

**Notes from the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review  
Steering Committee Meeting; December 6, 2000; 3:00 PM;  
Hyatt Regency Hotel, Albuquerque, New Mexico**

*In attendance:*

Jonathan Ambrose*	Amy Lewis, Steering Committee
Karen E. Browne*	Charles Lujan, Steering Committee
John Burkstaller, Steering Committee	Russ MacRae*
John J. Carangelo, Steering Committee	Julie Maitland, Steering Committee
Lawrence Cata, Steering Committee	Mike Marcus*
Art Coykendall*	Art Martinez, Steering Committee
Cliff Crawford, Steering Committee	Joe Martinez, Steering Committee
Jim Davis, Steering Committee	Palemon Martinez, Steering Committee
William DeBuys, Steering Committee	Clay Mathers*
Gina DelloRusso, Steering Committee	LTC Ray Midkiff, Executive Committee
Ellen Dietrich, Assistant Project Manager	William J. Miller, URGWOM
Gary Esslinger, Steering Committee	Claudia Oakes*
Edd Fifer, Steering Committee	Robert Padilla*
Hector Garcia*	Cynthia Piirto*
Susan Goodan*	Steve Piper*
Rhea Graham, Project Manager	Jim Platero, Observer
Dale Gronewold*	Lisa Robert, Steering Committee
Steve Hansen, Executive Committee	Rolf Schmidt-Petersen, Executive Committee
Brian Hanson, Steering Committee	John Shomaker, Steering Committee
Steve Harris, Steering Committee	Tod Stevenson, Steering Committee
Gordon Herkenhoff, Steering Committee	Gail Stockton, Project Manager
Phil King, Steering Committee	Leann Towne, Project Manager
Ron Kneebone*	Manuel D. Trujillo, Steering Committee
Dick Kreiner*	Julie Tsatsoros*
Gerhard Krueger, Steering Committee	Steve Wagner, Steering Committee
Derrick J. Lente, Observer	Doug Wolf*

\*Inter-agency and Inter-disciplinary Technical Teams

- ❖ The meeting was opened and attendees were welcomed by Lt. Col. Midkiff.
  - He told the group that the goal of the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review is to produce an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to assist decision makers and inform the public about options and choices for managing the facilities and operations of the lead agencies in the basin.

- The Steering Committee's role is to provide feedback to the Executive Committee. At the last meeting in June, the Steering Committee provided input for the public scoping meetings that were held at nine locations from June through October.
- In today's meeting, the members will hear from representatives from each resource team, who will summarize their draft plans of study that will be integrated into an overall study plan by the Project Managers, to guide them in gathering and analyzing data to develop this EIS.
- Lt. Col. Midkiff introduced the Executive Committee members, representing the joint lead agencies, who attended. In addition to himself, representing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; they were Steve Hansen, attending for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) as Deputy Area Director, who is currently acting for the Area Director, and Rolf Schmidt-Peterson, representing the New Mexico Interstate Stream (NMISC) Commission Engineer.
- ❖ Rhea Graham, Project Manager for the NMISC, summarized the status of the project to date.
  - There have been nine public scoping meetings at locations in Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. An important issue that came up was that agriculture and agricultural issues need more emphasis in the Review and EIS. It was pointed out that agriculture should be at least as prominent as recreation.
    - To address this concern, the Land Use, Socioeconomics, and Environmental Justice Technical Team will include both agriculture and recreation under its team's resources.
  - Other public outreach has been conducted by the Project Managers upon request. They have given presentations to such groups as the Conservation Committee of the Sierra Club, the Indian Resource Advisory Council (IRAC), and the Jemez y Sangre Regional Water Planning group.
- ❖ The representatives for each technical team made presentations summarizing the important resources to be covered in their study plans. Handouts in draft form that outlined the study plans were provided for the Steering Committee members to provide additional comments at a later date. Summarized below are the questions and discussion that took place after the presentations.
  - Cultural Resources Technical Team: Presented by Ron Kneebone, CoE
    - Will the evaluation of cultural resources be limited geographically to above Elephant Butte and below the Colorado state line?
      - Data from New Mexico is more complete and more readily available, but the team must collect data from the other two states and determine a method of integrating it into the analysis.
    - Art Martinez of the Bureau of Indian Affairs reported that the agency has received complaints from some pueblos that federal agency people have been traversing pueblo lands without permission. He did not know if these people were involved in this Review or not. A letter requesting permission from their Governor is required before the day of the trip.
      - Ron stated that it is their policy never to go onto tribal land without advance permission, and have not done so. The Project Managers agreed to take this input back to their agencies, and follow up on this concern.

