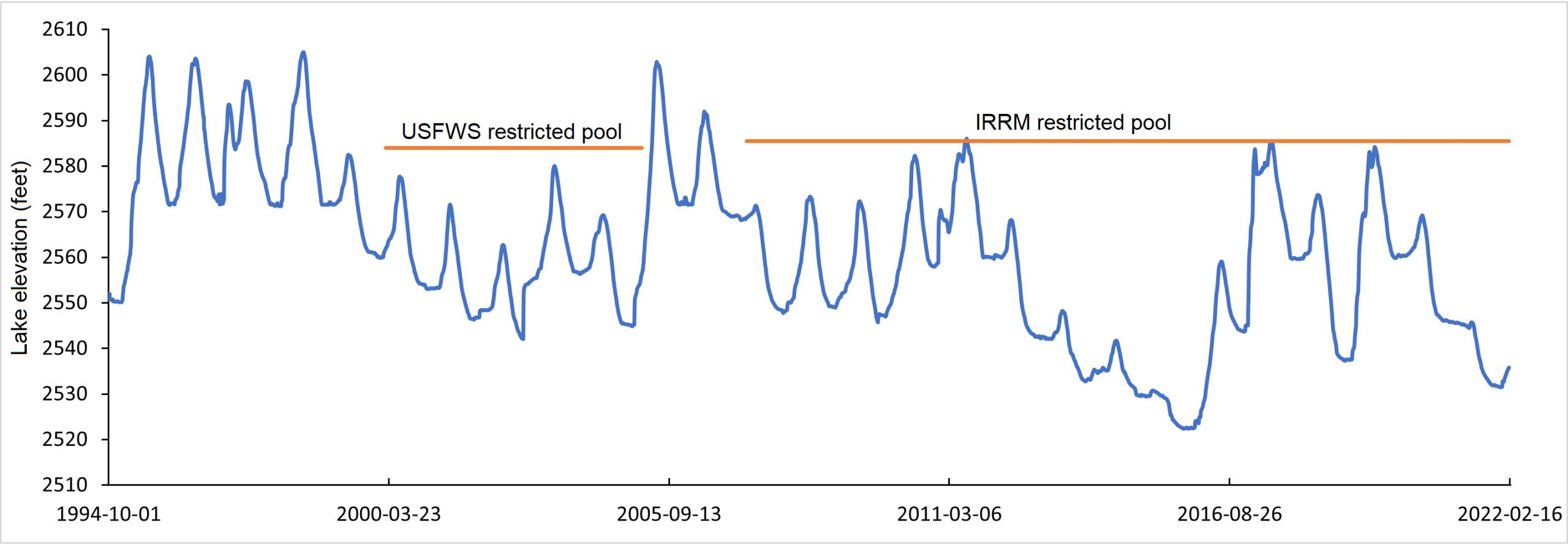
This emergency deviation has generally kept lake levels 20 feet below the normal gross pool elevation of 2605.5 feet (2609.26 feet NAVD 88) since 2006. During normal operations, the gross pool elevation is reached when the water level in the reservoir is at the crest of the service spillway and generally represents the elevation where all flood storage in the reservoir is filled.

The deviation was put in place to reduce risk to life and public safety until the Isabella Lake Dam Safety Modification Project is complete. Ending the deviation will allow the lake to naturally fill depending on rainfall within the watershed.

