

**Draft Environmental Assessment  
La Loma Tank Replacement Project  
Cuba, Sandoval County, New Mexico**

**Section 595 Water Resources Development Act**



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Prepared For:  
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Albuquerque District  
**January 2026**



**US Army Corps  
of Engineers** ®  
Albuquerque District

**List of Acronyms**

## DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

### LA LOMA TANK REPLACEMENT PROJECT

#### VILLAGE OF CUBA, SANDOVAL COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Albuquerque District (Corps), in cooperation with the Village of Cuba, has conducted an environmental analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the La Loma Tank Replacement Project, dated January 2026, (Proposed Project) addresses water tank replacement and waterline improvements to the Village of Cuba's water system, Sandoval County, New Mexico.

This EA, incorporated herein by reference, evaluated alternatives for water storage and distribution to improve water storage standards for the Village of Cuba. The Proposed Project is located in Cuba, New Mexico, within Sandoval County, across from Cuba Independent School District buildings along Vallecitos Road (Sandoval County Road 13). The purpose of the Proposed Project is to remedy deficiencies in the existing La Loma water storage tank which has been found to have significant corrosion.

The recommended plan involves installation of a new 470,000-gallon potable water storage tank (40 feet in diameter and 52 feet in height) to replace the existing La Loma Tank. The project would also include installation of approximately 215 linear feet of new 6-inch PVC drain line, approximately 121 linear feet of 8-inch fill and distribution line, associated piping to connect the new tank to the existing water system, and all associated appurtenances. One temporary access road and one existing permanent access road to the new tank would be used to access the site; the old tank would be abandoned in place. In addition to the recommended plan, a “no action” plan was considered. See Section 2 of this EA for a description of alternatives.

For all alternatives, the potential effects were evaluated, as appropriate. A summary assessment of the potential effects of the recommended plan are listed in Table 1:

**Table 1: Summary of Potential Effects of the Recommended Plan**

	Insignificant effects	Insignificant effects as a result of mitigation	Resource unaffected by action
Aesthetics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Air quality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aquatic resources/wetlands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Invasive species	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fish and wildlife habitat	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Threatened/Endangered species/critical habitat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Historic properties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	Insignificant effects	Insignificant effects as a result of mitigation	Resource unaffected by action
Other cultural resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Floodplains	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hazardous, toxic & radioactive waste	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Hydrology	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Land use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Navigation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Noise levels	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public infrastructure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Socioeconomics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tribal trust resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Water quality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

All practicable and appropriate means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental effects were analyzed and incorporated into the recommended plan. Best management practices (BMPs) are detailed in the EA, listed below, and will be implemented, if appropriate, to minimize impacts:

- Activities would be limited to the designated or otherwise approved areas shown on the construction drawings for construction areas, staging, and access.
- A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan would be required (SWPPP). Water resources would be protected with silt fencing, geotextiles, or straw bales according to the plan in order to prevent runoff of sediment from areas disturbed by construction.
- Measures for dust control and local sedimentation and erosion-control would be implemented in accordance with the SWPPP.
- All fuels, oils, hydraulic fluids, and other similar substances would be appropriately stored out of the floodplain. Construction equipment would be inspected daily and monitored during operation to prevent leaking fuels or lubricants from entering any surface water.
- BMPs would be implemented regarding the treatment and disposal of waste material. Waste material would be disposed of properly at commercial disposal areas or landfills.
- Areas disturbed by construction and not developed would be revegetated with native plant species.

- Project work would be conducted between September 1 and March 31, outside the breeding bird season to the extent feasible. Should any work need to take place within the breeding bird season, all potential nesting habitat to be disturbed would be surveyed for nesting birds by a qualified biologist. For any active nest found with eggs or nestlings, the area of the nest would be avoided in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- Open trenches would be covered to prevent trapping of wildlife or ramps would be installed to allow animals to safely escape.

Public review of the Draft EA and FONSI were completed from [X] to [X], 2025. A comment-response table is included in section [X] and comment letters are provided in Appendix [X] of this Final EA and FONSI.

Pursuant to section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is making a determination that historic properties will not be adversely affected by the recommended plan. The New Mexico Historic Preservation Division (State Historic Preservation Office) concurred with this determination on December 18, 2025.

Pursuant to section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined that the recommended plan would have no effect on federally listed species or their designated critical habitat.

All applicable laws, executive orders, regulations, and local government plans were considered in evaluation of alternatives. Based on this report, the reviews by other Federal, State and local agencies, Tribes, input of the public, and the review by my staff, it is my determination that the recommended plan would not cause significant adverse effects on the quality of the human environment; therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

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Date

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Matthew T. Miller  
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army  
District Commander

APE	Area of Potential Effects
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CDC	Centers of Disease Control
CWA	Clean Water Act
DWB	Drinking Water Bureau
EA	Environmental Assessment
EMNRD	Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department
EO	Executive Order
HTRW	Hazardous, Toxic, and Radioactive Waste
IO	Isolated Occurrence
IPaC	Information for Planning and Consultation
NACE	National Association of Corrosion Engineers
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NM	New Mexico
NMAC	New Mexico Administrative Code
NMDGF	New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
NM-ERT	New Mexico - Environmental Review Tool
NPDES	National Pollution Discharge Elimination System
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
SHPO	New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer
SMA	Souder, Miller & Associates
SWPPP	Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan
USACE	United States Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Services

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Village of Cuba and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Albuquerque District, Souder, Miller & Associates (SMA) has prepared this environmental assessment (EA) for the La Loma Tank Replacement Project, Cuba, Sandoval County, New Mexico (Proposed Project).

This EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.) and the United States Army Corps of Engineers NEPA implementing regulations (33 C.F.R. part 230). The Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (ASA(CW)) has removed most of the sections from 33 CFR 230 and indicated that the Civil Works program will follow the DoD implementing procedures for NEPA issued on 30 June 2025. However, actions that were ongoing as of the effective date of the new rule will continue to use the rule in place at the time the action was started. Therefore, this EA follows the USACE Procedures that were in place at the time the draft EA was prepared.

## 1.1 Background and Location

The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Albuquerque District in cooperation with, and at the request of the Village of Cuba, is planning the La Loma Tank Replacement Project (Proposed Project) in Sandoval County, New Mexico to make water tank and waterline improvements to the Village of Cuba's water system. The work would be conducted under Section 595 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-53) as amended. The Act authorizes the USACE to provide aid in the form of design and construction for water-related environmental infrastructure, resource protection, and development projects in Idaho, Montana, rural Nevada, New Mexico, and rural Utah. Types of projects included under the Act are wastewater treatment and related facilities, stormwater retention and remediation, environmental restoration, surface water resource protection and development, and sewer and water line replacement. Provisions under the Act require that the project be publicly owned to receive Federal assistance. The Non-Federal sponsor for the proposed project is the Village of Cuba and the project area is within publicly owned right-of-way.

