

Notes from the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review Steering Committee Meeting; June 27, 2002; 1:00 PM; Bureau of Reclamation; Albuquerque, New Mexico

In attendance:

Neal Ackerly, Corps/Dos Rios	Jon Kehmeier, SWCA/NMISC
Scott Anderholm, USGS	Conrad Keyes, Jr., Consultant to Corps
*Lee Brown, Middle Rio Grande Water Assembly	Steve Kolk, Bureau of Reclamation Project Manager
Carolyn Brumfield, Corps	☛ Dick Kreiner, Corps
Deb Callahan, USBR	Bill Leibfried, SWCA/NMISC
*James Chavez, City of Albuquerque	*Colleen Logan, Weston/Corps
Art Coykendall, USBR	*Charles Lujan, Pueblo of San Juan
*Gina DelloRusso, Bosque del Apache NWR	*Julie Maitland, NMDA
Ellen Dietrich, Corps/SAIC	*Palemon A. Martinez, NMISC
*Gary Esslinger, EBID	Clay Mathers, Corps
Susan Goodan, Corps/SAIC	Jennifer Neal, Corps
Rhea Graham, NMISC Project Manager	Claudia Oakes, SWCA/NMISC
☛ Steve Hansen, USBR	Steve Piper, USBR
*Brian Hanson, USFWS	Gary Rutherford, Corps
Ernie Jahnke, Corps	☛ Rolf Schmidt-Peterson, NMISC
	Gail Stockton, Corps Project Manager

* denotes Steering Committee member or their representative.

☛ denotes Executive Committee member or their representative.

- ❖ This meeting of the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review and EIS Steering Committee was preceded by a poster session from the technical teams. The posters displayed information on aspects of the various resources that could be affected by changes in water operations, in addition to some methods for analyzing impacts to those resources.
- ❖ Copies of the slide presentations were distributed. Additional comments and questions related to each presentation are summarized below, organized by agenda item.
- ❖ Rhea Graham presented an overview of the agenda and an update that included a summary of the draft alternatives that were discussed in the public meetings.
- ❖ Attendance at the public meetings and a summary of comments received were reviewed by Steve Kolk.
- ❖ Each resource technical team gave an overview of their resource, the types of information that will be characterized in their descriptions of the affected environment, and how they plan

to conduct impact analysis of each alternative. The questions and comments are summarized below, with the responses indented under each.

- Cultural Resources—Neal Ackerly
 - **Question:** How far from the river will impacts to cultural resources be evaluated?
 - The cultural team will be evaluating impacts within 5 kilometers of the river. Data quality and quantity vary greatly, so the team will need to develop a method for interpolating to account for unknown data.
- Land Use, Socioeconomics, Agriculture, Recreation, Environmental Justice—Susan Goodan, Steve Piper
 - **Comment:** The number of acres of farms sounds low.
 - Data are from the Census of Agriculture and only reflect irrigated land.
 - **Comment:** Team should use a 5-year summary report written by Brian Wilson (OSE) as a source for New Mexico.
 - **Comment:** Appear to be missing cotton, vegetables, and pecans in the list of New Mexico crops and potatoes in the San Luis Valley.
 - These will be considered in the impact analysis.
 - **Question:** What year is the basis of the agricultural costs and expenses?
 - 1997
 - **Question:** How will land use and subsistence agriculture be characterized using the Census of Agriculture? Will non-irrigated economics be included?
 - The information on the overall agricultural economy will be used as a basis for comparison of impacts. There will be a qualitative analysis of subsistence agriculture.
 - Although it may be unlikely that changes in water operations would affect cattle or non-irrigated land, it will have to be considered.
 - **Question:** Will you address the security and protection of federal property anywhere in the document? How will you address the limits to recreational use?
 - The team has not considered this and will need to find out what types of limits on recreation have been established and whether this would increase pressure on other facilities in the area.
 - This may be considered as part of cumulative impacts.
- Riparian and Wetlands—Art Coykendall
 - The team will be considering primarily the vegetation outside the river channel, not anything within the channel unless it has developed woody vegetation.
 - **Question:** Will you be using one snapshot of the resource or two or three over time?
 - Plan to use original aerial photography taken in 1984 and compare to 1997 photos and possibly to some photography to be taken this year.
 - **Question:** In areas without vegetation mapping from aerial photography, will you use satellite imagery?