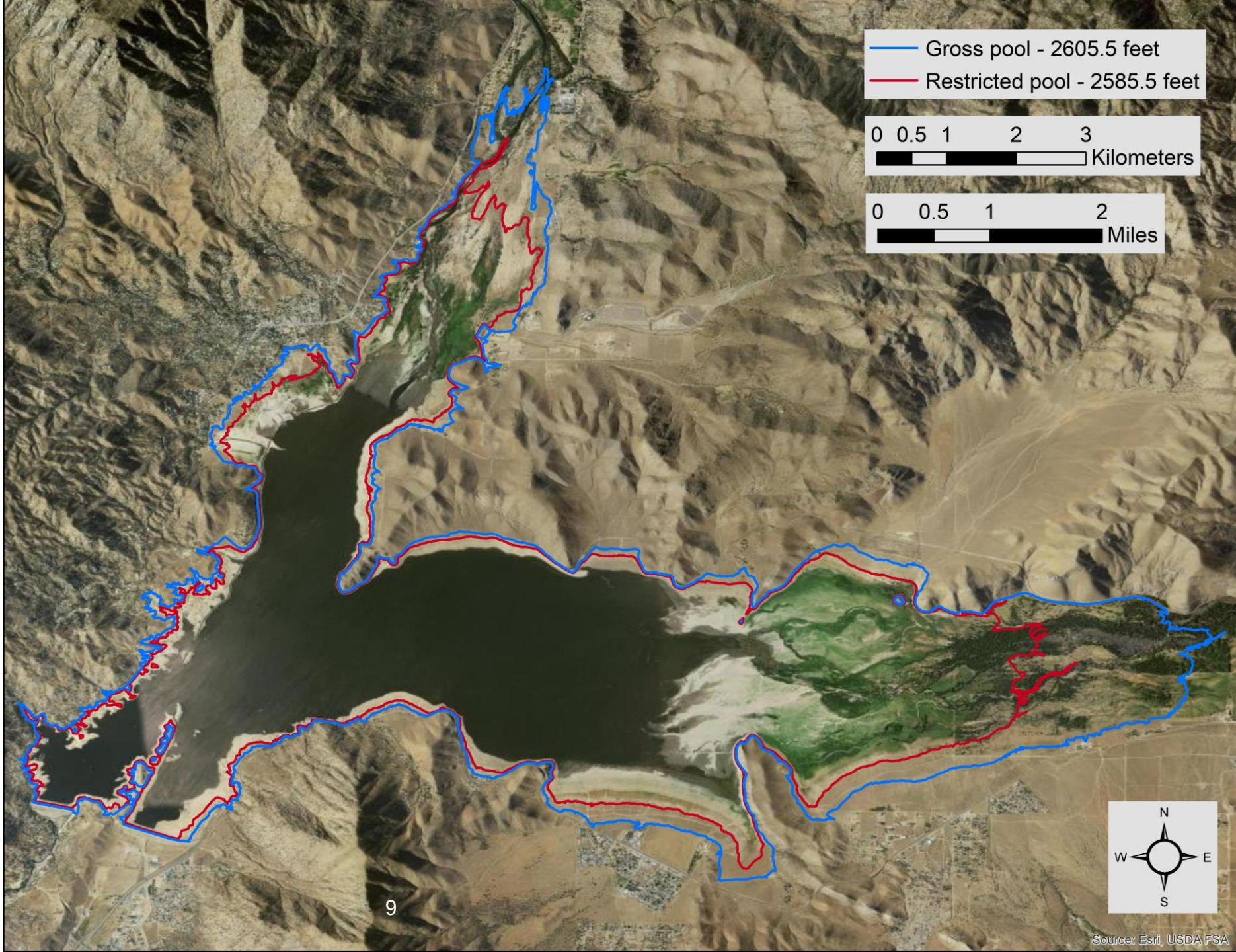
Datums


North American Vertical Datum of 1988 (NAVD88)
+2.61 ft
National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NGVD29)
+3.76 ft
+1.15 ft
Isabella Project Datum (IPD)

Lake Isabella water levels with deviations



Proposed Action



Effects of the Proposed Action

Based on the environmental analyses, the Proposed Action would have less than significant effects on Biological Resources, Federal special status species, water resources and quality, and recreation.

Effects of the Proposed Action

Less than significant on Biological Resources, Federal special status species, water resources and quality, and recreation.

Under the Proposed Action…there is approximately a 20% chance each year that water levels would rise above the restricted pool. During such years, some riparian vegetation (*e.g.*, willows and cockleburs) and fish species would benefit from the higher lake levels, while other species (such as birds with low nests) could be harmed. The majority of the time, there would be no effect to vegetation and wildlife. Therefore, since the Proposed Action would not permanently remove sensitive native communities, or significantly reduce the amount of native vegetation and wildlife habitat in the project area, affects to fish and wildlife species would be less than significant.

Effects of the Proposed Action

Less than significant on Biological Resources, Federal special status species, water resources and quality, and recreation.

