

**Notes from the URGWOPS Steering Committee Meeting; June 13, 2000;
1:30 PM; Bureau of Reclamation Rio Grande Conference Room,
Albuquerque**

In attendance:

Charles Braden, USIBWC	Julie Maitland, NMDA
John D'Antonio, NM OSE	Rolf Schmidt-Peterson, NMISC
Ellen Dietrich, SAIC	Steve Silcox, USFWS
Thomas Fallin, LTC, Corps	Tod Stevenson, NMGF
R. Steve Fox, USIBWC	Gail Stockton, Corps
Norman Gaume, NMISC	John Stomp, Water Resources, City of Albuquerque
Rhea Graham, NMISC	Leann Towne, Bureau of Reclamation
Steve Hansen, Bureau of Reclamation	Tom Turney, NM State Engineer
Dick Kreiner, Corps	Steve Vandiver, CO SEO
Rob Leutheuser, Bureau of Reclamation	

 Identifies action items.

- ❖ Rob Leutheuser welcomed everyone to the first Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review and EIS Steering Committee meeting. Rob provided some background.
 - The URGWOPS effort will be a comprehensive review of water operations, the outcome of several years of agency coordination including the development of the model, URGWOM, which began in 1997.
 - The effort started with the Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Reclamation working together, then extending an invitation to the State of New Mexico to participate as a joint lead agency. The state chose to be represented by the Interstate Stream Commission.
 - He explained that the Management Team has been carrying out the bulk of the work and have developed procedures that will help the project succeed.
 - Rob thanked the attendees for their participation and stressed that the involvement of cooperating agencies and key stakeholders will be essential if the effort is to succeed.
- ❖ Rolf Schmidt-Peterson provided an overview of the Water Operations Review in a slide presentation. He distributed a handout of the slide show. Additional discussion is summarized below.
 - Project information
 - The Memorandum of Agreement with the joint lead agencies was signed in January; the Notice of Intent was published in March.
 - Only flood control operations will be studied at Platoro, Elephant Butte, and Caballo. Flood control operations below Caballo will be coordinated with IBWC.
 - URGWOPS will only address the operations of reservoirs and projects under lead agency discretion or authority. Other facilities exist over which the lead agencies



have limited or no control. The Steering Committee was asked to help determine how the operation of these facilities could be applied to this project.

- For the EIS, the technical teams will develop descriptions of the existing environment, define their resources, determine the issues to be addressed, and identify the data needed for analysis of impacts to the resources.
 - It would be best if the technical teams could involve everyone in the process as early as possible. Qualified staff from cooperating agencies can help the teams develop their plans of study.
 - The project needs the assistance from the Steering Committee in identifying potential technical team members, and in providing agency staff time to participate.
- The result of the EIS will be three separate, hopefully similar, Records of Decision from each of the joint lead agencies.
- Examples of alternative water operations that could be evaluated include:
 - Increasing the maximum flood releases to maintain safe channel capacity below Cochiti from 7,000 cfs to 10,000 cfs.
 - Maintenance of Jemez Canyon Reservoir sediment pool.
 - Considering the potential to store native water in Abiquiu.
 - Operations of the Low Flow Conveyance Channel.
- Public participation includes the nine scoping meetings planned, and could also include separate presentations to individual groups, if requested.
- Project activities are on schedule. The scoping process will help identify issues to address. Technical teams are under development.

➤ Cooperating agencies

- Rolf asked the group to **inform the Management Team if anyone knows of agencies**, other than those listed in the handout, **that should be sent invitations to become cooperating agencies**.
- The plan is to identify cooperating agencies by the end of September, with signed agreements completed by the end of November.

➤ The Steering Committee is intended to be composed of representatives of the cooperating agencies, key stakeholders, and members of the Rio Grande Compact Commission.

❖ Rhea Graham gave an update on URGWOPS progress. She distributed several handouts.

➤ Scoping meetings

- The *Federal Register* notice listing the scoping meetings was published on June 5.
- At the last ID NEPA Team meeting, the technical team members stated that representatives of each team should attend each scoping meeting. This would affect the resources of the cooperating agencies that are sending staff to these meetings.
- Each technical team is developing a display of their resource to inform the public and encourage them to provide input about issues and information in their area.

➤ The first URGWOPS newsletter was mailed last week and distributed to the group.

➤ Web page

- The web site address is printed on the back of the newsletter—
<http://www.spa.usace.army.mil/urgwops/>.
- Dates and maps for the scoping meetings are links, as are the e-mail addresses for the Management Team.
- ➔ Rhea requested that any problems with the web site be reported to the Management Team.
- Rhea mentioned some highlights of the “Stakeholder Opinion Research” Executive Summary that was distributed.
 - No tribe or pueblo responded to the invitation to participate in the interview.
 - The majority of the responses were from people between Santa Fe and Socorro.
 - In general, the people interviewed had knowledge of the agencies involved with water operations and are interested in surface water issues.
 - Most people get their local information from the newspaper.
- ➔ Rhea asked that Steering Committee members notify someone on the Management Team if they hear of stakeholders who are not receiving adequate information on the project.
- ➔ The Steering Committee is scheduled to meet every six months, so the next meeting would be in December. Rhea suggested that the meeting could include presentations from the technical teams on their plans of study and their descriptions of existing conditions.
- ❖ Steering Committee questions, answers, and discussion
 - Tod Stevenson asked how the technical team assignments for the scoping meetings were made.
 - Gail Stockton responded that the technical teams made their own assignments. Rolf recommended that they select a primary person to attend each scoping meeting and an alternate.
 - The technical team members felt strongly that, if specialists were not available to discuss each resource, this would imply that the project participants had already determined that they would not learn anything about that resource at that location. They thought it is important not to slight any area.
 - Tod agreed that, in his experience, this approach is appropriate. They could expect significant participation at the Alamosa meeting from both sides of the state border.
 - Rob asked if radio spot announcements would be used to advertise the scoping meetings.
 - Gail responded that they are using the newspapers because the stakeholder surveys indicated that the newspapers provide their main source of information on local activities.
 - The Management Team will publish paid advertisements in two local papers, plus possibly a news article if a paper will cover it.
 - Rob mentioned that the Bureau of Reclamation used radio public service announcements to advertise citizen’s meetings in Socorro.
 - Steve Vandiver recommended advertising in the Pueblo Chieftain because it is widely read in Alamosa. Public service announcements could be arranged through the radio station.