- Plan to combine new color infrared aerial photography with fieldwork to check the results and to identify the undergrowth. Do not intend to use satellite photos.
- **Question:** Does URGWOM use satellite imagery or aerial photography?
 - FLO-2D modeling translates URGWOM flows and volumes into depths and velocities and is based on a ground surface grid that uses aerial photography. URGWOM is a hydrologic model and does not use either satellite imagery or aerial photography.
 - The tech team needs to know the structure and density of riparian vegetation. There is no source of continuous data but the team hopes to compare aerials from different years to capture the change from 1984 to 2002.
- Aquatic Systems—Bill Leibfried
 - **Question:** If you are considering reservoir aquatic habitat at Abiquiu and Cochiti, why not Heron and Elephant Butte?
 - At Heron, only effects due to changes in waivers will be evaluated; only protocol changes for flood control are proposed for Elephant Butte.
- ❖ Gail Stockton gave a presentation on the development of the URGWOM Planning Model. She invited those interested in learning more about the development of URGWOM physical model calibration and validation to attend the next Technical Review Committee meeting on August 22 from 9:00 a.m. to noon in the Corps conference room 119.
 - **Question:** Is there a “Judge Parker” wildcard?
 - There is nothing specifically in the alternatives for now because the Executive Committee has decided to wait until the end of the summer to determine the scope of the ruling’s impact. No changes to the project’s Purpose and Need statement have been made.
 - **Question:** How serious a drought would be evaluated under each alternative?
 - We will be using real data to simulate a 1950s type of drought, such as the drought years of ’77, ’96 and ’02. Current plans include analyzing at least three years of drought back-to-back in the Planning Model.
- ❖ Following are questions and responses considered during the period set aside for general discussion.
 - Questions: Most of the presentation on economics focused on agriculture. If San Juan-Chama flows are affected by drought, would the analysis include urban impacts also?
 - 2002 was the worst year so far for the San Juan-Chama project with only about 5,000 acre-feet delivered to Heron Reservoir.
 - Municipal and industrial impacts will be part of the economic analysis.
 - **Question:** What team is looking into the narrowing of the channel and the encroachment of human activity? In the last five years of low flows, sand bars with vegetation have been established, but these may not be addressed in the mapping proposed by the Riparian and Wetlands Technical Team because it would be within the channel.
 - Trends in channel changes will be described and analyzed for each alternative by the Geomorphology Technical (Support) Team. A “No Action” alternative will be evaluated that will show the effects of making no changes in our current operations.

- If the sandbars contain significant vegetation, they will be mapped by the Riparian and Wetlands Technical Team this year.
- **Question/comment:** Reservoir deltas can be the most dynamic parts of reservoir vegetation for documenting changes in habitat. Will this be evaluated outside of recreation?
 - Yes. The Aquatic team will look at ephemeral vegetation, with the help of the Water Operations team.
 - The limits of the normal flood pool will be the boundary of the riparian vegetation mapping. Vegetation at lower elevations would be ephemeral for wildlife habitat purposes.
 - The Aquatic Systems Technical Team will be looking at changes in the water depth and the aquatic vegetation in reservoirs.
 - The ephemeral nature of vegetation means that the interface between riparian and aquatic areas becomes quite dynamic in years of low flow.
 - The Water Operations Technical Team will help determine reservoir volumes and reservoir pool elevations.
- **Question:** What will be done to evaluate the indirect effects of the alternatives on socioeconomics?
 - The team will use IMPLAN modeling to determine the effects of operational changes.
- **Question:** Do you plan to reference the 1933 Congressional report on the Rio Grande to provide background for the layman?
 - Each tech team will provide the background for each resource. The changes under each alternative will be compared to current water operations, which is the No Action alternative.
 - The current authorizations for water operations will be included in the EIS, some of which are contained in the 1930s report.
 - Only the data from 1975 to 2000 will be used in URGWOM modeling. The report information could be used to describe major changes in climate, compared to present conditions, but it would be difficult to use the 1896-1928 hydrology from the report.
- **Question:** Will you address the loss of water through other uses like municipal and industrial, not just evapotranspiration?
 - We are only evaluating the effects of changes in water operations.
- **Comment:** The climatic and flow record from the mid-1970s to 1979 will be important to use to document drought conditions. These drought conditions caused a big change in management of El Vado.
- **Question:** How did people at the public meetings respond to the concepts of the alternatives presented?
 - The cards were well received as a method to explain the concept of the alternative water operations.

