

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

**Department of the Army, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

**Availability of a Draft Integrated General Reevaluation Report and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Middle Rio Grande Flood Protection Bernalillo to Belen, New Mexico: Mountain View, Isleta and Belen Units**

**AGENCY:** Department of the Army, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, DOD.

**ACTION:** Notice of availability.

**SUMMARY:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) announces the availability of an updated General Reevaluation Report and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (GRR/SEIS) for Public Review. The updated GRR/SEIS adds an intermediate alternative for review. The GRR/SEIS evaluates alternatives to replace the existing spoil bank with an engineered levee to reduce flood risk within the Middle Rio Grande between Bernalillo and Belen, New Mexico. It also documents the existing condition of environmental resources adjacent to the spoil bank and potential impacts on those resources that could result from implementing the alternatives. The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) is the non-Federal Sponsor for the project.

This SEIS also evaluates actions to avoid or minimize potential effects to Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed species and/or associated critical habitat. The GRR/SEIS will supplement the *May 1979, Middle Rio Grande Flood Protection Bernalillo to Belen, New Mexico, Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)*. That document assessed impacts from alternatives to reduce flood risk to structures, infrastructure and life safety. The previously proposed alternative

included reconstructing the existing spoil bank system maintained by the MRGCD with a structurally competent levee system.

**DATES:** All written comments must be postmarked on or before July 23, 2018.

The final GRR/SEIS is currently scheduled to be available for public review in fall 2018.

**ADDRESSES:** Written comments should be mailed to Albuquerque District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, CESP-PM-LE, Bernalillo to Belen Levee GRR/SEIS, 4101 Jefferson Plaza NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109, or submitted via email to *Michael.D.Porter@usace.army.mil*, designated by inserting “Bernalillo to Belen Levee SEIS” in the subject line.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Questions about the proposed action and GRR/SEIS can be answered by contacting Dr. Michael D. Porter, Fishery Biologist, Albuquerque District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, CESP-PM-LE, 4101 Jefferson Plaza NE, Albuquerque, NM 87109, by phone at (505) 342-3264; or via email to *Michael.D.Porter@usace.army.mil* designated by including “Bernalillo to Belen Levee SEIS” in the subject line.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personally identifiable information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask in your

comment to withhold from public review your personally identifiable information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. The document will be available for review at the

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Albuquerque District Web Site:

<http://www.spa.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/Environmental-Compliance-Documents/Environmental-Impact-Statements-ROD/>

Copies may also be requested in writing at (see ADDRESSES).

*Proposed Action.*

On May 18, 2017, the Corps published the notice of intent (NOI) to prepare the GRR/SEIS for the MRG GR study in the Federal Register (Vol. 82, No.95). On September 22, 2017, the Corps released a Draft Integrated General Reevaluation Report and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Middle Rio Grande Flood Protection Bernalillo to Belen, New Mexico: Mountain View, Isleta and Belen Units.

The original spoil banks were constructed by MRGCD as part of their authority to drain wetlands and deliver irrigation water.

Preparation of this GRR/SEIS became necessary due to the changes that have occurred since the original EIS was finalized in 1979. A longer period of record for hydrological data is now available to allow improved and updated hydrological analysis. New levee design criteria that address long duration flows were adopted by the Corps in 1993. Any proposed plan now has to incorporate new design features that prevent seepage through the levee or its foundation due to prolonged flow against the riverward toe. The Corps has adopted a probabilistic determination of flood risk to perform levee design. Three species that have been listed as threatened or endangered since 1994 occur within the study area (two with critical habitat). These species are

the Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo, the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, and the Rio Grande Silvery Minnow.

*Alternatives.*

The GRR/SEIS will investigate and determine the extent of Federal interest in a range of alternative plans designed to reduce the risk of flooding in the communities between Albuquerque and Belen. The GRR/SEIS will describe the risk of flooding in the communities between Albuquerque and Belen; evaluate a range of alternatives to reduce flood risk and potential environmental impacts; and describe measures to minimize or mitigate for potential environmental impacts. The updated GRR/SEIS adds an intermediate alternative for review.

**PREVIOUSLY PROPOSED ACTION:** The Corps has previously proposed a project (1979) to rehabilitate the spoil bank system with an engineered levee in five Middle Rio Grande Units. The levee for the Corrales (12.6 miles), Mountain View (4.4 miles), Isleta West (3.2 miles), Belen East (22.1 miles), and Belen West Units (20.0 miles) were designed to provide protection for the 1% annual chance exceedance (ACE) flood event. The Corrales Unit was designated a separable element in a Limited Revaluation Report (1994) with construction completed in 1997.

**SIGNIFICANT ISSUES TO BE ANALYZED:** Significant issues to be analyzed in the development of the GRR/SEIS include the effect of the alternatives on endangered or threatened species and their critical habitat; floodplain development; water quality; riparian ecological

systems; social welfare; human safety; cultural resources; and aesthetic qualities. Development of mitigation measures will be undertaken for any unavoidable impacts.

The Corps initiated consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) on the effects of the Project on species listed under the ESA. As part of that consultation, the Corps proposed several conservation measures that would modify structures or operation and maintenance of the Project. The Service is preparing a Biological Opinion (BiOp) and the Corps expects that the Service may incorporate the conservation measures as part of the BiOp. The Corps will need to complete applicable environmental compliance, including evaluation under NEPA, prior to adopting and implementing any terms and conditions in the BiOp. The proposed GRR/SEIS would constitute that evaluation under NEPA. The Corps has proposed several measures to improve conditions for listed species, including the actions described in the Public Involvement Process section below, subject to authority and funding.

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS:** Coordination has been ongoing since 2008 with both public and private entities that have jurisdiction or an interest in land and resources in the Middle Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico. These entities include the general public, local governments, the Pueblo of Isleta, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, the Service, the MRGCD, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and the Interstate Stream Commission. Coordination will continue throughout the public review of the GRR/SEIS through comment letters and public meetings. All interested parties, including federal, state, tribal, and public entities, are invited to submit additional comments on the draft GRR/SEIS (see ADDRESSES).

The planning effort is also being coordinated with the Service pursuant to the requirements of the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1972 and the ESA of 1973, as amended. Consultation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer is ongoing pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

*Request for Review Comments:* The Corps invites affected federal, state, and local agencies, affected Native American tribes, and other interested organizations and persons to participate in the review of the GRR/SEIS. The Corps invites interested parties to provide specific comments on issues and the preferred alternative in the GRR/SEIS related to the construction of the Project. Comments, requests to be placed on the GRR/SEIS mailing list, and requests for information may be submitted to the address above. All comments and materials received, including names and addresses, will become part of the administrative record and may be released to the public. Interested parties should not submit confidential business or otherwise sensitive or protected information.

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District Commander