

Notes from Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review Interdisciplinary NEPA Team Meeting; December 12, 2002; 1:00 PM; Corps of Engineers Conference Room, Albuquerque

In Attendance:

Robert Browning II, Corps	Claudia Oakes, SWCA/NMISC
Mike Buntjer, USFWS	Brian Ortiz, USFWS
Ellen Dietrich, SAIC/Corps	Dennis Oyenque, San Juan Pueblo
Darrell Eidson, Corps	Nancy Purdy, USBR
Don Gallegos, Corps	Garret Ross, USBR
Susan Goodan, SAIC/Corps	Gail Stockton, Corps
Debbie Hathaway, SSPA/NMISC	Jack Veenhuis, USGS
Jon Kehmeier, SWCA/NMISC	Scott Waltemeyer, USGS
Bill Leibfried, SWCA/NMISC	Larry White, USBR
Colleen Logan, R.F. Weston/Corps	Mark Yuska, USBR/URGWOM Technical Team
Clay Mathers, Corps	
Jennifer Neal, Corps	

- ❖ Gail Stockton opened the meeting, began introductions, and asked that everyone review the notes from the last meeting. Since this meeting did not include all technical team members as previous workshops did, she asked that technical team leaders and members in attendance pass along the information discussed to their teams.
 - ❖ Don Gallegos reviewed the preliminary screening of alternatives that is underway by the Water Operations Technical Team. They have been reviewing the single operations alternatives and combining them into action alternatives. The technical team listed the actions proposed for each facility and evaluated whether each water operations attribute meets any of the purpose and need statements listed in the URGWOPS MOA and Notice of Intent. Those that meet a significant number of purpose and need items that do not have “fatal flaws” will be further evaluated through URGWOM to assess their feasibility. The result will be 4 action alternatives to be analyzed in detail in the EIS by all technical teams.
- Don projected the list and the format for documenting the team’s evaluation on the screen. **The draft list, without the entries for purpose and need, is available for all technical teams to download from Team Link. Technical team members should review and send comments to Don.**
- The purpose of this list is to document the team’s thought process in selecting the alternatives to be analyzed and to facilitate the description of those alternatives that were eliminated from detailed analysis.
- One person asked for the definition of “spawning flows,” which is listed as one of the attributes under each action. Don explained that this is assumed to be 1500 cfs flowing from Abiquiu Dam.
- Don stressed that Water Operations Technical Team evaluations are intended to assess the operational feasibility of implementing each alternative. Once operationally feasible

alternatives have been selected, each technical team will use its criteria to assess the impacts of applying the operations on specific resources.

- Don reviewed a preliminary list of different combinations of the feasible single operations that describe dry, average, and wet situations. These will eventually become the action alternatives.
- It was pointed out that there are 3 outstanding biological opinions that could affect the discretionary operations of the Low Flow Conveyance Channel. Whether the operations in each alternative meet the requirements of each BO will be determined in the impact analysis, but will not affect the selection of the alternatives to be evaluated.
- ❖ Technical team members present summarized their team activities and the status of their sections describing the affected environment (Chapter 3 of the EIS).
 - Aquatic Systems Technical Team—Bill Leibfried
 - The description of the affected environment is posted on Team Link.
 - The team is continuing to develop the aquatic habitat model and has added another site along the Rio Chama.
 - They met with a point of contact from Santa Ana Pueblo to request information from a recent survey of Jemez Canyon Reservoir. Potentially, they could process the data and provide a map to the team if a contract were to be developed.
 - **Gail stressed again that any request or meeting with a pueblo or tribe must go through the Cultural Resources Technical Team first, following the procedure set up for URGWOPS.**
 - Don told the group that the Pueblo de Cochiti has completed a sonar survey and contour map of Cochiti Lake that they will provide to him. **Before this can be used for URGWOPS, the Pueblo must approve.**
 - Water Quality—Jon Kehmeier
 - The description of the affected environment is posted on Team Link.
 - The team has been discussing how to conduct the impact analysis. They have selected the gages to use.
 - They need data on the sediment loads coming into Jemez Canyon Reservoir.
 - A Corps EA that was completed in preparation for the reservoir draw down in late 2000 would provide the needed information.
 - Sediment surveys would also provide some data.
 - In response to Jon's question on how water is released from the reservoirs on the system, it was established that all dams release water from the bottom.
 - Land Use, Socioeconomics, Agriculture, Recreation, and Environmental Justice Technical Team—Susan Goodan
 - The description of the affected environment for recreation is posted on Team Link. The land use section is almost ready and other sections are soon to follow.
 - MRCOG is planning to have its population and land use projections through 2025 available next week.
 - The team has been trying to work out how to **manage different data sources and varying resolution and quality for different reaches**. The variations result in some

significant discrepancies that must be described in the EIS. Clay cautioned that **all technical teams should address this and ensure that the magnitude of the variation is described.**

