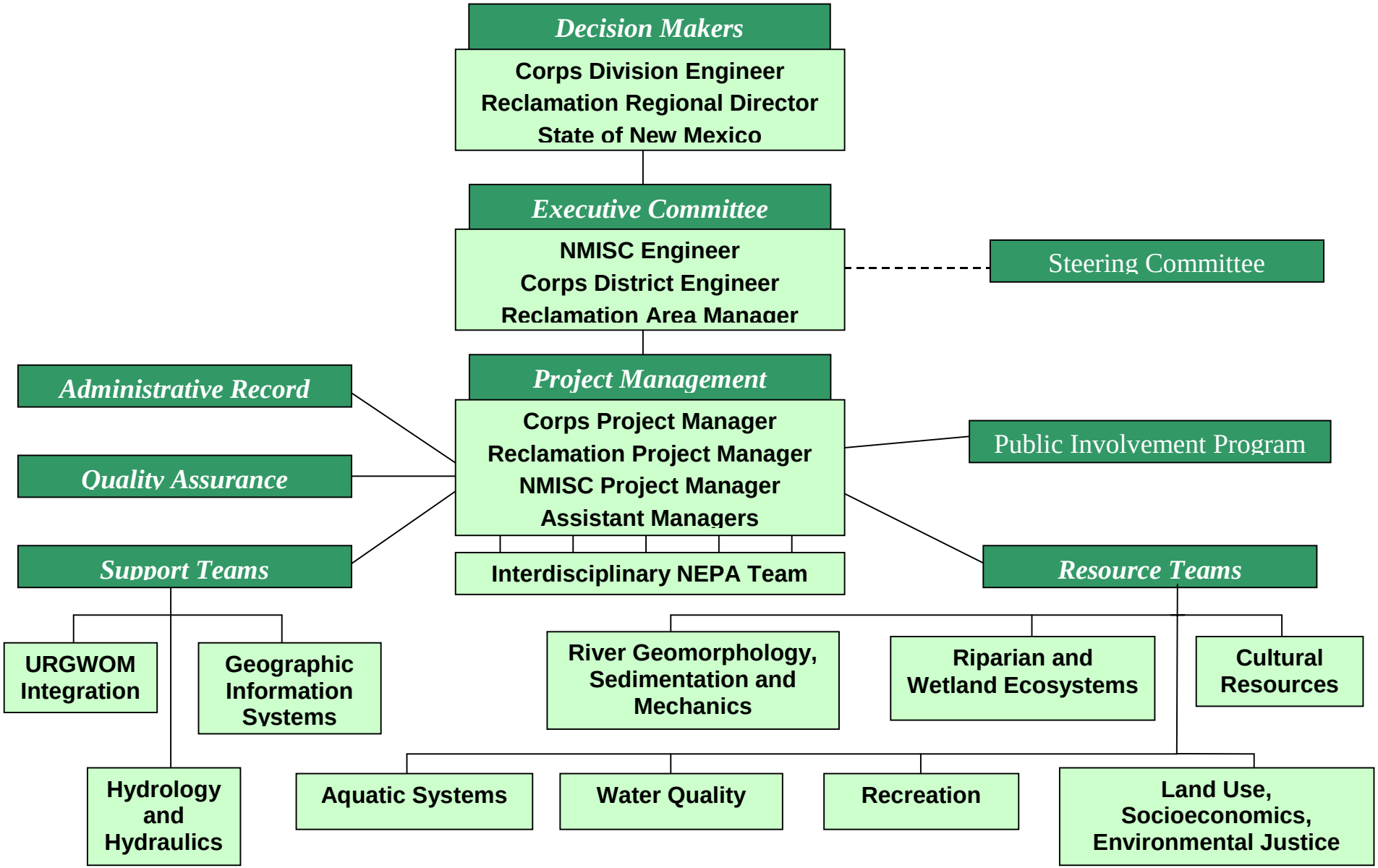
Notes from the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review ID NEPA Team Meeting, December 9, 1999, 1:00 PM, Corps of Engineers, Albuquerque District

In attendance:

Theresa Davidson, FWS
Ellen Dietrich, SAIC
Darrell Eidson, Corps
Richard Fike, Corps
Chris Gorbach, BOR
Steve Harris, Rio Grande Restoration
Ron Kneebone, Corps
Charles Lujan, Pueblo of San Juan
Clay Mathers, Corps
Robert Padilla, BOR
Gary Rutherford, Corps
Bill Spurgeon, Corps
Tod Stevenson, NMG&F
Gail Stockton, Corps
Doug Wolf, Corps

- Chris Gorbach began the meeting by discussing the status of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the joint lead agencies. The MOA is close to being finalized and will likely be signed in early January.
  - The Work Plan will be updated at that time to reflect the changes agreed upon in the MOA. The joint lead agencies are on track to issue the Notice of Intent in late January.
  - New Mexico Department of Game and Fish requested that they be added to the list of cooperating agencies. A summary of the letters sent in response to the invitation to become a cooperating agency was distributed.
  - The Interstate Stream Commission has not yet selected a permanent member of the Management Team.
  - Chris discussed the project organization that has been agreed upon in the MOA. (See page 2.) The main categories, in descending order, are:
    - Decision Makers—people who have the authority to sign the Records of Decision (ROD) from each joint lead agency.
    - Executive Committee—local agency management people who allocate resources to get the project done.
    - Management Team—the 3 Project Managers, one from each joint lead agency.
    - Interdisciplinary NEPA Team—representatives of each technical team.
    - Technical teams—7 resource teams and 3 support teams.
    - Other committees not directly involved in decision making and project management, but in advisory roles include:
      - Steering Committee—composed of cooperating agency representatives and key stakeholders.
      - Public Involvement Committee— charged with developing better ways to involve the public. A contractor has just been employed to conduct a market survey, beginning December 15, to determine what people think about water operations and how they get information on water management.