The Cuba Water System serves approximately 1,500 year-round residents and is classified as a community water system according to the New Mexico Drinking Water Regulations 20.7.10 NMAC. The water system consists of two active wells, two inactive wells, a treatment plant manufactured by Tonka Water, a sodium hypochlorite chlorinator, a 500,000-gallon clear-well, two storage tanks with a total capacity of 925,000 gallons, two booster stations and a distribution system (Figure 1). Water gravity flows to the Main Tank, located down

gradient of the treatment plant, and then into the Village distribution system. Booster Station #1 tees off the main line and pumps water up to the second storage tank (La Loma Tank) which serves residents located around the High School. This tank floats on the system. A second small booster station with one small pump and bladder tank serves a remote part of the system.

This project includes installation of a new 470,000-gallon potable water storage tank (40 feet in diameter and 52 feet in height) to replace the existing La Loma Tank. This project will also include approximately 215 linear feet of new 6-inch PVC and ductile iron drain line, approximately 125 linear feet of 8-inch PVC fill and distribution line, associated piping to connect the new tank to the existing water system, and all associated appurtenances. There will be one temporary access road and one existing permanent access road to the new tank, while the old tank will be abandoned in place. The surrounding habitat varies from ponderosa pine forest to piñon juniper woodland to open meadows, all of which are highly disturbed from historic and current vehicular use as well as the presence of trash. Existing access roads would be improved and utilized to access the water tank and water pipeline areas. Including a 50-foot buffer and staging areas, the project area is approximately 8 acres in size.

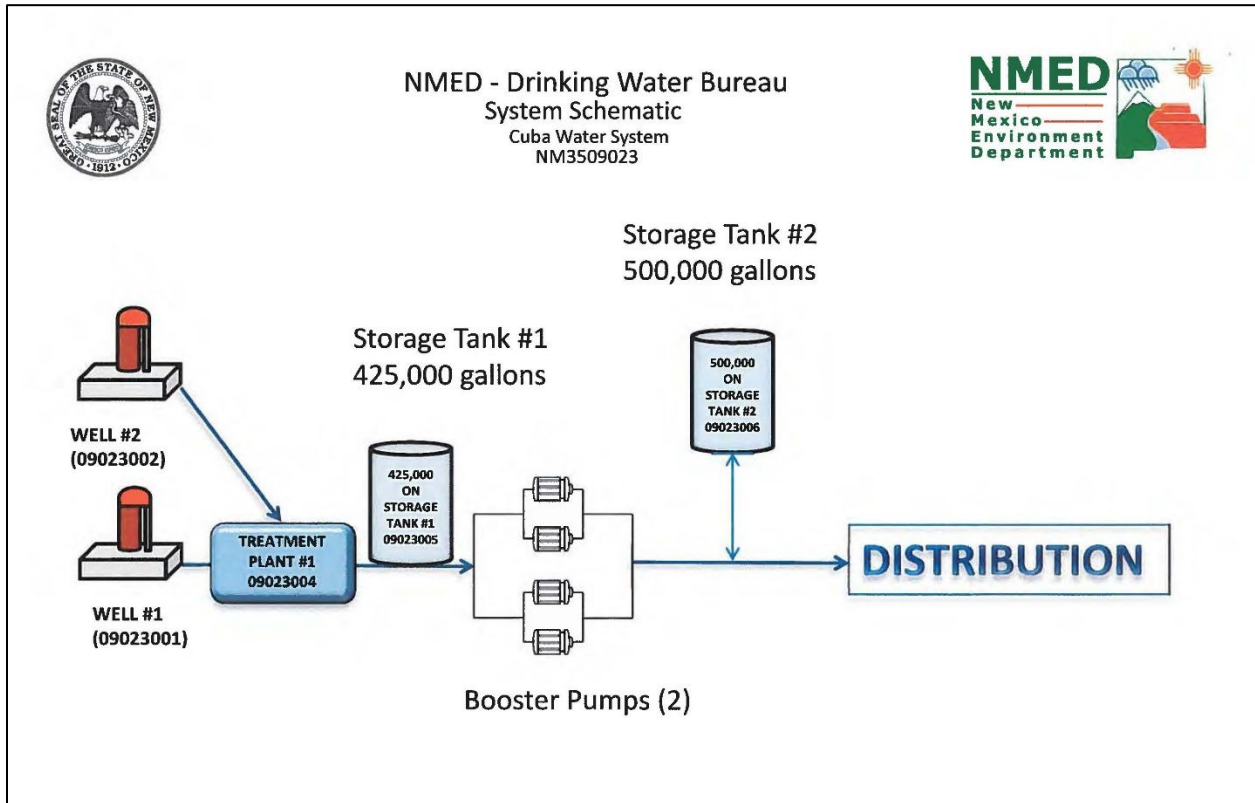


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of existing water system in Cuba, NM.

The project area is in Cuba, New Mexico, within Sandoval County, across from Cuba Independent School District buildings along Vallecitos Road (Sandoval County Road 13) as shown on the location map (Figure 2). For the purposes of this evaluation, the “project area” is comprised of the waterline path, the proposed water tank, existing water tank, access roads, overflow, and the 25-foot buffer along each side totaling approximately 8.0 acres (Figure 2).