- Riparian and Wetlands Technical Team—Claudia Oakes
 - The team has developed its technical report but needs to simplify it for the description of the affected environment.
 - The team is continuing the riparian vegetation surveys but will need funding to get the maps digitized.
 - They have been trying to plan the development of the biological assessment. The preferred alternative must be selected before the BA can be completed.
- Cultural Resources Technical Team—Dennis Oyenque
 - The description of the affected environment is posted on Team Link. It will need to be scaled down for the EIS, with the full text used in the technical report.
 - The meetings with tribes are going well. More will be scheduled after the new year begins.
 - A new USBR archaeologist will be starting to work next week and should be added to the technical team roster and Team Link.
- Geomorphology Technical Team—Darrell Eidson
 - Two reports about the river have been completed. Since the meeting, Clay scanned them and they are posted on Team Link.
 - The team will review the draft alternatives screening done by the Water Operations Technical Team.
 - The team needs to develop a plan for conducting the analysis for the EIS.
 - There was some discussion on whether the team should be preparing a section describing the river for Chapter 3.
- GIS Technical Team—Clay Mathers
 - Clay has been working on moving the administrative record documentation forward. He scanned the summary of public comments on the draft alternatives and posted it on Team Link. All scanned documents are stored using a program called DjVu, which has a reader similar to Adobe Acrobat. The advantages to using this program are its high compression, improved display, and quick search time. Clay is willing to convert any documents to DjVu for technical teams if requested. **All documents that need to be scanned should be submitted through Clay.**
 - Clay has developed the FLO-2D maps on the DOQQ background showing the maximum area of potential impact between Cochiti and Elephant Butte and between the confluence of the Rio Chama with the Rio Grande to Cochiti
 - Copies of the aerial photography by reach are available in either DOQQ or MrSid mosaics. If technical teams need them, they should request from Clay.

❖ For all technical teams:

- **If any technical teams need specific data from FLO-2D model runs, they must request it through the Project Managers.** The Project Managers must determine

whether the request is within the scope of the contract for modeling before the technical teams can count on the availability of the requested output.

➤ **Technical teams should be developing a glossary of terms so all definitions used are consistent.** A technical writer in the Denver USBR office will be getting involved in the project, and the technical team glossaries will be important for the writer to have available.

- ❖ Mark Yuska updated the group on development of the URGWOM Planning Model that will be used to simulate the flows under each alternative over the 40-year planning period.
 - The URGWOM Technical Team has found a snag in the rules for the water operations model resulting in the water accounting not reconciling with the operations of the reservoirs. They are working on fixing the problem, but this will delay completion of the Planning Model.
 - Don could still run the Operations Model for a 1-year period to screen the alternatives but this is very time consuming
 - The group discussed the trends that would affect river flows that may be needed to complete development of the Planning Model.
 - Mark is looking to the URGWOPS technical teams, especially Land Use, to tell him whether trends in population and land use should be taken into account in the Planning Model over the 40-year period. He asked for identification of variables that could cause changes in flows.
 - He reminded the group that URGWOM only considers what is happening in the river. Land use and population trends may only be important if changes would result in significant and probable changes to the river. For example, a trend may be apparent that would result in cropland being converted that causes changes in consumptive use or groundwater levels.
 - Of importance to URGWOM would be changes in river leakage, crop types or acreage, and riparian vegetation types or acreage.
 - After considerable discussion related to whether these variables should be incorporated into the model, **it was decided by the group that the physical system in the Planning Model would apply the current conditions over the 40-year planning period.** This approach would allow a relative comparison of the alternatives without getting bogged down in the problems of selecting and justifying the application of land use and population trends developed by different organizations and a multitude of unverifiable assumptions.
- Technical teams, such as the Land Use Team, will **still present the affected environment and qualitatively describe the trends predicted in the basin**, but these changes would not be incorporated into the Planning Model.
 - Reasonably foreseeable basin-wide trends will be described qualitatively under cumulative impacts for each resource.
- ❖ Gail briefed the group on the Executive Committee and Steering Committee meetings.
 - At the Executive Committee meeting, they discussed the request by the City of Albuquerque and the steps necessary for them to become a Joint Lead Agency. The project managers are preparing a draft letter of agreement to modify the MOA. The City said they would furnish resources to participate in the effort to analyze operations related to Abiquiu Reservoir and some portion of project management. Rhea Graham gave a

presentation to the Steering Committee that explained the selection of the 40-year sequence of hydrographs to be used in the URGWOM Planning Model. To summarize the feedback from the Steering Committee, Gail used the notes put together by Rhea (below), who was unable to attend this meeting.

- The committee was generally appreciative of the presentation.
- Those in attendance represented various backgrounds, which made for a mini-ID team atmosphere.
- The 40 actual hydrographs taped together end-to-end is a powerful exhibit; in particular, the water managers present spoke of not wanting the drought sequence years on their watch.
- Helpful hints were received with respect to how to explain this process so it didn't sound so technical.
- A hypothetical question asked was: what would happen if you made your operations choices, and knew what kind of water supply conditions were coming? Would you be able to successfully manage the system?
- It was a very productive meeting, and we seemed to have answered the previous questions regarding how our planning model simulation would be representative of actual conditions, while still using real measured data.
- The long-range variability in precipitation and runoff is something that is probably poorly understood by most folks.



❖ **The next meeting of the ID NEPA Team will be held as regularly scheduled on January 9 at 1:00 p.m. in the Corps conference room.**