

Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review

Progress Update From the Project Managers

Greetings!

This edition of the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review newsletter contains an update on the progress we've made as we prepare the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). We would like to tell you about the latest project developments since scoping was completed last fall.

One of our biggest challenges has been to define the existing condition, or to explain how the river is currently operated for the No Action Alternative. This task is undertaken to describe the complex inter-relationships that have evolved in phases over time, and now must operate in an integrated manner for each part to be most effective. With input from all who are affected by water operations on the Rio Grande, we

continue to work to improve our understanding that the Rio Grande—that which connects us to our natural environment in this valley—is also a system of water delivery in compliance with laws and other authorizations. Managing the water operations of the Rio Grande is indeed a multifaceted and complex endeavor.

We have been working with each agency interested in formally becoming a cooperating agency to develop an appropriate Memorandum of Agreement, establishing the responsibilities of all partners. Four cooperating agencies have currently signed agreements, and others have expressed interest. The cooperating agencies are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, N.M. Department of Agriculture, and the N.M. Environment Department. The Pueblo of San Juan is in the process of reviewing the agreement.

Cooperating agencies are those entities that have special expertise in or jurisdiction over areas or resources that may be affected by water operations. Likewise, we have been working with some of the 33 Native American tribes and tribal groups interested in the affected area on a government-to-government basis. We continue to be available to make presentations to organizations interested in water operations in the basin and to provide information on the progress of the project upon request.

Finally, we have a new member of the Project Management Team—Steve Kolk, a hydraulic engineer with the Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) who brings valuable experience to the team. Some of Steve's past work includes design and oversight of construction of the USBR portion of the Rio Grande restoration project at Santa Ana Pueblo and various efforts to address issues surrounding the Rio Grande silvery minnow.

As usual, please call any one of us if you have questions or would like additional information. Our numbers are listed on page 4 of this newsletter.

Sincerely,



Rhea Graham, Gail Stockton, Steve Kolk



***We would like to thank
Leann Towne,
Reclamation's former
Project Manager,
for her help in
getting us this far.***

Rhea Graham

Gail Stockton

Steve Kolk

N E W S L E T T E R

Public Comment Incorporated Into Analysis

It may seem like only yesterday to some, but the scoping comment period for the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review and EIS closed on November 17, 2000. Approximately 55 written and 172 spoken comments and questions were received over the course of the scoping period, which began on June 1, 2000.

Comments were reviewed and categorized according to their content. Comments that were within the scope of the review and pertinent to water operations and management in the basin were forwarded to the appropriate technical team for consideration in the EIS. Some comments that were outside the scope of the project were sent to an appropriate state or federal agency for study under a different program.

Twenty-two main comment categories were identified, with a majority of comments in one of the following three categories:

- **Water Operations and Structures**, including the use of dams, types of options to be considered in the alternatives, possible addition or removal of specific structures, inclusion of some but not all structures in the area, and flood control;
- **Study Content, Methodology and Alternatives**, defining the water operations system that will be included in the study, what models will be used to do the analysis, and what other tools will be used to conduct the Review; and
- **Project Scope, Agencies and Authorities**, including comments on why some agencies are involved and not others, the “bounds” or limits of the study, and the types of water operations under consideration.

A key theme that was identified by participants at the nine public scoping meetings, held from June through October 2000, was that agriculture needed more emphasis in the Water Operations Review and EIS, at least as much as is given to recreation. In response, the Land Use, Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice Resource Team will thoroughly review the effects on both agriculture and recreation in its analysis.

Further, it was mentioned during the scoping meetings that stakeholders want opportunities to meet with the project managers before potential alternatives are selected and analyzed in the EIS. These meetings will begin in January 2002. Meanwhile, the six resource teams will continue working on the development of alternatives, including the No Action Alternative. Three support technical teams will assist the resource teams in Hydrology and Hydraulics, Geographic Information Systems, and Water Operations.

Six Water Operations Management Subjects Studied

Six technical teams, with assistance from the public during the scoping period, have identified resource areas to be studied. The teams are reviewing current water operations management and identifying potential changes in these general subject areas:

- **Aquatic Systems**
- **Riparian and Wetland Ecosystems**
- **River Geomorphology, Sedimentation and Mechanics**
- **Water Quality**
- **Cultural Resources**
- **Land Use, Socioeconomics, Environmental Justice, Agriculture, and Recreation**

The teams will analyze the environmental impacts of potential changes in the way the river is managed once the alternative water operations scenarios are developed and finalized.



Steering Committee Provides Agency, Stakeholder Input

Much agency and stakeholder input on the contents of the Water Operations Review and EIS comes from the Steering Committee, made up of representatives from 23 agencies, the Rio Grande Compact Commission, and key stakeholders from the area affected by the Review. Stakeholders participating or observing on the committee are individuals from several tribes and pueblos, irrigation districts, universities, municipalities, environmental groups, and the private sector.