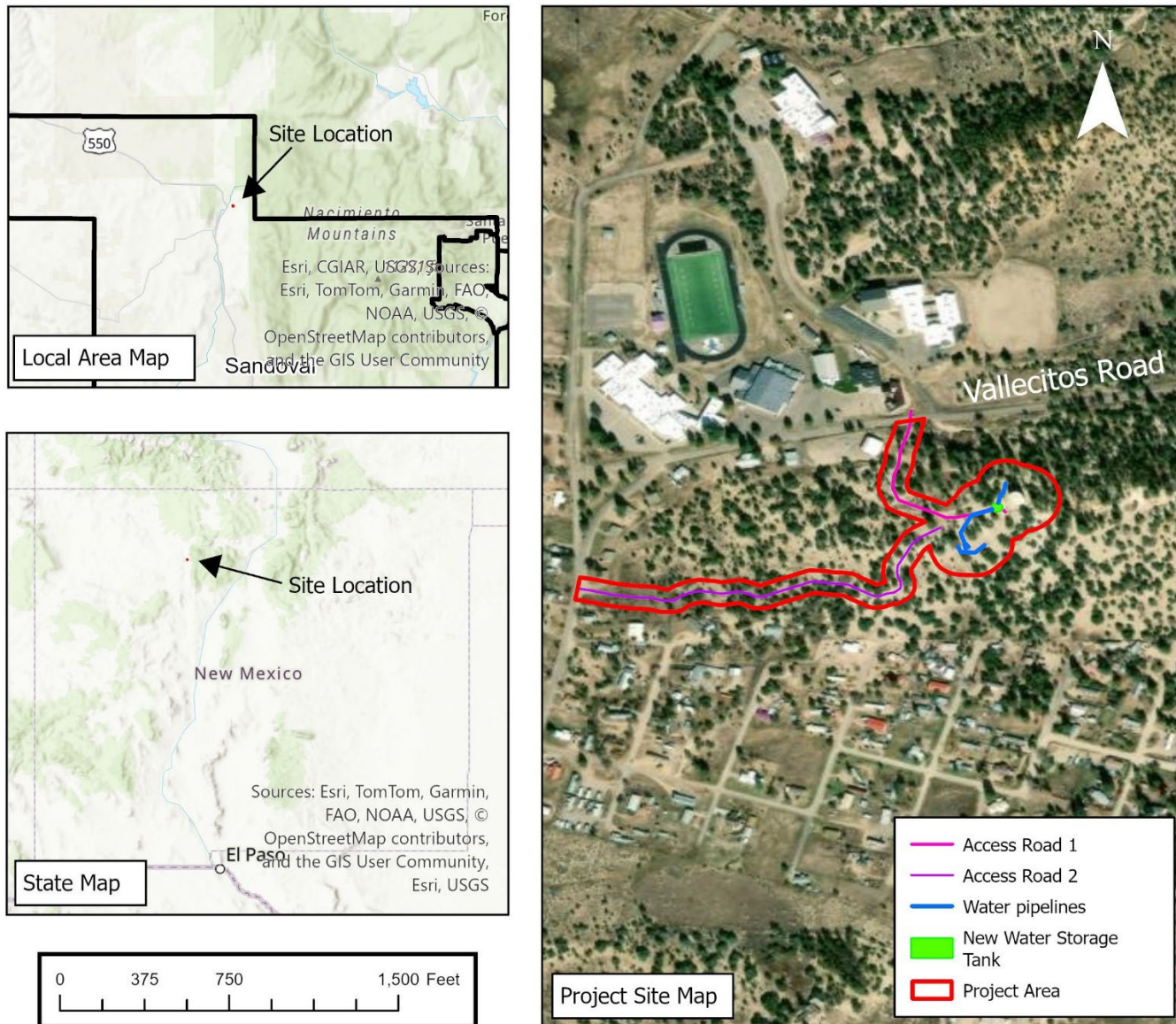


Figure 2. Project site location map.

## 1.2 Purpose and Need

The La Loma Water Storage Tank was inspected in 2017 by a NACE certified inspector and found to have significant corrosion issues especially on the bottom plates so much so that the inspector wrote a letter of concern regarding the possibility of failure of the bottom plates and resultant leakage which could precipitate failure of the tank foundation. A significant deficiency is defined as any deficiency that is causing or has the potential to cause a threat to public health [New Mexico Administrative Code (NMAC) 20.7.10.100 incorporating 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) §141.403(a)(4) or § 141.723(b)]. Public Water Systems are required to take corrective action for all significant deficiencies found during the sanitary survey. As of the 2021 survey, this deficiency had not been addressed (NMED 2021). The inspectors conducting the survey could not detect any outward signs of failure but that does not mean this concern has gone away.

Cuba must submit a plan of action to the Drinking Water Bureau (DWB) to address the infrastructure shortfalls of the distribution system including rehabilitation of the La Loma Storage and upgrading the booster stations and undersized water lines. This is especially critical for the La Loma Tank, which has an ongoing corrosion problem. If the tank starts leaking, it would begin to undermine the tank foundation which, in a worst-case scenario, may result in catastrophic failure of the tank. Such a failure may result in localized flooding to the school and nearby homes in the short term and water outages/shortages to residents on that side of town in the long run until this piece of infrastructure can be replaced.

## 1.3 Regulatory Compliance

This Draft EA was prepared in compliance with all applicable Federal Statutes, regulations, and Executive Orders (EO), as amended, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C 1251 et seq.)
- Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. 7401 et seq.)
- National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.)
- Archaeological Resources Protection Act (16 U.S.C. 470aa et seq.)
- Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.)
- EO 11988, Floodplain Management
- National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C 4321 et seq.)
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (25 U.S.C. 3001 et seq.)

- EO 11593, Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment
- EO 11990, Protection of Wetlands
- USACE Procedures for Implementing NEPA (33 CFR Part 230; ER 200-2-2)
- Farmland Protection Policy Act (7 U.S.C. 4201 et seq.)
- EO 13112, Invasive Species
- Federal Noxious Weed Act (7 U.S.C. 2814)
- Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, P.L. 110-140, Section 438, 121 Stat.1492, 1620 (2007)
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act, 16 U.S.C. 703, et seq.
- Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, 48 Stat. 401; 16 USC 661 et. seq.

This Draft EA also reflects compliance with all applicable State of New Mexico and local regulations, statutes, policies, and standards for protecting the environment such as water and air quality, endangered plants and animals, hazardous, toxic, and radioactive waste (HTRW), and cultural resources.

Because the project would utilize federal funding, this Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to evaluate potential impacts of the project and recommend actions to eliminate or mitigate any impacts. The EA outlines the proposed action and alternatives, and evaluates impacts on: Physical Resources, Biological Resources, Archaeological/Cultural Resources, Paleontological Resources, Environmental Engineering, Socioeconomic Considerations and Land Use, and Human Health and Safety.

## **2. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

All agencies that take part or assist in projects that utilize Federal funding are mandated by NEPA to evaluate alternative courses of action. Alternatives can include design and/or location considerations that may mitigate or reduce impacts generated by a given action. In general, the NEPA process can provide decision makers with an evaluation of the present and future conditions with regards to the implementation and timing of an action at a given site. Finally, a particular design chosen from alternatives evaluated can then be implemented in the best interest of the public and environment.

Two alternatives were considered for this NEPA analysis including the No-Action Alternative, which is used as the comparison basis, and the Proposed Action, which addresses the replacement of the La Loma water storage tank in order to improve water storage standards in Cuba, NM. Due to the urgent need to take corrective action as the current conditions are considered a threat to public health, no additional alternatives were considered.

#### Water Storage

- Alternative 1 – No-Action
- Alternative 2 – Construct new storage tank adjacent to the existing tank site

#### Water Distribution

- Alternative 1 – No-Action
- Alternative 2 – Installation of new 8-inch waterline connecting the new water tank to the existing water distribution system

## 2.1 No-Action Alternative

Water Storage Alternative 1, No-Action: Under Water Supply Alternative 1, no improvements would be made, and no construction would take place. There would be no environmental impacts associated with the No-Action Alternative. There would be no land requirements for this alternative.

Water Distribution Alternative 1, No-Action: Under Water Supply Alternative 1, no improvements would be made, and no construction would take place. There would be no environmental impacts associated with the No-Action Alternative. There would be no land requirements for this alternative.

