DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
ALBUQUERQUE DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
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ALBUQUERQUE NM 87109-3435

RECORD OF DECISION

UPPER RIO GRANDE WATER OPERATIONS REVIEW
NEW MEXICO, COLORADO, AND TEXAS

I have reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) dated April 2007 for the Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Review, New Mexico, Colorado, and Texas. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau), the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (Commission) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) were joint lead agencies for the study and FEIS. The FEIS was programmatic in nature and was not intended to implement or authorize specific actions. Each agency will separately document its decisions on the FEIS. Based on my review of both the FEIS and the views of interested agencies and the concerned public, the water management activities under the jurisdiction of the Corps will not change as result of this study and FEIS.

The safe channel capacities downstream from Abiquiu and Cochiti dams will remain at 1,800 cubic feet per second (cfs) and 7,000 cfs, respectively. Hydraulic modeling in the FEIS artificially confined higher discharges to the existing floodway in order to analyze the system's water conveyance capability. In actuality, flows greater than the safe channel capacities will result in damages to property or flood control structures. The FEIS did not—and was not intended to—analyze potential flood damages; nor did it evaluate, or propose, actions to alleviate existing channel capacity constraints. Many of these constraints along the Rio Grande between Cochiti Dam and Elephant Butte Reservoir may be alleviated through the implementation of ongoing and future flood damage reduction studies, each with specific impact analysis and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation.

The FEIS analyzed a range of native (Rio Grande basin) storage volumes in Abiquiu Reservoir to evaluate the reservoir's capability. This programmatic-level analysis is not sufficient to implement native storage. In the future, the Corps will evaluate specific proposals for such storage. Any decision to implement native storage will be based, in part, on the following: determination of available space in lieu of San Juan-Chama contractors' needs; storage permit from the New Mexico State Engineer; coordination and negotiation regarding storage easements with the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority; proposal-specific impact analysis; re-allocation of storage space and revision of the Abiquiu Dam and Reservoir water control plan; and specific compliance with environmental laws and regulations. In accordance with NEPA requirements, this may be accomplished with a tiered (if appropriate) Environmental Assessment or EIS.

The following water management activities (listed with their responsible agency) were analyzed in the FEIS:

- Channel capacity downstream from Abiquiu Dam (Corps)
- Channel capacity downstream from Cochiti Dam at Albuquerque (Corps)
- Storage of native Rio Grande water (annually, if possible) at Abiquiu Reservoir (Corps)
- Waivers to the annual delivery date of San-Juan Chama Project water from Heron Lake to contractors (Bureau)
- Diversion to the Low-Flow Conveyance Channel (Bureau)

Numerous alternative plans incorporating various operational levels of water management activities were screened down to the following final array of six action alternatives that, in addition to the no action alternative, were analyzed in detail in the FEIS:

Alternatives	Abiquiu Reservoir native storage (ac-ft)	Channel capacity below Abiquiu Dam (cfs)	Channel capacity at Albuquerque (cfs)	Waiver date at Heron Lake	Diversions to Low-Flow Conveyance Channel (cfs)
No action (G3)	0*	1,800*	7,000*	April 30*	0 - 2,000*
B-3	0 - 180,000	1,500	8,500	Sept. 30	0 - 2,000*
D-3	0 - 180,000	2,000	7,000*	Aug. 31	0 - 2,000*
E-3	0 - 180,000	1,800*	10,000	Sept. 30	0 - 2,000*
I-1	0 - 20,000	1,800*	7,000*	April 30*	0 – 500
I-2	0 - 75,000	1,800*	7,000*	April 30*	0 - 1,000
I-3	0 - 180,000	1,800*	7,000*	April 30*	0 - 2,000*

* indicates the current operational level or date.

These alternatives are fully discussed in the FEIS. All alternatives were evaluated and quantitatively ranked based on mission-related threshold criteria (flood damage reduction and dam safety; water conveyance; compliance with the Rio Grande Compact; and international treaty obligations), and their potential impact on ecosystem resources, threatened and endangered species, operational flexibility, water quality, sediment management, Indian Trust Assets, cultural resources, land use, recreation, hydropower generation, and environmental justice. No alternative was determined to be ideal for all resources. All six action alternatives would incur potentially significant impacts—both adverse and beneficial—relative to the no action alternative.

Of the action alternatives considered, E-3 was identified as the preferred plan because it met mission-related criteria and best satisfied the goals of the Review: more efficient operation of federal reservoirs and facilities as an integrated system; improvement of decision-making processes and interagency coordination; compliance with applicable laws and regulations; and promotion of ecosystem sustainability. Alternative I-1 was identified as the environmentally preferred alternative because it performed slightly better in ecosystem support than the other five action alternatives. However, it did not meet the mission-related threshold criteria of the Rio Grande Compact and the U.S./Mexico 1906 treaty.

The Corps' current water control plans (including safe channel capacity determinations) at dams and reservoirs in the Upper Rio Grande basin are fully compliant with environmental requirements, including NEPA, the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act. Similarly, all practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts have been incorporated into current water control plans through previous compliance and consultation efforts.

The Corps supports the goals and objectives of the Upper Rio Grande Water Operations Review and will continue to work with water management entities, resources agencies, local and Tribal governments, and the concerned public to resolve issues and embrace opportunities identified in the study and FEIS. Additionally, the Corps will support the Bureau and the Commission in the implementation of related water management activities under their jurisdiction. The tools, methodologies, and findings resulting from the study and FEIS will be valuable in the future development and evaluation of specific water management activities.

This Record of Decision completes the National Environmental Policy Act process for this programmatic-level analysis.

29 JUN 2007
Date

B.A. Estok
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army
District Commander