- River Morphology, Sedimentation, and Mechanics: Robert Padilla, BoR
  - What is the relationship between this technical team and the Aquatic Habitat and Riparian Technical Teams, especially in determining the impacts to the Rio Grande silvery minnow?
    - There is strong coordination among the resources of river morphology and riparian and aquatic habitats. The other two teams will study velocities, water depth, and areas of inundation, and will integrate data from the River Morphology Technical Team for their analyses of criteria to measure impacts to their resource.
    - Both Cultural Resources and Aquatic Habitat Technical Teams will use output from Flo2D, a two-dimensional flow model, in specific reaches. The Flo2D model is being developed by the Hydrology and Hydraulics Support Team, which works closely with the River Morphology Team.
  - What happens to habitats during lower flows?
    - The river morphology team desires that other teams determine what are the minimum flows needed for aquatic and riparian habitats. The River Morphology Technical Team is primarily looking at the response of the Rio Grande channel to changes in water operations.
  - Are the effects from tributaries factored into the study?
    - The team will evaluate how the Rio Salado and the Rio Puerco have affected the Rio Grande through time.
  - Steve Hansen pointed out that the silvery minnow problem is exacerbated by the fact that the minnows are located in an area without enough water to sustain them throughout the year. It will be important to consider this impact on their habitat.
  - Why are studies of sediment yield and transport listed as optional in the draft study plan?
    - Due to limited time and funding, this activity was listed as optional, because such a study is very data and resource intensive. Some general analyses and reach characterization is planned under the current study plan.
  - Will you look at sediment quantities in the reservoirs to evaluate the potential for losing storage space?
    - The team plans to evaluate sediment quantities in the inflows and outflows at reservoirs, but they have not thought about reservoir storage. This can be done if the Steering Committee and Executive Committee think that it is needed.
    - [*Background note for the record:* The Corps and Reclamation periodically conduct sediment surveys of their reservoirs. Sediment amounts in the reservoirs are calculated for water accounting for the Rio Grande Compact, but it will be important to identify a suitable method to evaluate sediment as an issue in the Water Operations Review.]
  - Sediment affects many resources and should be a major part of the study.
    - Dick Kreiner mentioned the need to analyze under the Review, an evaluation of sediment at Jemez Canyon Dam due to its recent change in operation. Consideration of changing operations for future resource needs, such as

increasing the sediment available for habitat conditions within the Rio Grande, will need to be studied.

- Robert told the group that the Hydrology and Hydraulics Support Team has been working closely with his team.
- Water Quality Technical Team: Julie Tsatsaros of NMED and Mike Marcus for NMISC
  - How does this study plan relate to the New Mexico TMDL agreements?
    - When the team evaluates water quality in each reach, they will need to know which reaches are listed as impaired in the state 303(d) list.
  - Will the state's TMDL schedule be maintained at the same time as this study?
    - Yes. The team will also consider chemical loadings on the TMDL list.
  - How will the team handle the impact on fish habitat of water quality?
    - Like the River Geomorphology Technical Team, this team will coordinate with the Aquatic Habitat and Riparian and Wetlands Technical Teams.
    - The water quality criteria will be the standards for the designated use of the reach.
    - Biological as well as chemical criteria will be used, something the NM Environment Department is already doing. EPA may be changing their rules so that both criteria will be considered instead of just chemical criteria, and biological considerations can overrule chemical criteria in some cases.
    - As TMDL studies are completed, it may be possible to change some standards to meet biological needs.
- Land Use, Socioeconomics, and Environmental Justice Technical Team: Steve Piper, BoR
  - [Note: Recreation and agriculture will be included as subgroups under this team.]
  - Should a value be added for maintaining the silvery minnow instead of using only qualitative evaluations?
    - The team can use actual dollars spent to maintain the silvery minnow, but this may not be a good indicator.
  - For all of the studies and analyses, the team will need to know the agricultural demand for water. How will this be quantified?
    - The team will assume that the demand is there for agricultural uses of water. Values established by other agencies will be used.
  - Is the team aware that values developed for production agriculture are inappropriate to measure subsistence agriculture?
    - The response was to propose conducting a qualitative evaluation of the economic value of subsistence agriculture.
  - To develop the agricultural water budget, will you include both groundwater and surface water?
    - Yes.