## 2.2 Proposed Action

Water Storage Alternative 2: Construct a new storage tank adjacent to the existing tank site: Under Water Storage Alternative 2, a new 470,000-gallon storage tank would be constructed adjacent to the existing tank site (Figure 3). The existing La Loma water tank would be abandoned in place. Existing access roads would be improved and utilized to access the water tank and water pipeline areas. Replacing the existing tank would help the community of Cuba prevent tank failure and potential localized flooding to the school and nearby homes in the short term and water outages/shortages to residents on that side of town in the long run.

The proposed storage tank would be constructed adjacent to the existing tank site, which has been previously disturbed.

Water Distribution Alternative 2: Installation of new waterlines connecting the new water tank to the existing water distribution system and connecting the new water storage tank to the fill line. Under Water Distribution Alternative 2, installation would include approximately 215 linear feet of new 6-inch PVC and ductile iron drain line, approximately 125 linear feet of 8-inch PVC fill and distribution line, associated piping to connect the new tank to the existing water system, and all associated appurtenances. Waterline improvements would be completed within previously disturbed areas following best management practices.

## 3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND FORESEEABLE EFFECTS

### 3.1 Physical Environment

#### 3.1.1 Physiography, Geology, and Soils

The project area is located on the western, lower slopes of the San Pedro Mountains, north of the Rito Leche, and east of the Rio Puerco. It is located in the Near-Rockies Valleys and Mesas ecoregion. This area has many mesas, benches, cuernas, cliffs, and canyons with ephemeral and intermittent streams. The project area is located on a hill above the immediate surrounding area with elevation ranging from 7,012 feet (2,137 meters) at the access road to 7,080 feet (2,158 meters) at the tank site above mean sea level.

The existing La Loma tank site is located on an outcrop of Ojo Alamo Sandstone located southwest of the Cuba Municipal School complex. The sandstone is exposed at the surface throughout the proposed tank site as well as along the proposed waterline alignment and within existing road cuts. The project area is found within the Sedimentary Toa geologic formation, Ojo Alamo formation (NMBGMR 2003). Ojo Alamo Sandstone is composed of interbedded sandstone, conglomeratic sandstone and shale. The thickness of the formation ranges from less than 20 feet to more than 400 feet in the San Juan Basin (Fassett and Hinds 1971), but the average thickness is less than 175 feet (Stone et al. 1983). The depositional environment of the Ojo Alamo Sandstone varies with location. Brimhall (1973) identified floodplains and channels as the two major depositional environments of this unit. Channel deposits are characterized by relatively thick and laterally limited accumulations of coarse, well-sorted sand and gravel. Floodplain deposits are thinner and of greater lateral extent; they are composed of finer grained sand deposits with more interbedded silts and clays.

A geotechnical investigation, prepared on April 16, 2025, revealed that the tank site as well as a majority of the proposed waterline alignment are underlain by hard sandstone. This

sandstone is generally friable (broken up) near the surface but becomes indurate (solid) about 1 foot below the surface. The near surface friable sandstone may be readily excavated using normal earthmoving equipment; however, the deeper indurate rock would require heavy ripping and/or rock breaking equipment such as hoe-rams to excavate. Excavation into the indurate sandstone may be performed at near vertical cuts and would not require shoring if excavated to the shallow depths anticipated. SMA believes there is significant subsurface sandstone rock at the project location. The geotechnical investigation describes information on the extents of rock excavation, and recommendations for excavation, backfill, compaction, and structural foundation design (Appendix A).

The map units delineated on the detailed soil maps represent areas dominated by one or more major kinds of soil or miscellaneous areas (NRCS 2025). A map unit is identified and named according to the taxonomic classification of the dominant soils. There are two soil map units within the project area: Menefee clay loam, 5 to 35 percent slopes, and Pinitos loam, 1 to 15 percent slopes (Appendix B). Both soil map units are dominated by clay loam and are well drained. Parent material for the Menefee clay loam, 5 to 35 percent slopes map unit is colluvium over residuum weathered from shale. Parent material for the Pinitos loam, 1 to 15 percent slopes map unit is fan alluvium derived from sandstone and shale. Neither are hydric soils.

As indicated by the exploratory borings, the subsurface soils below the proposed tank site consisted of hard non-plastic sandstone which was encountered at the surface and extended to a depth of 14 feet below existing surface grades where practical auger refusal was encountered.

Sandstone was also encountered at or just below the surface along the proposed waterline alignment, extending to the full depths explored. The exception would be at the Boring 6 location where non-plastic silty sand was encountered at the surface and extended to a depth of 6 feet below surface grade where sandstone was encountered and extended to the full depth explored.

No free groundwater was encountered. Soil and rock moisture contents were low throughout the extent of the borings.



The Proposed Action would have short-term, minor adverse effects to geologic and soils resources during construction, but these impacts would be minimized by implementing best management practices to mitigate potential erosion and would end upon project completion. Disturbed ground surfaces will be restored to their original condition by grading and seeding with warm season native grass species (see Appendix C for seed list). The contractor will restore any existing roadways or driveways to their existing condition or better (see Basic Requirements; Appendix D). Therefore, the Proposed Action will have minimal impact on existing physiography, geology, and soils.

Under the Proposed Action the following best management practices would be implemented to minimize impacts during construction:

- Activities would be limited to the designated or otherwise approved areas shown on the construction drawings for construction areas, staging, and access.
- Construction areas would be watered for dust control.
- Construction would comply with local sedimentation and erosion-control regulations.

Under the No-Action alternative, there would be no effects on geological and soils resources.

### 3.1.2 Climate

The project area occurs in the level 3 ecoregion, Arizona/New Mexico Plateau, and level 4 ecoregion, Near-Rockies Valleys and Mesas. The Arizona/New Mexico Plateau represents a large transitional region between the drier shrublands and wooded higher relief tablelands of the Colorado Plateaus in the north, the lower, hotter, less vegetated Mojave Basin and Range in the west, and forested mountain ecoregions that border the region on the northeast and south.

Seventy-six years (1938 – 2014) of weather data was collected at weather station 292241 in Cuba, New Mexico (WRCC 2025) (Figure 4). Data indicates that the annual average maximum temperature is 63.8 °F, with July experiencing the highest average maximum temperature of 86 °F. The annual minimum temperature is 28.5 °F, with January experiencing the lowest minimum temperature of 10.0 °F. Annual mean precipitation is 13.15 inches, concentrated during the July to September monsoon period. Annual mean snowfall is 28.6 inches, concentrated during December to March.

The Proposed Action and No-Action alternative are not anticipated to have effects upon the climate.

### 3.1.3 Water Resources

The project occurs, within the Arroyo San Jose-Rio Puerco HUC 12 watershed (130202040106), which is within the larger Rio Puerco HUC 8 watershed (13020204) flowing into the Rio Grande (HUC 2 Rio Grande Region) (USGS 2025).

