

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Albuquerque Area Office
Albuquerque, New Mexico**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Eastern New Mexico Rural Water Supply
Environmental Assessment**

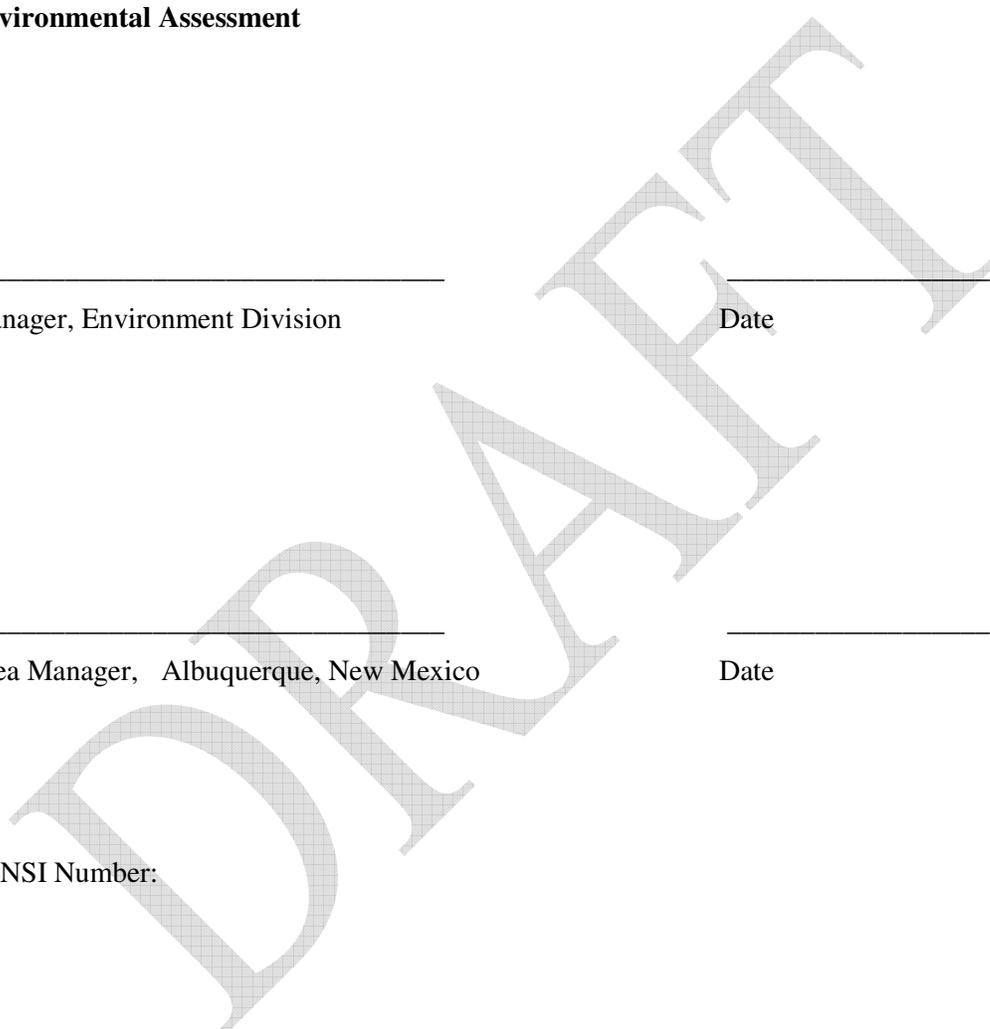
Manager, Environment Division

Date

Area Manager, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Date

FONSI Number:



Summary of the Proposed Action

The Eastern New Mexico Rural Water Authority (ENMRWA), the project proponent, is proposing to construct the Eastern New Mexico Rural Water System Project (Project). The project was authorized on March 30, 2009 in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. If Congress appropriates funds, it is anticipated that the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) would provide federal funds for project construction. Reclamation would transfer federal funds to the ENMRWA.

