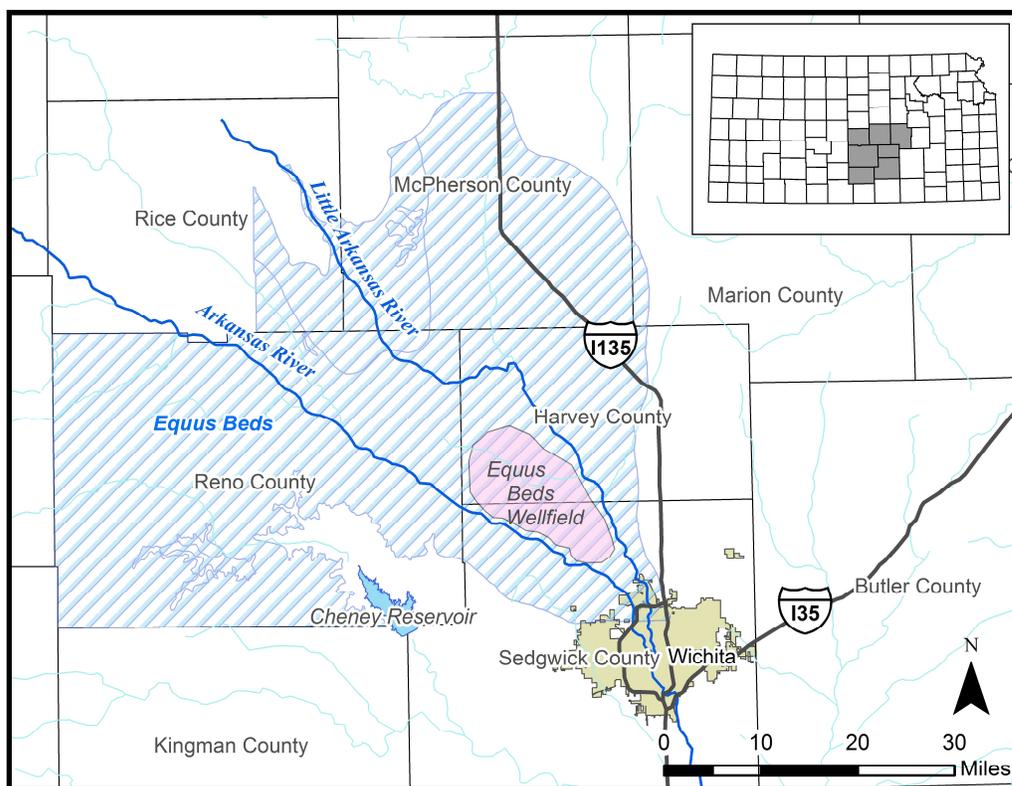


Equus Beds Aquifer Recharge and Recovery Project Environmental Impact Statement Scoping Document

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) is authorized under Public Law 109-299 to assist the City of Wichita, Kansas (City) in funding and implementation of the Equus Beds Aquifer Recharge, Storage and Recovery (ASR) component of the City's Integrated Local Water Supply Plan (ILWSP). This project is in part a Federal action because of the funding provided by Reclamation and is subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Due to the magnitude of the project and the potential for significant impacts resulting from the project, an environmental impact statement (EIS) must be prepared. This scoping document provides information about the proposed project and requests written comments from the public and groups or organizations that may have an interest in or could be affected by the project.

