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COLORADO WATER CONSERVATION BOARD
102 Columbine Building
1845 Sherman Street
Denver, Colorado 80203

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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.

Recreational facilities will be provided by the Forest Service at the Milly K. Goodwin Reservoir. Fisheries will be created at the 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	\$47,143,000
Recreation, fish and wildlife	<u>3,346,000</u>
Total Cost	\$50,489,000
Water allocation	
Irrigation (19,245 acres)	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 at Imperial Dam	3.3 mg/l
Benefit-cost ratio.	2.21 to 1
Total annual benefits	\$4,358,000

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 the reservoir.

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

e. An increase of 3.3 mg/l of salinity in the Colorado River at Imperial Dam would occur. Of this increase, 0.5 mg/l would be due to salt loading and 2.8 mg/l would be due to stream depletion.

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. An environmental assessment has been circulated and comments have been received. The draft environmental statement is scheduled for completion in September, 1975. Preconstruction drilling of the Black Mesa Conduit has been completed, but lack of funds has curtailed drilling at Soap Park dam site.

The President has included \$1,227,000 in his proposed budget for F.Y. 1976 to begin construction of this project.

Replacement of two inadequate and failing siphons in the existing Gould Canal was completed in F.Y. 1972.

Total investigation costs to June 30, 1974, including feasibility and advance planning studies and a completed drainage and minor construction contract for the Gould Canal siphons, amount to \$2,018,482.

Local Interest

State and local interests are actively encouraging construction of the project. The Fruitland Mesa Water Conservancy District was organized in August 1960 to be the administrative and contractual agency for the reclamation features of the project. The state of Colorado, through the Colorado Water Conservation Board, supplied \$14,000 to the Bureau of Reclamation to aid in the investigations. The Colorado River Water Conservation District has assisted in the investigations and has secured the necessary water rights for the project.

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 Reservoirs 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 scientific 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 previous 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. It is recommended that the Governor and the members of Colorado's congressional delegation be requested to support the President's proposed budgetary item of \$727,000 to initiate project construction during F.Y. 1976 and the sum of \$150,000 for the transition quarter.