

# How do I comment?

Public participation is a key component of the EIS process. Please submit comments to Ms. Marsha Carra at (505) 462-3602, [mcarra@uc.usbr.gov](mailto:mcarra@uc.usbr.gov), or at the return address below. A comment form is also found on the project Web site: <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/albuq/library/eis/carlsbad/carlsbad.html>.

To be most helpful, comments should be as specific as possible and should focus on the adequacy of the document or the merits of the alternatives. We will make available, in their entirety, for public disclosure all submissions from organizations or businesses and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. Comments must be received or postmarked by October 31, 2005.

During the 60-day public review period, Reclamation will receive, compile, classify, and evaluate all substantive comments received. Reclamation will incorporate any additional analyses, conclusions, and results of consultation in the final EIS scheduled for release by June 2006. The final EIS will also include responses to the comments received. For at least 30 days after the release of the final EIS, Reclamation will make no decision. After the review period, Reclamation will issue a record of decision in which it will identify the selected alternative to be implemented and will include any environmental commitments and mitigation measures applied to the action.

## Bureau of Reclamation

Albuquerque Area Office  
Attention: Ms. Marsha Carra  
Carlsbad Project Operations EIS Team Leader  
555 Broadway NE, Suite 100  
Albuquerque, NM 87102-2352

# Long-Term Miscellaneous Purposes Contract EIS

The NMISC and Reclamation are preparing a separate EIS on a proposed a long-term contract that would allow the NMISC to use Carlsbad Project irrigation water for Pecos River Compact deliveries of water to Texas.

This Carlsbad Project water is allotted to land inside the boundaries of the CID that NMISC owns or leases from other members of the CID. Since this action is proceeding independently of and on a different schedule than the Carlsbad Water Operations EIS, it has a separate public involvement process. The Draft EIS for this proposed action will be released on October 6, 2005, and a public meeting will be held on November 9, 2005, in Carlsbad, NM. If you are interested in learning more about the Miscellaneous Purposes EIS or in commenting on this action, please contact Ms. Elisa Sims (505) 827-3918, [elisa.sims@state.nm.us](mailto:elisa.sims@state.nm.us), or Ms. Marsha Carra (505) 462-3602, [mcarra@uc.usbr.gov](mailto:mcarra@uc.usbr.gov), or visit the project Web site at <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/albuq/library/eis/carlsbad/cmpe.html>.

Bureau of Reclamation  
Albuquerque Area Office

State of New Mexico  
Interstate Stream Commission

# RIVER NOTES

A Newsletter of the Carlsbad Project Water Operations & Water Supply Conservation EIS  
September 2005

## Draft Environmental Impact Statement Ready for Public Review

The Bureau of Reclamation and the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (NMISC) are pleased to announce the release of the Carlsbad Project Water Operations and Water Supply Conservation Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Reclamation and NMISC have prepared this document to assess the potential consequences of proposed changes in Carlsbad Project water operations and the implementation of a water acquisition program in the Pecos River Basin.

The proposed changes in water operations are designed to conserve the Pecos bluntnose shiner and its designated critical habitat, while conserving the Carlsbad Project water supply.

The DEIS includes a description of alternative means of implementing the proposed federal action, including a no action alternative, and presents an evaluation of the potential environmental, economic, and social consequences that could result from implementing the alternatives.

The DEIS is now open for a 60-day public review period.

## Public Meetings Scheduled

Reclamation will hold a series of public meetings to obtain input on the Carlsbad Water Operations DEIS during September in Roswell, Carlsbad, Ft. Sumner, and Santa Rosa, New Mexico. Each meeting will begin promptly at 7:00 PM, with an open house and an opportunity to view displays and talk to technical specialists. At 7:30 PM there will be a short presentation, followed by a general question and answer and comment session. Resource staff will be stationed around the room to answer your specific questions and to take your comments until 9:00 PM. The meetings schedule is as follows:

### Where can I view the DEIS?

- Project Web site: <http://www.usbr.gov/uc/albuq/library/eis/carlsbad/carlsbad.html>.
- Printed copies of the DEIS and appendices are available for public inspection and review at the following locations:

**Bureau of Reclamation**  
Albuquerque Area Office  
555 Broadway NE, Suite 100  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102

**Carlsbad Irrigation District**  
201 South Canal Street  
Carlsbad, New Mexico 88220

- Printed copies of the DEIS and appendices have also been provided to the following libraries:

**Albuquerque Public Library  
(Main Branch)**  
**Carlsbad Public Library**  
**Fort Sumner Public Library**

**Moise Memorial Library (Santa Rosa)**  
**Roswell Public Library**  
**Santa Fe Public Library**  
**New Mexico State Library (Santa Fe)**

Printed copies and CDs have been sent to agencies and major stakeholders. A limited number of copies and CDs are available. Please contact Marsha Carra, Bureau of Reclamation for further information, at (505) 462-3602, [mcarra@uc.usbr.gov](mailto:mcarra@uc.usbr.gov).