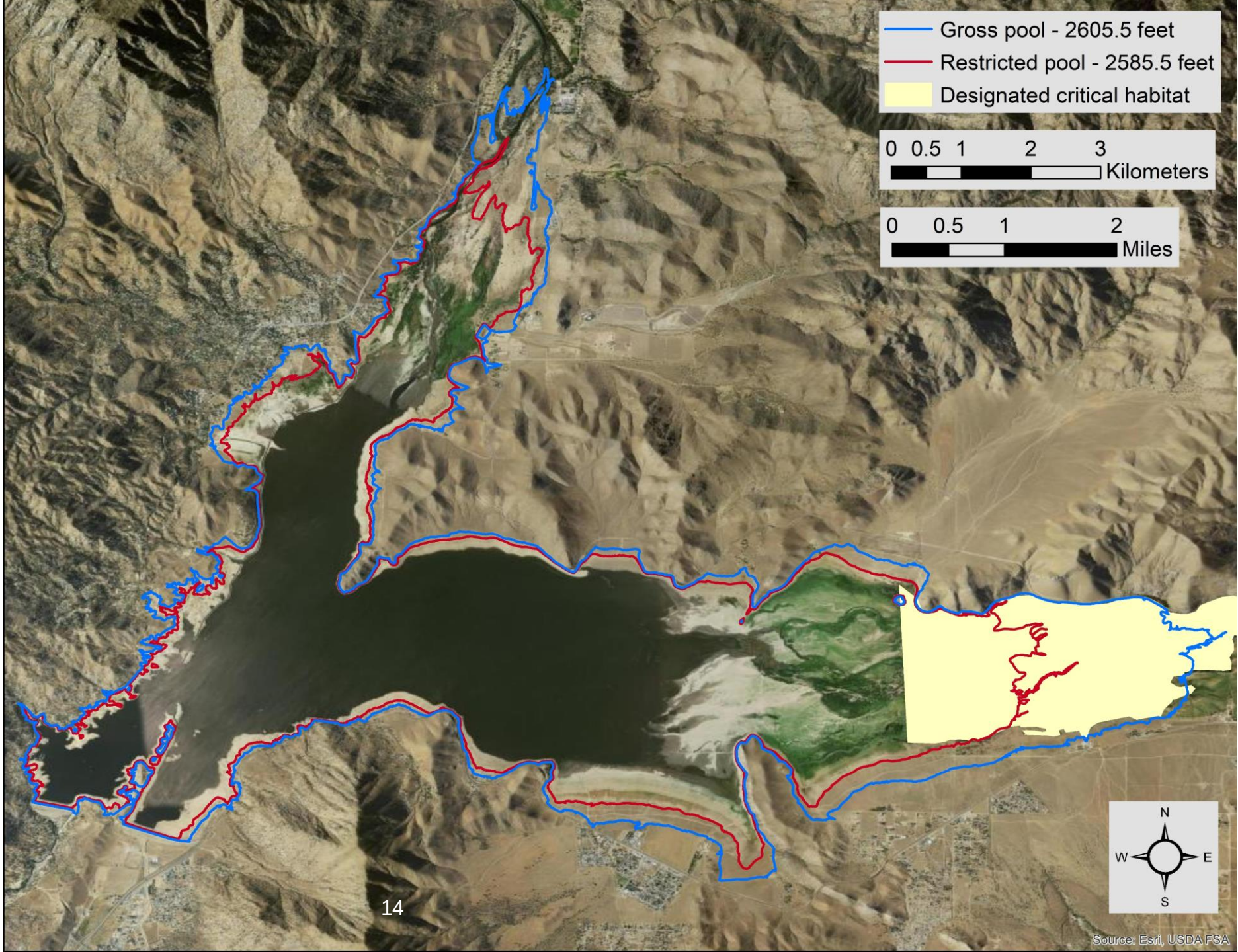
Pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, the Corps determined that the Proposed Action would have no additional effects to federally listed species, or their designated critical habitat, beyond what has been covered under the existing U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinions for long term operations of Isabella Lake and the Isabella Dam Safety Modification Project.

Effects of the Proposed Action

Less than significant on Biological Resources, Federal special status species, water resources and quality, and recreation.

The 2000 USFWS Biological Opinion concluded that routine lake operations are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the affected federal special status bird species because of the mitigation measures undertaking by the Corps to restore and preserve 1,100 acres of riparian habitat.

Southwestern willow flycatcher designated critical habitat



Effects of the Proposed Action

Less than significant on Biological Resources, Federal special status species, water resources and quality, and recreation.

Lake levels would fluctuate according to precipitation patterns and runoff, as well as reservoir operations in accordance with the Water Control Plan. In years with sufficient precipitation within the watershed (approximately 20% of the time), water levels would rise above the restricted pool. This would benefit water quality by lowering temperatures in the lake due to the increased storage, which would reduce potential for harmful algal blooms within the lake. With the same frequency, water released downstream for irrigation would shift from earlier in the growing season (as in the no action) to later in the growing season. Both effects would only occur periodically.

Since the proposed action would not substantially degrade water quality, water resources, or interfere with groundwater recharge; contaminate public water supply; or expose special status species or humans to substantial pollutant concentrations, the effects on water resources and quality would be less than significant.

Effects of the Proposed Action

Less than significant on Biological Resources, Federal special status species, water resources and quality, and recreation.

Compared to the no action alternative, the Proposed Action would have periodic minor benefits to in-lake recreation when lake levels rise above the restricted pool. There would be approximately a 20% chance that this would occur each year. Recreationists would experience a larger lake during these high-water years. This would provide more room for boaters, windsurfers, and other similar water users.

As a result, the proposed action would have a less than significant effect on recreation since it would not cause a permanent loss of recreational opportunities or resources; severely restrict or eliminate access to recreational opportunities and facilities; cause a substantial disruption in a recreational use or activity; or substantially diminish the quality of the recreational experience.

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Questions? Comments?

Please use Chat or raise a “virtual hand” to ask a question.

If you have a comment, please state your name and affiliation.


Thank you!
- The Isabella DSM Team