Section 402 of the Clean Water Act (CWA; 33 U.S.C. 1251 et. seq.) as amended, regulates point-source discharges of pollutants into waters of the United States and specifies that storm-water discharges associated with construction activities shall be conducted under the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) guidance. The NPDES general permit guidance would apply to the proposed project as the total project area (approximately 8 acres) is over one acre in size. Therefore, a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) would be required and prepared by the contractor for this project.

Section 404 of the CWA (CWA; 33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended, provides for the protection of waters of the United States through regulation of the discharge of dredged or fill material. The USACE Regulatory Program (33 CFR Parts 320-330) requires that a Section 404 evaluation be conducted for all construction that may affect waters of the United States. The project area has no jurisdictional wetlands present and no connection to nor presence of waters of the United States. Therefore, no 404(b)(1) analysis under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 197 would be required.

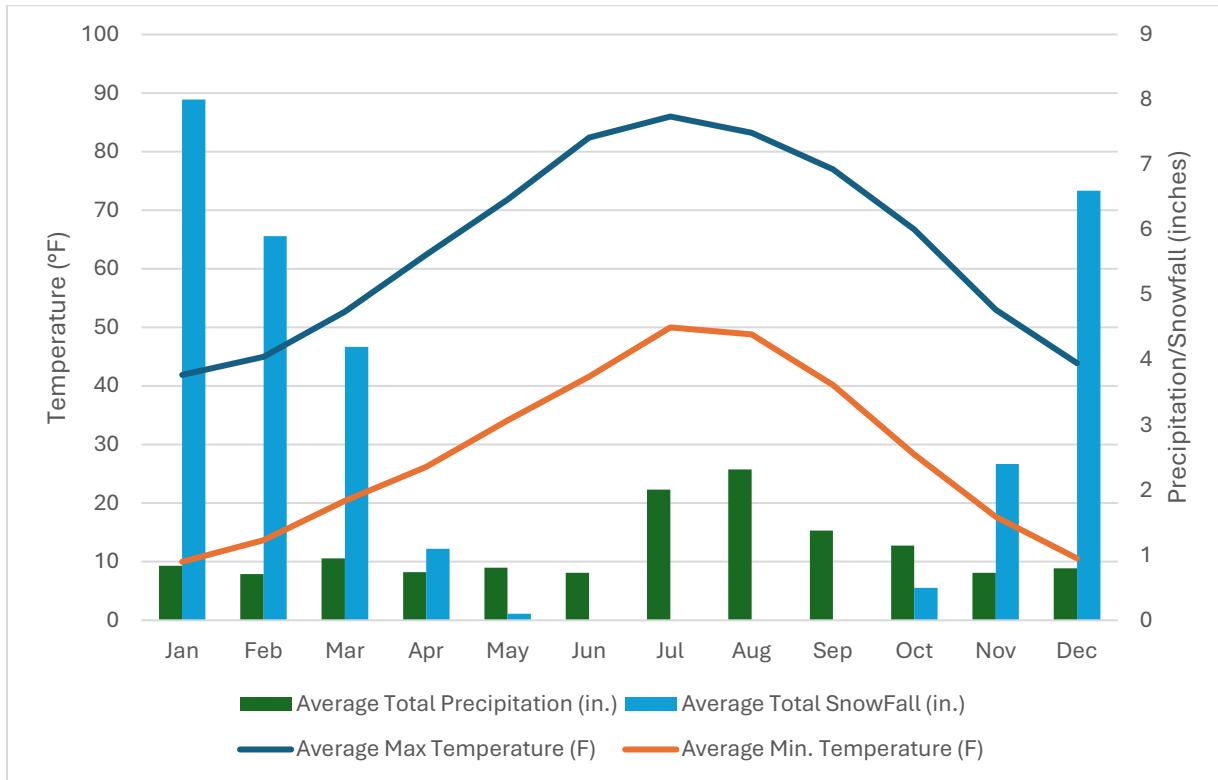


Figure 4. Climate data (09/01/1938 to 10/16/2014) from the NOAA coop weather station (292241) in Cuba, New Mexico.

Section 401 of the CWA, as amended, requires that a Water Quality Certification Permit be obtained for anticipated discharges associated with construction activities or other disturbance within waterways. Because there would be no discharge to waters or wetlands of the United States, a Water Quality Certification Permit would not be required.

Under the Proposed Action the following best management practices would be implemented to minimize impacts to water resources during construction:

- Prior to the start of construction, a SWPPP would be prepared, and construction would comply with all conditions of the SWPPP.

Water quality impacts from construction of the proposed project are expected to be negligible and short-term and all applicable permits and regulations would be followed during construction.

Under the No-Action alternative, there would be no water quality impacts due to construction.

### 3.1.4 Floodplains and Wetlands

Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management) provides federal guidance for activities within the floodplains of inland and coastal waters. The order requires federal agencies to take action to reduce the risk of flood loss, to minimize the impact of floods on human safety, health, and welfare, and to restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values served by floodplains. According to the Flood Insurance Rate Map, the proposed project is located within an area of minimal flood hazard (Zone X) (Figure 5). Therefore, no impact to the floodplain would result from the Proposed Action or the No-Action alternative.

Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands) requires the avoidance, to the greatest extent possible, of both long and short-term impacts associated with the destruction, modification, or other disturbance to wetland habitats. There are no jurisdictional wetlands within or near the project area, and therefore, no impacts to wetlands would occur from the Proposed Action or No-Action alternative.

### 3.1.5 Air Quality, Noise, and Aesthetics

The Project area is in New Mexico's Air Quality Control Region 152 for air quality monitoring. The Albuquerque-Mid Rio Grande Intrastate Air Quality Control Region 152 is located in central New Mexico along the north-south oriented Rio Grande Valley. It is composed of portions of Sandoval and Valencia Counties, and Bernalillo County in its entirety. The northwest corner is bounded by the Continental Divide. Sandoval County is "in attainment" (does not exceed State and Federal Environmental Protection Agency air quality standards) for all criteria pollutants (NMED/AQB 2024). Air quality in the project area is generally good.

The closest Class I area is San Pedro Parks Wilderness, located approximately 8 miles to the northeast of the project site. Class I areas are special wilderness areas of scenic beauty and natural wonder, such as national parks, national monuments, and wilderness areas, where air quality should be given special protection. Class I areas are subject to maximum limits on air quality degradation.



All vehicles involved in construction would be required to pass a current New Mexico emissions test and have required emission control equipment. The project would maintain the work area within or outside the project boundaries free from particulates in accordance with Federal, State, and local air pollution standards.

The Proposed Action would result in a temporary but negligible increase in suspended dust particles from construction activities in the vicinity of the project site. However, air quality in Cuba, Sandoval County, would not be affected by the Proposed Action or by the No-Action alternative.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC 2024), a typical, quiet residential area has a noise level of 40 decibels. A residential area near heavy traffic has a noise level of 85 decibels. Heavy machinery has a noise level of 120 decibels. The Noise Center (Center for Hearing and Communication 2024) advises that noise levels above 85 decibels would harm hearing over time, and noise levels over 140 decibels can cause damage to hearing after just one exposure.

