

Notes from the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review Steering Committee Meeting; June 22, 2001; 9:00 AM; Bataan Memorial Building; Santa Fe, New Mexico

In attendance:

Lee Brown, Middle Rio Grande Water
Assembly

Scott Collins, R. F. Weston, Inc.

Jim Davis, NMED

Gina DelloRusso, Bosque del Apache

Ellen Dietrich, SAIC

Norman Gaume, NMISC

Chris Gorbach, Bureau of Reclamation

Rhea Graham, NMISC

Steve Harris, Rio Grande Restoration

Dick Kreiner, Corps

Amy Lewis, City of Santa Fe and Jemez y
Sangre Regional Water Planning Group

Julie Maitland, NMDA

Nic Medley, NMGF

LTC Ray Midkiff, Corps

Gail Stockton, Corps

- ❖ Norman Gaume opened the meeting, welcomed attendees, and began the introductions.
 - He reminded the group that the function of the Steering Committee is to provide feedback to the Executive Committee, not as a decision making body. Committee members represent the constituency for the Water Operations Review.
 - The role of the Steering Committee is stated in Appendix C of the Memorandum of Agreement between the Joint Lead Agencies.
- ❖ Status of the project
 - Gail Stockton reported that the Project Managers have been working on integrating the study plans from each technical team and incorporating tasks and budgets into the overall project plan, as recommended by the Steering Committee at the last meeting in December, 2000.
 - The total of all technical team budgets currently exceeds overall project resources. In order to refine and reduce these budgets, the Executive Committee recommended that the Project Managers work on developing the alternatives to be analyzed in the EIS. This would help the technical teams focus their planned tasks on the specific data and analyses required to address the impacts of implementing the alternatives, providing a better context in which to develop refined budgets.
 - Once the alternatives are better defined, the technical teams will complete their study plans and budgets, allowing Project Managers to finalize the overall project plan and budget.
- ❖ Development of alternatives that meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
 - Chris Gorbach reported that the technical teams were asked to consider options that would optimize the resources they are assigned to evaluate. To do this, they have been working on identifying the needs of their resource and the potential conflicts caused by managing for the protection of other resources.

- Once technical teams determine what is needed to optimize their resource, they work with the Water Operations Technical Team to describe how facilities would be managed to achieve the single purpose alternative.
 - The next step would be to build multi-purpose alternatives that combine similar operations and purposes, to be analyzed in the EIS.
 - The No Action Alternative, as defined by NEPA, is the most difficult to define for this project because no one has tried to describe current water operations management for all three Joint Lead Agencies before now.
- ❖ Slide show on the No Action Alternative
- Rhea Graham distributed a handout of the slides and asked for feedback on the slide show. The handout will be sent to the Steering Committee members who were unable to attend. The Project Managers plan to further develop the slide show and use it for presentations to public and tribal groups.
 - The No Action Alternative is defined as continuing with the present course of action, or, in this project, how operations are currently conducted.
 - It includes trends that change over time, as the system changes over time.
 - The No Action Alternative can be viewed as what would occur in the future without implementing any of the proposed changes.
 - Over time, the water managing agencies developed ways of cooperating and of operating facilities that are not defined by policy or rules, but should be captured as part of the No Action Alternative.
 - Baseline conditions represent stable river conditions that occurred over the period of record. During analysis of impacts, the effects of leaving operations as they are currently managed, the No Action Alternative, would be compared against the baseline conditions, to determine how the system would change. All alternatives would be compared against baseline conditions.
 - Questions, answers, and discussion generated during the slide show are summarized below.
 - A question was asked on whether the operations at El Vado are included in the No Action Alternative. The answer given was that El Vado operations are included, but will be consistent across all of the alternatives because they are not within the existing authorities of the Joint Lead Agencies to change.
 - A question was asked on 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.
 - Would a specific hydrology be necessary to define the No Action Alternative? The response was that all of the alternatives would be compared to historical hydrology for the period of record for which URGWOM was developed (1975 to present), using the current river system configuration and incorporating some extremes in hydrology into the data to represent wet and dry years.

- Extensive discussion ensued on the period of data to be used, the types of hydrographs and range of flow conditions, how to characterize the No Action Alternative, and how to define baseline conditions.
 - A committee member requested an update on the use of URGWOM to simulate the Rio Grande. In response, it was stated that a module of URGWOM is currently being used by the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation for planning of daily operations and to develop the Annual Operating Plan. The Planning Model, a separate module, is under development. It will be used to assist in analysis of impacts of the alternatives in the Water Operations Review and EIS.
- ❖ The Project Managers requested input on the date and agenda of the next Steering Committee meeting. The following recommendations were made.
- It will be an all-day meeting at the Corps of Engineers conference room in Albuquerque, on December 6 beginning at 9:00 a.m.
 - The agenda will include:
 - Review of the No Action Alternative;
 - Presentations on the single resource alternatives developed by the technical teams, with time for questions and answers reserved after all presentations;
 - Thinking and discussion on development of the multi-resource alternatives.
 - The Project Managers will ensure that the technical team leaders will be available all day.
 - Handouts on all of the presentations will be available.
 - The Project Managers will send information on the alternatives to the Steering Committee members in advance of the meeting.
 - In an effort to increase attendance, Steering Committee members will receive an invitation letter and a phone call reminder.
- ❖ After discussion of the alternatives with the Steering Committee, the Project Managers intend to schedule some public meetings to discuss the alternatives. They still plan to coordinate with the IBWC and Mexico to address flood operations down to Fort Quitman.