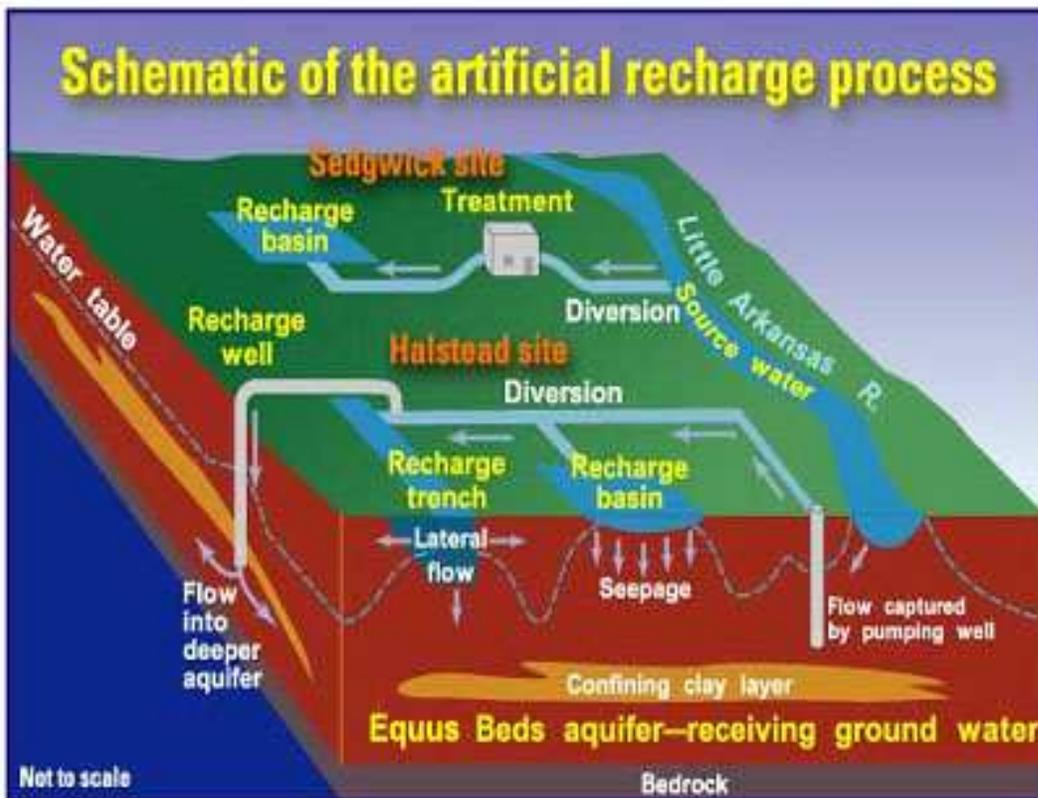


General Location and Project Background

The City intends to develop additional water sources to provide potable water to their customers through the year 2050. Burns & McDonnell (2003) completed an environmental review for the City as part of the process of obtaining federal assistance for their proposal; it is referenced in this document and is available for viewing at <http://www.usbr.gov/gp/otao/equus>. Their data predicted a water deficit for average daily use in the City by 2016 and for maximum daily use by 2026, based on the number of customers, consumption pattern and water conservation estimates. Wichita developed its Integrated Local Water Supply Plan, including the ASR Project, to meet these projected water demands. The general location of the project is shown on the first page.

The Proposed Project

The City proposes to develop surface and groundwater supplies for municipal and industrial use. The ASR Project would move 100 million gallons per day (MGD) of water from the Little Arkansas River and adjacent bank infiltration wells into the Equus Beds aquifer during periods of high flow. Water storage would be for use and protection of the aquifer. Infiltration wells would operate only when river flow exceeds 40 cubic feet per second (cfs) and surface diversion would occur only when flow exceeds 20 cfs, which is the mean base flow of the Little Arkansas River. The project would involve the installation of 42 infiltration wells, 33 recharge wells, 4 recharge basins, 46.2 miles of pipeline, fiber optic cables, overhead power lines and associated facilities.



(Courtesy of USGS)



Purpose of the Proposed Project

The purpose of the ASR is to provide a reliable supply of potable water to the City through the year 2050 while protecting and restoring, to the extent possible, the Equus Beds aquifer. This would be accomplished by diverting water from the Little Arkansas River and its associated groundwater during periods with above mean base flow, treating it if necessary, and storing it in the aquifer. Reclamation proposes to reimburse the City for design and construction of the ASR, to a maximum of 25% of the total project cost or \$30 million (indexed from January 2003), whichever is less.

Need for the Proposed Project

The City developed the ILWSP to circumvent predicted water shortages. The ASR is needed to protect Equus Beds aquifer water quality by inhibiting saltwater intrusion from the Arkansas River and past oil field activities. In addition, use of the aquifer has exceeded recharge over the last 50 years, leading to drops in the water table of up to 50 feet. Growing population and demands for water in the City could exhaust the water supply by the year 2050. The ASR would improve the rate at which the aquifer is replenished after a severe drought and help return and maintain groundwater storage at more natural levels. This would be accomplished by capturing high flows in the Little Arkansas River for storage in the aquifer.

Scope of the Proposed Project

The scope of the proposed project consists of the range of actions, alternatives, and potential impacts to be considered by Reclamation. The scope would include those actions and alternatives that are consistent with the development of the ASR. The potential environmental impacts to be considered in the environmental document are direct, indirect, and cumulative effects that may result from the proposed project and alternatives.

Geographic Scope

The geographic scope of the proposed project includes areas and resources potentially affected by the project. These include, but are not necessarily limited to, resources located in Sedgwick, Harvey, Marion, McPherson, Reno, Rice and Kingman counties, Kansas.

Responsible Official

The responsible official for making the federal decision is the Regional Director, Great Plains Region, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

Lead and Cooperating Agencies

Reclamation is the lead agency for preparation of this EIS. The following agencies are being invited to participate as cooperating agencies: U.S. Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Groundwater Management District No. 2, Kansas Department of Agriculture, and Kansas Water Office.