- Steve also recommended using the radio in Taos and advertising in the Taos weekly newspaper.
- The El Paso Times was recommended to be used for the El Paso meeting.
- John Stomp asked if this EIS will include consultation under Section 7 with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and asked for an explanation of how this project is different from the other consultations now going on in the Rio Grande (at least five). Is the outcome of the URGWOPS EIS to provide Section 7 consultation for the middle valley?
 - Gail replied that it is hoped that this project will wrap the necessary consultation into the overall EIS process, at the same time as the development of alternatives and the impact analyses, instead of handling it as a separate, later process. An MOA between the FWS and the joint lead agencies is being developed that includes consultation and requires all parties to contribute resources. With the FWS as a cooperating agency, they will participate in the entire process, not be called in for consultation after major decisions have been made.
 - Rob pointed out that the ESA Work Group for the middle valley is currently discussing the best way to carry out Sections 7 and 10 consultations. The relationship between this Work Group and URGWOPS has not yet been determined, but needs to be defined.
 - Rob also said that the current consultations are interim. It is anticipated that URGWOPS would provide more comprehensive consultation and coordination. For now, it will be important to insure that the outcomes of ongoing consultations do not conflict. No one knows yet how they will fit together.
 - Operating decisions for the Low Flow Conveyance Channel have been deferred until URGWOPS makes progress. The Bureau of Reclamation recognizes that these operations must be adjusted as the Water Operations Review proceeds. This flexible approach may be needed for the operation of other facilities also.
 - Norm Gaume stated that the MOA calls for the joint lead agencies to work out how ESA compliance will be conducted. The EIS process must recognize other related projects and processes.
- John asked how the future use of San Juan-Chama water and the concerns of the City of Albuquerque will be addressed in this EIS.
 - Gail stressed that coordination and communication are critical to making the process work.
 - Steve Hansen responded that when separate pieces of the system are added or changed during the Water Operations Review to create a “hydrologic reality,” the agencies may find that not all existing pieces fit together. This process may require the agencies to reassess their own systems, processes, and capacities to make the now separate pieces of the river system fit together eventually.
 - Dick Kreiner reported that at the last ESA Work Group meeting, they discussed how ESA consultations are done in the upper Colorado basin. It might be useful for the Management Team to learn more about this effort to determine if any part of it can be applied to URGWOPS.
 - Rob suggested that the Management Team send an URGWOPS representative to the ESA Work Group meetings to learn about other efforts.

- Norm pointed out that it is the role of this Steering Committee to assist with agency coordination. Until the overall limits to water operations are considered, no one can see how the many projects and operations in the Rio Grande basin will fit together.
- Rolf suggested that there may be a need for the Steering Committee to meet more often than every six months.
- John asked what procedures are available for resolving disputes between the Steering Committee and the Management Team.
 - The dispute resolution defined in the Joint Lead Agency MOA would have the Executive Committee resolve this type of dispute.

➤ **Tod said that he knows of at least seven additional groups that should be invited to participate in the Steering Committee.** Some of these groups are collecting similar data and these interests and resources should be used by URGWOPS. He asked if the other Steering Committee members had names to offer.

- Dick recommended that the Steering Committee members develop a list of local people who should be contacted, either by phone or mail, to invite to the scoping meetings. Steering Committee members could personally call key people who live in the area of the scoping meetings to encourage their attendance.
- Leann offered to notify the regional water planning groups, especially for the Española meeting.

➤ **Steering Committee members should send lists of contacts for the scoping meetings to the Management Team.** Gail and Rhea will follow up on this.

❖ Cooperating agencies

- A list of cooperating agencies was distributed. In addition to the seven listed, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Fish and Wildlife Service recently sent letters stating their commitment to becoming cooperating agencies.
- The USIBWC is now editing their MOA to address their specific authorities. It is under legal review and they expect to have the MOA signed within two months.
- MRGCD and NMED are developing their MOAs.
- NMDA: Julie Maitland took the copy of the MOA to her supervisor and will check on its progress.
- The New Mexico Game and Fish Commission has differing opinions on the agency's participation as a cooperator, but the staff is interested in participating and has been attending technical team and ID NEPA Team meetings.
- The City of Albuquerque has been discussing their role and level of participation.
- Hal Simpson of the Colorado Office of the State Engineer would like to be involved in the project, but is concerned about committing their limited resources. Steve Vandiver will discuss the development of an MOA with him.

- ❖ Rolf summarized the main points of the meeting.
 - A representative from each technical team will attend all scoping meetings.
 - The Management Team and Steering Committee should consider other projects in the Rio Grande basin to understand how they fit with the Water Operations Review, and learn more about other similar efforts in other watersheds that might help develop this project.
 - The Management Team should attend other meetings related to water operations in the Rio Grande basin.
 - ESA consultations must be coordinated.
 - Steering Committee members will provide a list of people to invite to the scoping meetings.
 - Radio public service announcements should be used to advertise the scoping meetings in addition to newspaper ads.
- ➔ ❖ The next Steering Committee meeting will be held in December. Suggestions for the agenda are encouraged.