**September 19, 2005**  
**Bureau of Land Management**  
Conference Room  
2909 West 2nd Street  
Roswell, New Mexico

**September 20, 2005**  
**Pecos River Village**  
Conference Center, Room 3  
711 Muscatel Avenue  
Carlsbad, New Mexico

**September 21, 2005**  
**Village Community House**  
204 North 4th Street  
Ft. Sumner, New Mexico

**September 22, 2005**  
**City Hall Meeting Room**  
141 5th Street  
Santa Rosa, New Mexico

## Overview of the Carlsbad Water Operations Draft EIS

Reclamation and NMISC have prepared the DEIS to consider the effects of ongoing changes in Carlsbad Project operations and water acquisitions in the Pecos River Basin. Carlsbad Project operations include diverting water to storage and releasing water for delivery to water users in the Carlsbad Irrigation District (CID).

Reclamation must ensure that Carlsbad Project operations comply with the Endangered Species Act and conserve the Pecos bluntnose shiner. One method Reclamation is considering is to implement alternative flow targets as measured at gages in the Pecos River.

Efforts to conserve the shiner through changes in operations can affect the amount of water available for delivery to CID. Without an accompanying program to acquire and provide water, the Carlsbad Project water supply would be reduced. A variety of water acquisition options were developed as part of the EIS process.

The alternatives for the DEIS were formulated and screened through a collaborative process involving multiple agencies, stakeholders, and technical working groups.

Proposed changes in the Carlsbad Project include bypassing available inflows through Santa Rosa and Sumner Dams to meet target flows or minimum flows as measured at either the Taiban Gage or Acme Gage.

The final alternatives also incorporate certain actions common to all, such as acquiring water, changing protocols for block releases, continuing the use of a conservation pool to ensure river flow, and an adaptive management plan for monitoring and addressing river conditions and ensuring that the chosen alternative meets the project purpose and need.

A variety of options for acquiring additional water for the Carlsbad Project or providing flows for direct benefit of the shiner are also analyzed in the DEIS. These

options include purchasing or leasing water rights, combined with retiring land, fallowing, and/or developing well fields.

Other options would encourage changes in cropping patterns or pumping water to the river from existing wells or an abandoned gravel pit. Reclamation will use these options to develop specific water acquisition proposals, which may require additional permitting, consultations, congressional authorization, and NEPA analysis.

In all cases, Reclamation actions must be in accordance with its existing federal and state legal and statutory authorities and obligations, the Pecos River Compact, water rights, and contractual obligations.

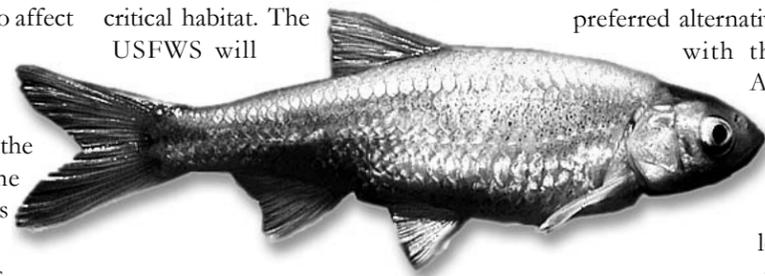
Reclamation would continue to work with irrigation districts and water users to implement these options on a voluntary buyer/seller relationship, respecting existing water rights and priorities in the Pecos River Basin.

## The DEIS and Endangered Species Act Compliance

Under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, Reclamation is required to consult with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) when there is the potential for its project to affect federally listed species and designated critical habitats. While the Pecos River Basin includes many species that are federally protected, the species of primary concern in the Carlsbad Project is the Pecos bluntnose shiner.

Two noncontiguous river reaches, totaling approximately 101 miles of the Pecos River, have been designated as critical habitat for the shiner. Critical habitat is a geographical area occupied by the species at the time it is listed, on which are found those physical and biological features essential to the conservation of the species and which may require special management considerations or protection.

As part of the Section 7 consultation, Reclamation has prepared a biological assessment that evaluates potential effects of its action on the listed species and critical habitat. The USFWS will



The Pecos bluntnose shiner is a federally protected species.

subsequently prepare a biological opinion based on information contained in the biological assessment and the USFWS's knowledge of the project and affected species.

