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COLORADO WATER CONSERVATION BOARD  
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FRUITLAND MESA PROJECT

The Fruitland Mesa project is located in the Gunnison River basin of west central Colorado. Project lands are located south of the Smith Fork of the Gunnison River and east and north of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Recreation area near the town of Crawford. The project was authorized in 1964 as a participating project of the Colorado River Storage Project Act. The Fruitland Mesa Water Conservancy District was organized in 1960 as the sponsoring and contractual agency for the project. This district includes portions of Delta, Gunnison and Montrose counties.

Plan of Development

Water provided by a storage reservoir on Soap Creek and from Curecanti Creek will be diverted through the Black Mesa Conduit to supplement the flows of Crystal Creek, all tributaries of the Gunnison River. The releases from Black Mesa Conduit and direct flows from Crystal Creek will be diverted by existing systems and by the proposed Fruitland Canal. The initial portion of the Fruitland Canal will be a replacement for the existing Gould Canal from which water is presently supplied to the Gould Reservoir and Gould Canal.

The Fruitland Canal would continue westward to provide irrigation for 16 proposed new farm units and to provide water for private lands not now being irrigated. A pipeline will be constructed to provide the Black Canyon Monument area with approximately 15 acre-feet of water annually. Irrigation laterals from the Fruitland Canal will be constructed as needed to serve the new lands.

Recreation facilities will be provided by the Forest Service at the Milly K. Goodwin Reservoir. Fisheries will be created at that reservoir, along Soap Creek and at the privately-owned Gould Reservoir. Irrigation replacements for the maintenance of a fishery pool at Gould

Reservoir will be made to the reservoir owners from Fruitland Canal. Minimum flows for fish will be maintained along Soap Creek, Curecanti Creek and Crystal Creek.

Project Costs (Estimated)

Irrigation	\$40,116,000
Recreation, fish and wildlife	<u>3,098,000</u>
Total Cost	\$43,214,000

Water allocation

Irrigation	57,885 a.f.
Public water supply (Black Canyon National Monument)	<u>15 a.f.</u>
Total	57,900 a.f.
Annual depletion of the Colorado River	28,000 a.f.
Annual salinity contribution to Colorado River	2 to 4 ppm
Benefit-cost ratio (3 1/4%)	1.23 to 1
Benefit-cost ratio (5 1/2%)	0.72 to 1

Environmental Impact

a. Construction of Soap Park Reservoir (Milly K. Goodwin Lake) will create aesthetic improvements on the landscape by access roads, dam construction, and increased human activity that will affect the experience of those persons using the West Elk Wilderness. The Wilderness is adjacent to the proposed reservoir development.

b. Water quality of Soap Creek will be enhanced and minimum flows will be maintained which may lead to establishing a kokanee salmon run from Blue Mesa Lake.

c. The establishment of a minimum pool in Gould Reservoir, where one presently does not exist, will establish a year-round fishery in that reservoir.

d. Irrigation of new lands in the Fruitland Mesa area has been reduced to lessen the impact on critical big game wintering area, but the 12,000 acres of new lands still presents a significant impact on big game winter range that has not been resolved.

e. Increase of 2 to 4 ppm of salinity in the Colorado River below Lake Mead would occur. The EPA has made an estimate of 5 ppm and this remains an unresolved issue.

f. Better access to Soap Creek will require a marina to be constructed on the Soap Creek arm of Blue Mesa Reservoir to handle the expected increase in recreation use.

### Current Status

Advance planning studies were initiated in F.Y. 1965 and the definite plan report was completed in 1967. The repayment contract between the United States and the Fruitland Mesa Water Conservancy District was executed in 1969. Petitions for project irrigation have been essentially completed. There has been a substantial reduction in service to new land acreages to match water available.

Negotiations are under way for an archaeological survey of the project area to be made by the University of Colorado for the National Park Service. Assembly of data for an environmental statement and preparation of a draft for the statement are in progress. Preconstruction drilling at Soap Park Damsite was undertaken earlier in this fiscal year and continued until inclement weather forced curtailment of this work.

The F.Y. 1974 program of \$10,000, consisting of funds carried over from F.Y. 1973, is to be used to determine the effect of the project on the salinity of the Colorado River and to estimate the cost for facilities to offset salinity effects of the project. A congressional appropriation for F.Y. 1973 in the amount of \$500,000 to start construction of the project is being held in budgetary reserve.

Replacement of two inadequate and failing siphons in the existing Gould Canal was started in F.Y. 1972 and approximately 70 percent of the work has been accomplished. The work is scheduled to be completed by June 30, 1973, under a \$362,274 contract.

Total investigation costs to June 30, 1972, including feasibility and advance planning studies, amount to \$1,548,995.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This section of Colorado is semi-arid and is presently undergoing a general decline in population due to the undependable and inadequate water supply (approximately 25% of optimum through existing facilities over the past 25 years). The area has been designated a depressed area under the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965.

Completion of the project would be of great economic value to the area, including an increase of over 2 million dollars to the local tax base. All irrigated crops would be utilized for livestock production, which at the present time could be of significant national benefit.

The recreational benefits derived from local fisheries along the streams and at Gould and Soap Park Reservoir would serve to take local pressure away from the Curecanti National Recreation area and provide additional facilities for the overflow from Curecanti and Black Canyon of the Gunnison areas.

This project, like the Savery-Pot Hook, has been long delayed because of procrastination on the part of various administrations. Because of the long and unprecedented drouth in this particular area which started in 1931, the Fruitland Mesa project was assigned the first priority by this board after the passage of the Colorado River Storage Project Act in 1956. There is no logical explanation for the continued water shortage in the area, but it nevertheless persists. The economic hardship to the old-timers in the area has been severe. Despite the opposition of the Office of Management and Budget to irrigation projects, there is no logical reason why this project should not be constructed at an early date.

Of the nine authorized reclamation projects in Colorado, this is the only project for which a repayment contract has been executed. This repayment contract was executed in 1969. Since that time a small construction start was made on the replacement of the Gould siphon. Congress appropriated the sum of \$500,000 to initiate project construction this year, but that money has been placed in budgetary reserve. It is recommended that the following course of action be adopted for the Fruitland Mesa project:

1. That the Governor and the members of Colorado's congressional delegation be requested to support an appropriation in the sum of \$500,000 for F.Y. 1974 from budgetary reserve in order to initiate project construction.

2. That the sum of \$6,000,000 be requested for F.Y. 1975 to continue project construction.