During construction, noise would temporarily increase in the vicinity during vehicle and equipment operation. However, the increase in noise during construction would be minor and temporary, ending when construction is complete. Therefore, the Proposed Action would have no significant effect on noise. The No-Action alternative would have no effect on noise.

Neither the Proposed Action nor the No-Action alternative would influence the aesthetic values or scenic quality in the area.

### **3.2 Hazardous, Toxic, and Radioactive Waste Environment**

To identify and document the recognized environmental conditions (i.e., hazardous, toxic, and radioactive waste (HTRW)) in connection with the proposed project, a NEPAassist report was generated for the project and surrounding area on April 29, 2025 (Appendix E). NEPAassist is a tool that facilitates the environmental review process and project planning in relation to environmental considerations (EPA 2025). The web-based application draws environmental data dynamically from EPA Geographic Information System databases and web services and provides immediate screening of environmental assessment indicators for a user-defined area of interest. These features contribute to a streamlined review process that potentially raises important environmental issues at the earliest stages of project development. These issues include the presence of wetlands, endangered species, Superfund sites, and air/water quality.

The NEPAassist report revealed no evidence of recognized environmental concerns within or near the proposed construction project. The NEPAassist did not identify the presence or likely presence of any hazardous substance, or petroleum products on or near the property that indicate an existing release, a past release, or threat of a release into the ground, groundwater, or surface water of the property.

In addition, a search of available environmental records was conducted by Environmental Data Resources, Inc (Appendix F). The report was designed to assist parties seeking to meet the search requirements of EPA's Standards and Practices for All Appropriate Inquiries (40 CFR Part 312), the ASTM Standard Practice for Environmental Site Assessments (E1527 - 21), the ASTM Standard Practice for Environmental Site Assessments for Forestland or Rural Property (E2247 - 16), the ASTM Standard Practice for Limited Environmental Due Diligence: Transaction Screen Process (E1528 - 22) or custom requirements developed for the evaluation of environmental risk associated with a parcel of real estate. Two underground storage tanks (USTs) were identified; Johnson Robert W (Facility ID: NM28784) is a closed and removed (June 24, 1993) 4,000-gallon unleaded gasoline tank located approximately 737 feet from the project area; and Penistajo Trading Co (Facility ID: NM29911) included a closed 8,000-gallon unleaded gasoline tank (removed June 24, 1993), 8,500-gallon unleaded gasoline tank (removed June 7, 1991), 1,000-gallon unleaded gasoline tank (removed June 7, 1991), and 500-gallon kerosene tank (removed on June 7, 1991) located approximately 755 feet from the project area. There was one State Cleanup Site (SCS) identified; BAR F#3 has PCE/TCE contamination but is located almost one mile away (approximately 5,162 feet) from the project area. No event or closed date was reported for this SCS. None of these sites occur within the project extent.

The following best management practices would be implemented to ensure that the release of HTRWs does not occur during construction:

- All equipment would be washed prior to the initiation of work at the study site and following completion of all tasks. Fueled equipment that enters the site should be inspected at least once every working day for dripping or leaking fluids. Dripping or leaking equipment would be repaired immediately at an off-site location. All fueled equipment would carry a spill control kit which would allow the immediate control of small fuel drips and spills, and removal of stained soil resulting from this project work.
- No hazardous materials would be used in the execution of this project.

The No-Action alternative would have no effect on known HTRW, as no recognized environmental concerns occur within or near the proposed construction project.

The Proposed Action would have no effect on known HTRW, as no recognized environmental concerns within or near the proposed construction project were identified. Based on the evidence derived from the NEPAassist and EDR reports, a Phase II investigation (ASTM E1903) is not warranted at this time.

### 3.3 Biological Environmental

#### 3.3.1 Vegetation Communities

The project area is the level 3 ecoregion, Arizona/New Mexico Plateau, and level 4 ecoregion, Near-Rockies Valleys and Mesas (Griffith et al. 2006). The Arizona/New Mexico Plateau represents a large transitional region between the drier shrublands and wooded higher relief tablelands of the Colorado Plateaus in the north, the lower, hotter, less vegetated Mojave Basin and Range in the west, and forested mountain ecoregions that border the region on the northeast and south.

Local relief in the region varies from a few feet on plains and mesa tops to well over 1000 feet along tableland side slopes. The Near-Rockies Valleys and Mesas ecoregion is an area of mostly piñon-juniper woodland, juniper savanna, and mesa and valley topography, with influences of higher elevation vegetation in drainages from the adjacent Southern Rockies. Its geology differs from the North Central New Mexico Valleys and Mesas Ecoregion, with older Tertiary and Cretaceous sedimentary rocks. It has generally higher elevations, greater precipitation, and more juniper than the San Juan/Chaco Tablelands and Mesas Ecoregion to the west. Canyon streams flow intermittently out of the Rockies into the Canon Largo watershed, a tributary to the San Juan River.

In general, the project area is highly disturbed with a variety of informal or old access roads that continue to be used by off-highway vehicles as well as dispersed and concentrated garbage. In addition, various types of garbage, both old and recent, are present throughout the project area. The northeast portion of the project area appears to be an old staging area with a portion of the slope removed, leaving a large relatively flat rectangular area adjacent to Vallecitos Road. The remaining project area is covered with natural mixed ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) forest, pinyon pine (*Pinus edulis*)-juniper (*Juniperus spp.*) woodland, and open meadow habitats (See Appendix G for observed flora). During site visits by a SMA biologist (March 17, 2025), no rare plant species or rare plant communities were observed within or around the project area. One Class C noxious weed, Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*), was observed along Vallecitos Road.

The following best management practice would be implemented to minimize impacts to vegetation:

- Activities would be limited to the designated or otherwise approved areas and would be shown on the construction drawings for construction areas, staging, and access.
- Any area disturbed by construction and not covered by an impervious surface would be revegetated by seeding with native grasses.

The Proposed Action would have minor adverse effects to vegetation within the project area as vegetation, including trees and shrubs, would be removed to construct project features, but these impacts would be minimized by implementing best management practices. Due to the limited amount of disturbance within the project area, the previously disturbed nature of the site, and measures that would be implemented to reduce impacts to vegetation, the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse effects on vegetation. The No-Action alternative would have no effect on vegetation.

### 3.3.2 Wildlife

Wildlife species expected to be encountered on site are adapted to a mix of ponderosa pine forest, pinon-juniper woodland and open habitats in proximity to low density residential areas with no source of consistent water in the vicinity of the project. This is likely to include several rodent species, desert cottontails, a variety of lizard and bird species, mule deer, and elk, and predators of those species such as coyotes, mountain lions, and birds such as hawks, falcons, and owls that may infrequently use the project site.