- People were most concerned with discrete local conditions, such as the channel capacity below Abiquiu (at the Abiquiu meeting) where they recommended consideration of 800 cfs flows to minimize damage to their diversion dams.
- In the San Marcial area, there was a recommendation that maintenance of the floodway should be incorporated into the “No diversion to the Low Flow Conveyance Channel” alternative.
- **Question:** Will there be recommendations to address the weak points for flood control, such as the locations of floodplain encroachment, its problems, and proposed controls on encroachment?
 - This would be beyond the authorities of the Joint Lead Agencies because it is under the purview of the local governments to implement or establish land use and zoning regulations.
 - This could be identified as a cause for rejecting an alternative (outside existing authorities) or it could be addressed as a mitigation measure.
 - Something like this could be addressed in the EIS in a chapter that discusses actions not within existing authorities.
 - *Note:* The relocation of the San Acacia Rail Road Bridge is authorized and assumed for purposes of the Review and EIS to evaluate draft alternatives which include higher flows than currently possible.
- **Question:** What is the best way to explain the complexities of the system in order to present the results of analysis?
 - The document must be clear and written for the lay reader to understand.
 - Feedback from this meeting will help guide how information should be presented.
- **Comment:** The impacts must be explained reach by reach.
- **Comment:** The posters look good and would be useful for public meetings.
- **Question:** When are the next public meetings?
 - After distribution of the Draft EIS there will be formal public hearings.
- **Question:** Have there been public presentations other than at the URGWOPS public meetings?
 - The Project Managers volunteer to give presentations to any organizations that request them, and try to schedule the public meetings to complement other agencies’ meetings. For example, presentations were given at several outside meetings, including a board meeting of the Elephant Butte Irrigation District, the morning after the Las Cruces Public meeting. The public meeting at Abiquiu followed the Abiquiu Operations public meeting that is usually well-attended.
- **Question:** Will you consider attending other meetings?
 - The Project Managers are always willing to give presentations to other meetings where they are invited.
 - Letters have been sent to all tribes/pueblos/nations within the basin requesting meetings with their tribal councils to explain the project. The invitation to keep them updated will be extended about three times a year.

- **Question:** Can meetings similar to those with tribes be offered to acequias?
 - The Project Managers have thought about this but have not sent out letters yet. If acequias are interested, they are welcome to contact a Project Manager and request a presentation.
- ❖ Steve Kolk explained to the group what the next steps for the project are prior to the next Steering Committee meeting.
 - It was recommended that the next spring Steering Committee meeting is changed to May and the fall meeting be held in early December or late November because attendance might be better.
 - Another suggestion was to consider holding the Steering Committee meetings in conjunction with other meetings to encourage attendance.
 - The Project Managers will consider these recommendations and the dates for upcoming meetings before scheduling the next meeting in approximately 6 months.
- ❖ Wrap-up
 - The Water Operations Technical Team will be reviewing and combining the draft alternatives and eliminating those that are either not feasible or do not meet the Purpose and Need statement, then will recommend the Action alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS.
 - The project schedule will be reviewed to determine if any changes in tasks are needed and to continue to track progress.