The Steering Committee is a non-decision making body which meets twice per year, and has a mission of providing stakeholder input and agency feedback to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee, composed of the lead agency heads, has overall responsibility for project decision making, allocating resources, and overseeing the work of the project managers and interdisciplinary and technical teams.

At the most recent Steering Committee meeting, held June 22, the Steering Committee members received progress reports from the project managers, then provided input, suggestions, and raised issues of concern to the staff. Discussion focused on defining the “No Action” alternative, which is the future condition without an integrated operating plan for the basin, similar to the existing condition. Among the questions raised was whether Low Flow Conveyance Channel operations would be described separately from operations in the upper basin. The response was that the intent of the Water Operations Review is to look at the river as an integrated system, not to consider parts of it separate from the whole. That approach enables the water managers to consider tradeoffs between facilities and to maximize operations. Meeting notes are posted on the website listed at the end of this newsletter.



What the Review Will Do:

The Review will determine how the lead agencies will use their existing water operations authorities to:

- Help meet water needs of all users, including the need for conservation of endangered species.
- Meet downstream delivery requirements mandated by the Rio Grande Compact and international treaty with Mexico.
- Provide flood protection and sediment control.
- Assure safe dam operations.
- Support compliance with local, state, tribal, and federal water quality regulations.

The Review and EIS will also:

- Identify flexibility for operation of federal reservoirs and facilities within existing authorities.
- Assist managing agencies to operate these facilities more efficiently as an integrated system.
- Improve decision-making processes on water operations through better interagency communications and more public input.
- Support compliance by the joint lead agencies with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and all other applicable laws and regulations.

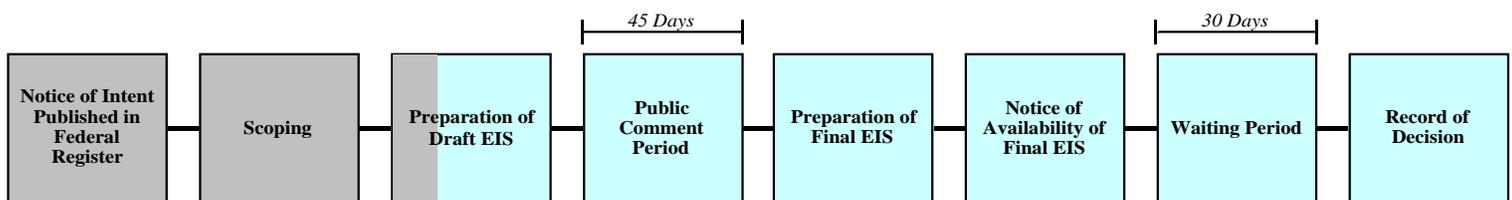
Public Involvement Opportunities

Water Operations Review and EIS Next Steps

The next step in the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review is to develop alternatives for evaluating selected water operations activities in the basin above Fort Quitman, Texas that are within the authorities of the joint lead agencies: U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the N.M. Interstate Stream Commission. This iterative process includes holding public meetings to describe the draft alternatives and to get feedback before the alternatives are finalized. A tentative public meeting schedule follows. Specific locations and times will be announced in the next newsletter.

El Paso, TX	January 2002	Santa Fe, NM	March 2002
Las Cruces, NM	January 2002	Espanola, NM	April 2002
T or C, NM	February 2002	Abiquiu, NM	April 2002
Socorro, NM	February 2002	Taos, NM	May 2002
Albuquerque, NM	March 2002	Alamosa, CO	May 2002

Following this public process, the alternatives will be further refined and a preferred alternative will be selected while portions of the Draft EIS are being written. The Draft EIS is scheduled for completion in February 2004, followed by a 45-day public review and comment period, including a final round of public meetings.* Revisions to the draft and details of responses to comments received during the public review period will both be printed in the Final EIS, scheduled for completion in November 2004. The Record of Decision on the planned changes will be made no sooner than 30 days following the issuance of the Final EIS.



Gray items indicate steps that have been completed.

Blue items indicate steps to be completed.

* Public input can occur during any phase by contacting the project managers.

Participation in Next Steering Committee Meeting Encouraged

The next meeting of the Steering Committee is Thursday, December 6, 2001, at 9:00 a.m. It will be an all-day meeting at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conference room, 4101 Jefferson Plaza NE, Albuquerque. Interested members of the public are welcome to participate. The proposed agenda will consist of :

- Review of the No Action Alternative;
- Presentations on the draft alternatives with time for questions and answers;
- Discussion on other potential alternatives.

Additional information about the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review and EIS is available online at <http://www.spa.usace.army.mil/urgwops/>. The project managers listed below are the points of contact.

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