Scattered tree cavities in ponderosa pines throughout northern and eastern portions of the site are likely used primarily by woodpeckers, cavity nesting songbirds, and possibly swallows. A Northern Flicker was observed visiting a cavity. The site was previously disturbed with illegal off-road vehicle use and large amounts of both dispersed and concentrated garbage (see Appendix H).

During a site visit by an SMA biologist (March 17, 2025), wildlife observed included White-throated Swift (*Aeronautes saxatalis*), Woodhouse's Scrub Jay (*Aphelocoma woodhouseii*), Juniper Titmouse (*Baeolophus ridgwayi*), Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*), Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), Common Raven (*Corvus corax*), Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*), Pinyon Jay (*Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus*), Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*), Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*), Bushtit (*Psaltriparus minimus*), Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*), White-winged Dove (*Zenaida asiatica*), White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*), Domestic Dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*), Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), and Cottontail Rabbit (*Sylvilagus spp.*) (Appendix I).

Disturbance of wildlife from construction of the proposed action would be temporary and limited to the project area. The following measures would be implemented to minimize impacts to wildlife:

- Project work would be conducted between September 1 and March 31, outside the breeding bird season. Should any work need to take place within the breeding bird season, all potential nesting habitat to be disturbed in the work area must be surveyed for nesting birds by a qualified biologist. Because a Gunnison's prairie dog colony, which could provide preferred habitat for Western burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), was observed near the project area during the biological survey, nest surveys would include surveys for nesting burrowing owls. For any active nest found with eggs or nestlings, the area of the nest would be avoided by implementing buffers and any other requirements deemed necessary in consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).
- Open trenches are anticipated during construction; therefore, the following best management practices should be followed (See NMDGF Trenching Project Guidelines in Appendix J for more details).
  - Any trenches left overnight would be covered to prevent trapping of wildlife or ramps would be installed to allow animals to safely escape. Earthen escape ramps should be installed at least every 30 meters and be no steeper than 1:1.
  - When pipe has been laid in the trench, end caps should be placed on the open end(s) of the pipe to prevent animals from entering. Pipe staged outside the trench should be capped until placed in the trench or checked for wildlife before being placed into the trench.
  - Most wildlife can be protected by constructing silt fence completely around the open trench. Silt fence should be supported from sagging by t-posts, rebar, or stakes and buried at the base to preclude animals from moving below the fence. If construction of a silt fence is a required best management practice for erosion control, then, to preclude the need for a biological monitor, escape ramps, and concurrent backfilling, the guidelines for silt fence installation and maintenance in the Trenching Project Guidelines should be followed.

Due to the limited amount of disturbance within the project area, the previously disturbed nature of the habitat, and measures that would be implemented to reduce impacts to wildlife, the Proposed Action would not result in significant adverse effects on wildlife. The No-Action alternative would have no effect on wildlife.

### 3.3.3 Special Status Species

Four agencies have primary responsibility for protecting and conserving plant and animal species within the proposed project area. The USFWS, under authority of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531) (ESA), as amended, has the responsibility for federally

listed species. The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF) has the responsibility for state-listed wildlife species. The New Mexico State Forestry Division (Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department) (EMNRD) has the responsibility for state-listed plant species. Each agency maintains an updated list of species that are classified, or are candidates for classification, as protected based on their present status and potential threats to future survival and recruitment into viable breeding populations. The potential USFWS-listed species were identified using the Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) tool (Appendix K). The potential NM-listed species were identified using the New Mexico – Environmental Review Tool (NM-ERT) (Appendix L). These types of status rankings represent an expression of threat level to a given species survival as a whole and/or within local or discrete populations. Special status species listed by the USFWS and NM as potentially occurring in the project area are provided in Table 1.

The following USFWS and NM special status species have the potential to occur at the project site:

- Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*): due to the timing of the survey, potential host and food species might be present at some point during the year.
- Spotted Bat (*Euderma maculatum*): breeding and roost habitat is not present within the project area. However, suitable foraging habitat is present within the project area.
- Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*): there is no breeding habitat within or adjacent to the project area. However, non-breeding individuals may utilize the area for hunting. Any presence within the project area is anticipated to be temporary by non-breeding individuals.
- Gray Vireo (*Vireo vicinior*): Piñon-juniper woodland habitat is found to the west and south of the project area. However, due to the woodland density and proximity of the project area to adjacent urban areas, breeding use is of low likelihood.

The remaining USFWS and NM special status species are not expected to occur at the project site because suitable habitat is not present.

Table 1. List of special status species that occur or could potentially occur within or near the project area. Status key is as follows, E = Endangered, T = Threatened, PE = Proposed Endangered, and PT = Proposed Threatened.

Common Name	Scientific Name	USFWS	NM
Jemez Mountains Salamander	<i>Plethodon neomexicanus</i>	-	E
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	-	T
Mexican Spotted Owl	<i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i>	T	-
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	<i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	T	-
Gray Vireo	<i>Vireo vicinior</i>	-	T
Spotted Bat	<i>Euderma maculatum</i>	-	T
Monarch Butterfly	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	PT	-
Suckley's Cuckoo Bumble Bee	<i>Bombus suckleyi</i>	PE	-

There is no breeding/roosting habitat that spotted bats might utilize in the project area. Any individuals present would be foraging and unlikely to be present during working hours. Therefore, the Proposed Action would have no effect on Spotted Bats or their habitat. Any Peregrine falcons present in the area would be hunting or roosting during non-breeding and not significantly impacted by the temporary construction and demolition activities. Therefore, the Proposed Action would have no effect on Peregrine Falcons or their habitat. Gray Vireos and other nesting bird species may be present during the breeding season. If site preparation, construction, and/or demolition activities occur within the nesting season for Gray Vireos (late-April to early-August) or birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) (April 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup>), active nest searches would occur within seven days of the initiation of such activities. Any active nests located would require the cessation of activities until USFWS and NMDGF are consulted and either a take permit is issued, or another mitigation alternative is provided. Although the monarch butterfly, proposed for listing as federally threatened, could potentially occur within the project area, consultation with USFWS is not required for species that are proposed for listing. The limited disturbance to vegetation from the proposed project is unlikely to result in significant effects to milkweed plants (the host plant for monarch butterflies) should plants be present in the project area.

Due to the limited amount of disturbance within the project area, the previously disturbed nature of the habitat, and measures that would be implemented to reduce impacts to wildlife, the Proposed Action would have no effect on state or federally listed species or their critical habitat.

Under the No-Action Alternative, there would be no effect on federally or state listed species or their critical habitat.

### 3.4 Cultural Resources

A pedestrian survey was conducted on April 2, 2025, within the 3.63-acre project area by Chronicle Heritage archeologist Sarah Niskanen (Appendix M). In addition, a supplemental area was surveyed by Martin Goetz of Souder Miller and Associates (Appendix M).