Compliance on current operations is guided by a biological opinion, which will expire on February 28, 2006, before the anticipated record of decision and final EIS.

The initiation of Section 7 consultation requires that a proposed federal action be identified, and Reclamation has identified the Taiban Constant Alternative as the preferred alternative. Formal consultation

with the USFWS began in August 2005 with the submittal of a biological assessment.

Reclamation will seek a biological opinion for long-term operation of the Carlsbad Project. During the time that Reclamation and the

USFWS are in formal consultation, the DEIS will undergo public review and comment. Decisions made during the consultation process will be incorporated into the final EIS and record of decision. A short-term biological opinion will be required to cover the transition period after the expiration of the current biological opinion and before the final record of decision.

## Issues and Environmental Consequences

During the 2002 scoping process for the DEIS, the public and stakeholders identified issues that they felt needed to be addressed in this EIS. A majority of the comments addressed the ecology of the shiner, its habitat, and river flow requirements. Others concerns were expressed about the impacts to property owners and holders of water rights, particularly farmers, and to industries that depend on the river. Commentors also were concerned about dam operations and the need to obtain accurate river flow data before making changes. Some suggested that watershed management and brush removal could be used to improve conditions on the river.



Sumner Dam

The DEIS presents the analysis results of six alternatives defining changes to the Carlsbad Project, sixteen Carlsbad Project water acquisition options for conserving the project water supply, and eighteen options for acquiring additional water for maintaining flows for the shiner. The environmental consequences of these actions were assessed for water resources, water quality, agricultural soil and land resources, biological resources, regional economy, recreation, cultural resources, Indian trust assets, environmental justice, and cumulative effects. Below are highlights of these results.

**Shiner needs.** All of the alternatives would result in modeled intermittency, or interruptions in connected flows in the Pecos River, of less than 0.5 to 2.7 percent of the time during the irrigation season. Intermittency has been identified as the greatest immediate threat to the shiner. All of the alternatives include a fish conservation pool, which could be released to provide water for the shiner. An adaptive management plan is included under the action alternatives to help ensure that the changes in operations conserve the shiner, given the uncertainty inherent in natural systems.

**Property and water rights.** All of the alternatives and options would respect existing property, water rights, priorities and obligations of the Pecos River Compact. Water would be acquired from willing sellers on a voluntary basis. Conserving the Carlsbad Project water supply (i.e., water delivered to Brantley Reservoir for use by CID) is part of the project purpose and need. The alternatives vary in the amount of water that would need to be acquired to continue to keep the Carlsbad Project whole. Those alternatives that require the most water would likely result in more money being spent in the basin for leasing water rights, but fewer agricultural products being produced and less expenditure for industries

that support agriculture. Alternatives requiring the acquisition of smaller amounts of water would have fewer negative or positive effects on the regional economy.

**Water and dam operations.** The proposed use of the Taiban Gage in some of the alternatives and the adaptive management plan common to all alternatives are designed to improve river flow monitoring, especially in areas where the shiner is present. Sumner Dam operations are standardized under all of the action alternatives to continue to move water efficiently, according to CID's irrigation needs, while conserving the shiner. Block releases are to be avoided during the shiner's spawning period.

**Watershed management and brush removal.** Watershed management and brush removal proposals were considered early in the EIS process as water acquisition options, but they were not brought forward in the final analysis due to the time required to see results with such projects. Reclamation will continue its ongoing programs to remove nonnative vegetation and will continue to cooperate with other agencies that are removing salt cedar and restoring habitat in the basin.

## Preferred Alternative

Reclamation and the NMISC have selected the Taiban Constant Alternative as the preferred alternative for this DEIS and for initiating Section 7 consultation with the USFWS. This alternative proposes to operate the Carlsbad Project with a target flow of 35 cubic feet per second at the Taiban Gage and to deliver from storage Carlsbad Project water as contracted for irrigation, consistent with applicable federal and state laws. Selecting a preferred alternative does not define Reclamation's final decision. The intention is to let the public know what the agency considers the best alternative, based on the information available. Public comments or other considerations may result in a change in the preferred alternative and may even result in the final decision not being the preferred alternative stated in either the DEIS or the final EIS.

Reclamation selected the preferred alternative based on the following criteria, ordered by ranked importance:

- 1 Assurance that Reclamation's actions do not jeopardize the shiner
- 2 Amount of additional water needed to meet target flows and augment the supply for the Carlsbad Project
- 3 Ease of operation
- 4 Minimal restrictions on block releases
- 5 Occurrence of intermittency
- 6 Likelihood of the USFWS accepting the alternative
- 7 Stability of the biological opinion
- 8 Flexibility of the alternative