The Proposed Action is funding the Project, which consists of construction of a pipeline and associated intake, storage, pumping, water treatment, and delivery facilities from Ute Reservoir to the eastern New Mexico municipalities of Clovis, Elida, Grady, Melrose, Portales, and Texico; Curry and Roosevelt counties; and Cannon Air Force Base (CAFB) (Participating Communities). The overall Project Area for the EA includes the area potentially affected by the Project—portions of Quay, Curry, and Roosevelt counties. The proposed federal action would provide funding to the ENMRWA to deliver 16,450 acre-feet (AF) of water per year from Ute Reservoir to the Participating Communities to meet a portion of current and future water supply needs. The planning horizon considered in this EA is 2060, which is within the normal range for water supply projects (40- to 60-year planning horizons are common). The Project is anticipated to supply water well beyond the planning horizon. Based on the analysis, the Proposed Action would not result in any significant impacts to the environment.

Background

Currently, all Participating Communities rely solely on ground water from the Ogallala aquifer for their M&I water supply. Overall, historical water demand is much greater than aquifer recharge, which has resulted in declining water levels throughout the aquifer. On November 13, 2009, the State Engineer closed the High Plains aquifer in the Curry-Portales Underground Water Basins to new permits for agricultural, commercial, municipal, or industrial wells. Permits for small uses, as well as use transfer (such as agricultural to municipal), changes in well locations, replacement wells and supplemental wells will still be allowed, if statutory requirements are met.

As the water levels in the aquifer drop, well production rates also decline and ground water becomes too expensive to meet demands. Wells then have to be extended or replaced to reach to greater depths. The ability of the Participating Communities to provide a reliable M&I water supply is currently or will soon be limited by declining ground water levels in the Project Area. Most of the Ogallala aquifer in the Project Area is characterized as having “little or no saturated

thickness". In addition, some Participating Communities face declining ground water quality that cannot be remedied without additional water treatment infrastructures. As ground water levels decline, water quality often declines as well.

Environmental Impacts

The following resources and socioeconomic factors were evaluated in detail in the Environmental Assessment for anticipated impacts from the proposed ENMRWA Water Supply Project: water resources, biological resources, socioeconomics and recreation, cultural resources, Indian Trust Assets, and environmental justice. The following resources are discussed further:

Water Resources

Surface water in the Project Area includes Ute Reservoir, the Canadian River downstream of Ute Reservoir to the state line, and sections of Revuelto Creek, Running Water Draw, Frio Draw, and Blackwater Draw. Ground water in the Project Area includes the Ogallala and other freshwater regional aquifers within Quay, Curry, and Roosevelt counties, as well as deep brackish groundwater aquifers.

Water quality varies throughout the project area depending on resource (surface or ground water), aquifer, and location within the aquifer. Generally, the Canadian River has high total dissolved solids (TDS) but is fully supporting of its state-designated uses. Ute Reservoir generally has high TDS, and is impaired for aluminum in the water and mercury in fish tissues. Freshwater aquifers in the Project Area also generally have high TDS, with localized higher concentrations of radon, fluoride, and arsenic. Deep brackish aquifers by definition have high TDS, and areas of radium concentrations. The Proposed Action would not result in changes to water quality.

Water quantity in Ute Reservoir, as well as releases to the Canadian River, are governed by the Canadian River Compact and Amended Decree. The Compact and Amended Decree restrict water storage on the Canadian River below Conchas Dam, including Ute Reservoir.

Approximately 193,240 AF of water can be stored in Ute Reservoir before water must be spilled. Flow in the Canadian River below Ute Dam is a result of spills and seepage. Water level elevations currently average about 3,781 feet, or a surface area of about 6,289 acres. Spills normally would occur about once in every 2.4 years under current operations, depending on precipitation inflow and evaporation (and other minor outflows). Seepage in the Canadian River is relatively consistent at about 3 to 5 cfs. The Proposed Action would change the average expected water level and surface area in Ute Reservoir, because there would be withdrawals for project use. Water level elevations under the Proposed Action would average about 3,775 feet

(about 5 feet less than the current average) and the surface area would average about 5,508 acres. The Proposed Action would change the duration and frequency of releases that are required under the Canadian River Compact and Amended Decree, to approximately once in 3.2 years. The Proposed Action is not anticipated to have a significant effect on seepage and therefore baseflows in the Canadian River. In addition, the NMISC has committed in the Arkansas River Shiner Management Plan to maintain the existing baseflows in the Canadian River.