The survey area has been disturbed by motorized vehicles and impacted by modern dumping. Chronicle Heritage identified and documented one newly recorded archaeological site and two newly recorded historic properties in the APE. Chronicle Heritage recommended LA 206312, HCPI 558334, and HCPI 55834 not eligible for listing in the NRHP. Additionally, Chronicle Heritage documented four Isolated Occurrences (IOs).

LA 206312 is a newly-recorded nonstructural historic-period site consisting of five artifact concentrations along a series of two-track roads. The site is mostly on bedrock lightly overlaid with sediment. The artifact assemblage consists of approximately 2,000 historic-period artifacts consisting primarily of cans, glass, and historic ceramics. Based on the artifact assemblage, the site likely represents multiple discrete refuse deposition events over the past century by local residents dumping their household trash. Given the nature of the deposited trash and the lack of subsurface deposits, USACE determines that LA 206312 is not eligible for the NRHP.

In addition to LA 206312, the project area is entirely within the newly-proposed boundary for site LA 100111, the Village of Cuba (Nacimiento) itself, as shown in the NMCRIS database. This new site boundary did not appear in the database at the time of fieldwork, but is present as of the writing of this EA. While the database indicates prior determinations that LA 100111 is eligible, the small scope of the present undertaking precludes doing a thorough evaluation of the village as a whole. Nonetheless, assuming eligibility for the village overall, USACE believes that the present project, in adding a water tank to a portion of the landscape already containing a similar water tank, does not present any viewshed issues or create adverse effects to LA 100111.

Further, two residential houses are located near the outer boundary of the APE, documented by Chronicle as HCPI 55833 and HCPI 55834. Both are residential buildings that appear to be present on maps from the 1940s. However, the fact that these houses are currently occupied and on private property make a full evaluation and assessment of integrity difficult at present. Both are located near or beyond the edge of the buffer chosen to define the APE, lying between 30 and 100 feet from the two-track road that will be used for project access, and will be avoided by project activities. USACE therefore does not make eligibility determinations for these properties, but determines that even if they were eligible, neither structure would be affected by the proposed project.

In sum, USACE determines that LA 206312 and the isolated occurrences are all not eligible for the NRHP. HCPI 55833 and HCPI 55834, while apparently appearing on 1940s maps, lack enough detailed information to fully evaluate for eligibility; nonetheless, neither will be impacted by the proposed work. USACE determined that the proposed project will result in no adverse effect to historic properties; namely, the Village of Cuba (LA 100111).

USACE communicated its determination of no adverse effect to the New Mexico Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) on 19 December 2025, and SHPO concurred on January 13, 2026. In addition, Tribes with interests in the area were contacted regarding this determination on 30 December 2025, and USACE received no indication of Tribal concerns. Copies of Section 106 correspondence are located in Appendix M.

If undocumented cultural resources are discovered within the APE, Chronicle Heritage recommends that construction immediately cease and that USACE contact the SHPO and interested Tribes for further Section 106 consultation. No work shall occur within 100 feet (30 meters) of the discovery until further notice from USACE in consultation with the SHPO is provided. If human remains are encountered during the disturbance, all activity must cease in the vicinity and the appropriate law enforcement agency, Office of the Medical Investigator, and the SHPO should be contacted immediately per 4.10.11 NMAC.

### **3.5 Land Use and Socioeconomic Environment**

The project area is located in Section 28 of Township 21 North, Range 1 West (New Mexico Meridian). Land use surrounding the project area is low-intensity development, residential, and natural, and the community setting is rural. Nearby roads include Vallecitos Road (County Rd 13), NM-126, and US Hwy 505. Much of the project area is managed by the Village of Cuba, New Mexico. In addition, some adjacent land located outside of the project area is administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) (Appendix N).

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), provides detailed soil maps and identifies soils as prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, farmland of local importance, or unique farmland – those soils best suited to food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. The average annual precipitation in the area ranges from 12-16 inches, mean air temperature ranges from 45-52 °F, with a frost-free period of 110-130 days. The Soil Resource Report for the project area indicates that there is no prime farmland nor hydric soils present; however, there is farming in adjacent areas within the community.

The La Loma water storage tank is located within the Village of Cuba, Sandoval County, New Mexico. Sandoval County was created in 1903. Historically, the population in Sandoval County has increased based on decennial census data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau for a period between 1910 and 2020 from 8,579 to 148,834. Cuba is approximately 3.26 square miles (8.45 kilometers squared). According to the 2020 census, there are 628 people in Cuba, NM (USCB 2025). The median age is 32.5 with 18.9% of the population over the age of 65. The 2023 American Community Survey reported an employment rate of 60.4% in Cuba. 17.1% of people had a bachelor's degree or higher, and 4.4% of inhabitants lacked health care coverage. 22.9% of people in Cuba, NM, live under the poverty line. Median income for families is \$73,472, while it is \$78,750 for married-couple families, and \$32,679 for non-family households.

The Proposed Action would not affect land use or socioeconomic resources in the project area. The proposed improvements would be conducted under Section 595 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-53; 33 U.S.C. 2201 et seq.) as amended. This program is largely intended to provide needed assistance (technical, financial, etc.) to communities in which water resources are degrading and in need of improvement. The No-Action Alternative would have no impact on land use or socioeconomics in the Project Area or surrounding region.

### **3.6 Human Health and Safety**

The Proposed Action would both improve water quality and security to the community of Cuba, New Mexico. The current La Loma water storage tank poses a potential risk to the water security and failure of the tank risks loss of water to residents as well as a reduction in public safety services. Under the No-Action, however, the identified potential failure of the La Loma water tank would persist creating a negative impact on human health and safety.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

The Proposed Action evaluated in this Draft EA addresses the method and potential effects for proposed water system improvements. Impacts to the environment would be non-significant, short-term, and related solely to construction. The proposed project would not result in any moderate or significant short-term, long-term, or cumulative adverse effects. Therefore, the proposed project would not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and is recommended for implementation.

## 5. PREPARATION, CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

### 5.1 Preparation

This Draft EA was prepared for the USACE, Albuquerque District by Souder, Miller and Associates (SMA). Personnel primarily responsible for preparation include:

Charles Britt                      Senior Scientist II

### 5.2 Quality Control

This Draft EA has been reviewed for quality control purposes. Personnel who reviewed this Draft EA include:

Nicole Harings                      Senior Scientist III

Stephanie Jentsch                      USACE Biologist

Jonathan VanHoose                      USACE Archaeologist

Micael Albonico                      USACE Environmental Engineer

### 5.3 Consultation and Coordination

The public will be provided a 30-day review period of this Draft EA (see Appendix O).

Agencies and entities that were contacted in preparation of the Final EA include:

Mr. Shawn Sartorius  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office

Ms. Jennifer Faler  
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Albuquerque Area Office

Ms. Virginia Seamster  
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish  
Conservation Services Division

Ms. Jennifer Baca  
New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission  
Office of the State Engineer

Ms. Shelly Lemon  
Surface Water Quality Bureau  
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Mr. John Rhoderick  
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