- Doug Wolf of the Hydrology and Hydraulics Support Team stated that the focus of this Review and EIS is on surface water that would be affected by changes in the operations of federal facilities. The link between surface water and groundwater is uncertain.
- [*Background note for the record: URGWOM, the Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Model, does have a limited groundwater component. The model estimates leakage from the river and gains to the river from groundwater.*]
- A follow-up statement by a member of the Steering Committee stressed that the ability of agriculture to irrigate from pumped groundwater should be considered, and that the strong connection between groundwater and surface water should be included.
- Will the team calculate the value of agricultural water that is converted to municipal and industrial use?
  - Yes.
- Will the team include the value of the sale of lease lots and their potential value for purchase?
  - This could be included, but it must be remembered that the team is charged with only considering the impacts of changes in water operations.
- The NMSU basin-wide economic tradeoff studies can assist the team.
- Recreation Technical Team: Cynthia Piirto of CoE and Susan Goodan for CoE
  - Presentations for this team were more general because the study group is still forming and will be working closely with the Land Use team.
  - Will rafting and other businesses that would be affected by changing water operations be involved?
    - Yes, their concerns and issues will be addressed.
- Aquatic Habitat Technical Team: Hector Garcia of BoR
  - Will only federally operated reservoirs be included?
    - Yes.
  - Can the Aquatic Habitat team get the information they need without analysis of sediment transport by the River Morphology Technical Team?
    - Probably not. The next step for the Interdisciplinary NEPA Team will be to integrate all of the team plans of study. These discrepancies will be addressed.
  - It will be important for the teams to determine the appropriate timing and sequence of implementing the study plans of each team. The Project Managers will need a better handle on the schedule for technical team data collection.
    - The Interdisciplinary NEPA Team, composed of the leaders of each technical team, will coordinate data needs, schedules, and recommend the assignment of resources. This task will begin at their next meeting.
  - It may be possible for the teams collecting data to use a global positioning system (GPS) to identify where data was collected. This would help teams to use the same locations for data collection where possible.

- The GIS Support Team hopes to establish an ARC/IMS system that would allow teams to see where data are available, where there is overlap between teams, and help them coordinate data sharing among the technical teams and with other groups outside the Review.
- The ARC/IMS system would be a mechanism for coordinating all work on the Rio Grande, among all agencies, organizations, and tribes, without duplicating data collection efforts.
- It might be possible to use schools to assist in data collection. There is a great deal of expertise in data collection already available from a variety of sources.
- Riparian and Wetlands Ecosystem Technical Team: Art Coykendall of BoR
  - No questions were asked.

❖ Wrap up

Project management Team

- Rhea Graham will send a letter to each member of the Steering Committee with a copy of the sign-in sheet so members can contact others as they wish. She also stressed that the Project Managers welcome input from the Steering Committee to facilitate coordination and information exchange with the Executive Committee, and that it can be provided at any time.
- Gail Stockton told the group that the next Interdisciplinary NEPA Team meeting will be held on Thursday, December 14, at 1:00 p.m. in the Corps of Engineers conference room. Integration of team plans of study will begin at the next meeting. The regularly scheduled meeting day is the second Thursday of each month at 1:00 p.m. The Steering Committee and members of the public are welcome to attend.

Executive Committee

- Rolf Schmidt-Petersen told the group that feedback is needed from the Steering Committee to help them determine whether the Review is addressing the pertinent issues.
- Steve Hansen suggested that it might be possible to use the water planning list serve or another electronic system to facilitate communication among the Steering Committee.
- Lt. Col. Midkiff said that the Executive Committee will review the study plans and the overall plan to ensure that activities and methods are integrated and synchronized.
  - He was asked if the Executive Committee will make decisions on funding and on how to staff the effort from the agencies involved. There was a concern expressed that technical team members doing work for their team takes them away from doing their other agency work.
  - It was recommended that the Steering Committee be provided an opportunity to review the integrated plan of study.
  - Dick Kreiner explained that the initial budget projections of approximately \$7.5 million, did not include large technical team budgets, such as the one presented for water quality data collection and analysis. All budgets must be reviewed internally. This budget review will need to determine what can be accomplished under the established timeline, and whether the funding or timeline should be altered.

Steering Committee

- A member asked if it would be possible to consolidate the many projects now going on in the Rio Grande basin. Decisions on changes in water operations may affect some of these other projects.

NEPA ID Team members

- The participants of this Review and EIS must remain focused on the scope of this project, and not include the aspects of all of the other studies.
- The EIS will identify areas where further study is needed and where other issues should be addressed. This can involve coordination with other groups, or provide a basis for future studies.