Organization Chart for the Upper Rio Grande Basin Water Operations Review



- The Management Team will distribute the Purpose and Need statement and the Objectives from the MOA to the technical teams once they have been finalized.
- Any disputes will be resolved at the lowest level of the organization possible. A mediator will be on call to assist, if necessary.
- The line between the Water Operations Review and the EIS is fuzzy. The EIS will describe water operations and evaluate possible changes. The plans for water operations that will hopefully be adopted by each joint lead agency will be listed in the ROD each agency will produce. There is, however, no guarantee that all 3 RODs will be the same, but the goal is to make them compatible.

❖ Technical Teams

- Gail Stockton informed the technical team leaders that the SAIC Project Manager, Ellen Dietrich, and the Corps GIS Specialist, Clay Mathers, will be assisting the technical teams to understand and use GIS data to characterize and analyze their resources. They will meet with each technical team to present information on GIS and to help team members identify what GIS coverages they need.
- Chris told the group that the technical teams must be more actively working on their study plans, developing alternatives, and identifying how they will analyze impacts.
- **An action item for the Management Team is to make sure that the technical teams are meeting and completing their work.**
- Steve Harris suggested that technical teams may want to seek out members who have "reach-specific" expertise.

❖ A description of the existing environment or existing conditions must be prepared for each resource in the EIS. This would comprise Chapter 3 of the document and provide the basis for evaluating the impacts caused by implementation of each alternative in Chapter 4.

- Existing conditions are:
  - A product of historic trends and conditions.
  - Provide the basis for comparison to future conditions.
  - As defined for URGWOM, the physical system that governs river flows and characteristics, from 1975 to the present.
  - Discussed by the designated reaches that have been selected by the technical teams.
- Chris distributed a handout titled "URGWOPS Resource Assessment Worksheet," with a sample outline to help technical teams think about how to define the existing conditions of specific resources and how changes in water operations would affect them.
  - The worksheet contains sections for filling in the reach name, the resource, the indicator, the current condition and trends, and the effect of water operations on the indicator.
  - Technical teams would start filling in the worksheet by identifying what they know, which will help them determine what they don't know. If water operations do not affect the indicator, a different indicator may be needed.

- Each technical team should develop its own worksheets, which will be shared between technical teams so that everyone understands the existing conditions, trends, and indicators under consideration. **The completed worksheets should be brought to the next ID NEPA Team meeting for discussion.**

➢ During discussion, some additions to the worksheet and recommendations on how to complete it were made.

- Cite the data on which the statement of current conditions and trends is based. Either use a reference citation, state that it is based on experience with the reach and resource, or state that reference information is unknown. If no specific support data can be listed, the technical team members will know that they must find it.
- Note how to quantify current conditions and trends for each resource to determine how it is affected by changing water operations. If impacts are to be assessed qualitatively, state this.
- Start with the indicators that are familiar to technical team members.
- The assessment can help identify what GIS information and analyses will be needed.
- Units of analyses, frequency of data collection, and scale of data resolution are important to record for each indicator.
- Technical teams need to keep in mind that data collected by each team must be compatible with data used by other teams.

➢ Summary of the use of the Resource Assessment Worksheet:

- Identify and clearly define the resource and the indicator to be evaluated.
- Identify the existing conditions and trends of that resource, citing references where available.
- Determine how to measure the effects on the resource by changes in the indicator that are caused by changes in water operations. Identify any models or other tools that could be used to evaluate impacts.

❖ There was considerable discussion on how to define the No Action Alternative for the EIS. The EIS should help the decision makers determine how to change water operations.

➢ Don Gallegos has written a summary of Corps water operations from 1975 to the present. The Bureau of Reclamation needs to do the same for their dams and structures. These summaries will help define the No Action Alternative.

➢ To develop the No Action Alternative, consideration must be given to what there is about existing water operations that would affect the resources under study. Constraints on water operations should also be taken into account.

➢ Chris asked the group if there should be two No Action Alternatives—one including the withdrawal of San Juan-Chama water by Albuquerque, and one without including that plan. Discussion that followed is summarized below.

- Since the Albuquerque plan specifics have not yet been decided, it would be difficult to determine what the plan would entail and how it would affect existing resource conditions.

- It was recommended that since changes in water operations are based on a set of rules within which the federal agencies must operate, the No Action Alternative should be based on that rule set without changing it for other projects like the City of Albuquerque's plan.
- Tod Stevenson suggested that the most current data available (1998) should be used to describe existing conditions. The Albuquerque plan and other changes in water operations should be evaluated against the No Action Alternative and not be included in it.
- The Geomorphology Technical Team plans to use the most current data available in each reach to define existing conditions. This would result in data from different time periods being used.

❖ **The next Interdisciplinary NEPA team meeting will be held at 1:00 PM on January 13, 2000.**