The Proposed Action would slightly reduce usage of the Ogallala aquifer and slightly extend the life of the aquifer. These benefits would not likely be measurable. No significant impacts to surface water, water quality or ground water from this action are expected.

Biological Resources

The lesser prairie-chicken (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*) is a candidate for federal listing with known habitat in the project area, and the threatened Arkansas River Shiner (*Notropis girardi*) occurs in Revuelto Creek and downstream of Ute Reservoir in the Canadian River. The Canadian River currently sustains a healthy population of plains river fish, including the shiner. The existing baseflow regime, fluvial geomorphology, as well as flood flows from Revuelto Creek appear to support a reproducing population of the shiner. The Proposed Action could have minor, immeasurable effects on the baseflow, fluvial geomorphology, or floodflows that support this species.

A preliminary determination of "may effect, is not likely to adversely affect" has been made for the shiner. No impact would occur to endangered, threatened, or sensitive plant species. The Section 7 process between Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the applicants (NMISC and ENMRWA) is underway.

Minor vegetation impacts would occur from project implementation. Most impacts would be temporary in nature. Permanent impacts would occur where permanent facilities are sited. An increase in water level fluctuations in Ute Reservoir expected under the Proposed Action would result in a shift in shoreline vegetation, including wetlands. The amount of wetlands is anticipated to remain relatively stable. Most permanent wetlands are located at reservoir inlets, which would not be affected by reservoir levels. Minor, temporary construction disturbance to wildlife would occur from the Proposed Action.

Socioeconomics

The primary affected environment for socioeconomics comprises the Participating Communities, and the Quay County communities of Logan and Tucumcari. Logan and Tucumcari's economies

rely in part on tourism at Ute Reservoir. Other socioeconomic issues that rely on the reservoir include property values and quality of life. The economies of the Participating Communities rely on a sustainable water source for municipal and industrial uses. The Proposed Action would have a beneficial socioeconomic effect on the Participating Communities by providing a sustainable water supply for residences and businesses. The Proposed Action would have a short-term beneficial effect on Logan and Tucumcari during construction, and a long-term negative effect is possible during drought periods due to lower average water levels in Ute Reservoir.

Recreation

The primary affected environment for recreation includes the boating and fishing facilities at Ute Reservoir. As noted previously, the Proposed Action would result in lower average water levels in Ute Reservoir and could potentially affect access to recreation facilities (for example, boat ramps) and the quality of recreation.

Cultural Resources

Most of the project area has low potential for cultural resources, and few resources were located during surveys of the proposed project facilities. The exceptions are the area south of Ute Reservoir and the vicinity of Blackwater Draw north of Portales. Detailed survey and testing activities have found no significant cultural resources that would be adversely affected by the Proposed Action. Research is ongoing for sites near the reservoir. Coordination with SHPO also is ongoing.

No traditional cultural properties have been identified in the Project Area during tribal consultation.

No significant impacts are expected from the implementation of the Proposed Action.

Environmental Justice

Implementation of the Proposed Action would not disproportionately (unequally) affect any low-income or minority communities within the Project Area.

Indian Trust Assets

No Indian Trust Assets have been documented in the Project Area. Therefore, Reclamation has found no impact to Indian Trust Assets resulting from the Proposed Action.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts as a result of the proposed action are expected to be low. Cumulative impacts from two reasonably foreseeable actions—climate change and potential future water

withdrawals from Ute Reservoir—were considered. The cumulative effects of the proposed action on the identified resources are not significant.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis present in the EA, Reclamation’s assessment of Indian Trust Assets and Environmental Justice, Reclamation finds that there would be no significant impacts associated with the proposed action. Reclamation makes this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) and the Council on Environmental Quality implementing regulations (40 CFR 1500). Reclamation has determined that the proposed action does not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the human environment. Therefore, no environmental impact statement will be prepared for this proposal.

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