Nature of Decision to be Made

The EIS will culminate in a Record of Decision (ROD), wherein Reclamation will document its decision on whether or not to provide funding assistance and enter into a cost share agreement with the City of Wichita to implement the proposed 100 MGD ASR project

Project Timeline

Formal scoping will extend through March 31, 2008. Reclamation will issue a scoping summary report after conclusion of the formal scoping. The Draft EIS may be completed by February 2009. It will be available for a minimum 45-day comment period.



Public Involvement Activities

This document is being mailed to agencies, groups, and individuals who are considered stakeholders and those who express interest in the proposed action. This notice invites public comment on the proposal. Due to the City's public involvement efforts for its environmental document (Burns & McDonnell 2003), no scoping meetings are planned at this time. Reclamation will keep the option open for scoping meetings as the formal scoping period proceeds. While public participation in this analysis is welcome at any time, comments received during the formal scoping period (which closes on March 31, 2008) will be especially useful in preparation of the Draft EIS. The public scoping process is important in identifying potential issues, significant issues to be analyzed in depth, alternatives to the proposed action, and potential environmental effects of the proposal and alternatives.

Preliminary Issues and Potential Effects

Preliminary issues and potential effects have been identified from previous public and agency comments related to the ASR Project. The following general questions reflect the key concerns or questions of widespread public discussion and interest relevant to the ASR Project. These may be the basis of significant issues which will be analyzed in detail. However, the issues and potential effects are not necessarily limited to those listed below. Reclamation invites suggestions for other issues and potential effects that reviewers believe should be addressed in the EIS.

How does the Equus Beds Recharge and Recovery Project affect:

- Arkansas and Little Arkansas, and North Fork of the Ninnescah River flows and Cheney Reservoir levels?
- Irrigation water supply and use for agriculture in the project area?
- Water quality of the Arkansas, Little Arkansas, and the Equus Beds aquifer?
- Water rights of the Arkansas River basin?
- Federally-listed threatened and endangered species?
- Groundwater resources in the project area?
- Social and economic considerations in the local area and wider region?
- Cultural resources, both historic and prehistoric, in the project area?
- Aquatic resources in the Arkansas and Little Arkansas rivers?
- Recreation resources and activities?
- Wetlands and riparian areas in the project area?
- Wildlife populations and habitat in the project area?
- The cumulative effects of other federal, state and private actions in the project area?
- Potential impacts of climate change on the project, and *vice versa*?

Preliminary Alternatives

The EIS will describe the effects of one action (100 MGD ASR) and one no-action (ASR to proceed without federal funding) alternative. The City has indicated that it proposes to proceed with the ASR, with or without federal funding, passing additional project costs on to its customers.

Additional alternatives considered and eliminated from further consideration in the City's 2003 environmental document, including the "no project" alternative, will be briefly listed and described. Reclamation invites suggestions for other alternatives to be considered. Such alternatives should be described in sufficient detail to allow Reclamation to evaluate the reasonableness and adequately analyze the effects of such alternatives.



Further Project Information

For more detailed information on the project proposal please contact:

Jerry Blain
Superintendent of Production and Pumping
City of Wichita, Water Utilities
455 N. Main
Wichita, KS 67202

Mr. Blain may also be contacted by telephone at (316) 269-4764 or by e-mail at jblain@wichita.gov.

Comments Requested

This scoping document recognizes information gathered from the public and others who participated and commented during the City's preparation of their environmental document. The public is hereby invited to take part in the NEPA process and is encouraged to visit with Reclamation officials during preparation of the EIS, prior to the generation of a record of decision (ROD). Reclamation seeks information, comments, and assistance from Federal, Tribal, State, and local agencies, and other individuals or organizations that may be interested in, or affected by, the proposed project.

Written comments should be directed to:

Charles F. Webster
Environmental Protection Specialist
Oklahoma-Texas Area Office
Bureau of Reclamation
5924 NW 2nd St., Ste 200
Oklahoma City, OK 73127-6514

Mr. Webster may also be contacted by telephone at 405-470-4831 or by e-mail at cwebster@gp.usbr.gov.

Importance of Public Participation

Reclamation believes it is important to inform reviewers of several guidelines that have been supported by court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. To assist Reclamation in identifying and considering issues related to the proposed project, comments made during formal scoping and on the EIS should be as specific as possible. Reviewers must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts Reclamation to the reviewer's position and contentions. It is very important that those interested in this proposed project participate by the close of the scoping period so that substantive comments and objections are made available to Reclamation at a time when it can meaningfully consider and respond to them. Environmental objections that could be raised at the EIS stage, but are not raised until after completion of the Final EIS may be waived or dismissed by Reclamation. Comments may also address the adequacy of the EIS or the merits of the alternatives formulated and discussed in the statement.

Before including your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment including your personal identifying information may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

