

## Meeting: Pecos River 2<sup>nd</sup> Restoration Project Pecos River Restoration at Overflow Wetlands EA

BLM Roswell Field Office, 2909 W. Second Street, Roswell, NM  
November 17, 2011, 10:30AM

### Attendees:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Agency</u>	<u>Email</u>
Phelps Anderson	Private Landowner	phelpsanderson@dfn.com
Dick Smith	Chaves County/Flood	flood@co.chaves.nm.us
Dan Baggao	BLM - RFO	<a href="mailto:dan_baggao@blm.gov">dan_baggao@blm.gov</a>
Michael McGee	BLM - RFO	<a href="mailto:mmcgee@blm.gov">mmcgee@blm.gov</a>
Tim Frey	BLM - RFO	tcfrey@blm.gov
Kyle Arnold	BLM - RFO	karnold@blm.gov
Emile Sawyer	NMISC	<a href="mailto:emile.sawyer@state.nm.us">emile.sawyer@state.nm.us</a>
Yvette Paroz	Reclamation	<a href="mailto:yparoz@usbr.gov">yparoz@usbr.gov</a>
Judson Sechrist	Reclamation	jsechrist@usbr.gov
Gary Dean	Reclamation	gdean@usbr.gov
Mark Nemeth	Reclamation	<a href="mailto:mnemeth@usbr.gov">mnemeth@usbr.gov</a>
Marsha Carra	Reclamation	mcarra@usbr.gov
Kevin Doyle	Tetra Tech/EMPSi	<a href="mailto:kevin.doyle@tetrattech.com">kevin.doyle@tetrattech.com</a>
Susan Woods (phone)	Reclamation	swoods@usbr.gov
Susan Oetker (phone)	USFWS	<a href="mailto:susan_oetker@fws.gov">susan_oetker@fws.gov</a>

**Handouts:** Agenda, aerial view of the proposed action, drawing of bank excavation, bank lowering and sunflower swales

### Introductions

The meeting began approximately 10:35 AM. Introductions were made by each individual in attendance.

### Update on status of EA

Marsha updated the group on the project status. Comments were received on the draft of Chapter 1 and incorporated. Work has begun on Chapter 2. There are several questions that have been sent to Reclamation and are on the agenda for discussion today. Other agreements between stakeholders and understanding on the project roles and responsibilities need to be clarified. The NEPA process needs to be completed by the fall of 2012.

### Project Description Details: Questions/Assumptions

Mark Nemeth discussed the new handouts showing the locations of the restoration actions and the drawings of typical treatments planned. The technique that covers the largest area is the mechanical removal of non-native vegetation on the non-BLM lands. Portions of the State Trust land on the east side of the river would be handled differently by cutting and treating the stumps with herbicide in order to leave in some roots intact for bank stability and to protect wetlands. In other areas the banks would be excavated down to increase the width of the channel by up to 30 feet. Banks in other areas would be lowered and gradually sloped by up to 60 feet. The drawings also introduced the idea of creating swales outside of the river channel, but connecting with the shallow groundwater as an experiment to create habitat for the Pecos Sunflower.

Mark is working on the restoration budget and discussed the costs of the vegetation removal with BLM staff and others. Dan noted that there are now more competitors experienced in this kind of work. At this point it is assumed that Reclamation would do the mechanical removal with private contractors doing herbicide treatments. The BLM will provide information on contractors, costs, and herbicides.

One of the lessons learned is that the vegetation that is removed should not be left scattered in place. The preferred method is to use an excavator to pluck out the tamarisk and roots and pile it at the same time. Considerably less dirt is moved compared with bulldozers allowing for easier stacking and burning or grinding. For the areas close to the river, where the goal is to leave some roots, the slash would be removed and stacked and the stumps treated. Some snags would be placed in the river to help create fish habitat features such as backwaters.

Hand herbicide treatment of resprouts and roots should be planned after the first year. Herbicide should be allowed to work for a few years. In three years foliar hand retreatment may be needed. It is advisable for the government to provide the herbicide to the contractor to ensure that the proper chemicals are used during the right seasons.

Reclamation has a rule that does not permit herbicide use within 50 feet of the riparian edge. As the project proponent for the work and the vegetation removal on BLM land is already complete, it would seem that Reclamation rules would be applicable. More research into this issue is needed.

Reseeding was not used by the BLM in their work, but reseeded is planned for the Pecos Sunflower area and would be advisable elsewhere. A floodplain mix including alkali sacaton and four-winged saltbush could be used with post treatment and monitoring for invasives. It was noted that Ravenna grass is now classified as a New Mexico noxious weed.

### **Status of interagency and landowner coordination and agreements**

Phelps Anderson has not had any recent communication with Ernie Lopez, one of the other landowners. Ernie wants to maintain some cover for creating private hunting opportunities. Opening up the dense cover will be beneficial for a variety of species. Clearing would be concentrated near the river and the project disturbance would not extend beyond 300 feet.

Reclamation will continue to work with landowners and land managers on obtaining agreements regarding access. There were no representatives from the State Land Office present, but the State has indicated that they would agree to a longer-term access agreement. Access to the river on the east side is on county roads. Staging and fueling could be located at an old home site. West side access and staging locations still need to be explored and defined with the assistance of Melvin Gonzales.

Arrangements will be made by Dan for the BLM burn crew to burn the piles of debris onsite. The BLM will need a burn plan in place so that they are ready to go when the weather and moisture conditions are right.

Reclamation will address Section 404 compliance with the Army Corps of Engineers when the project is better defined. The Section 401 water quality certification will be completed by the NMED Surface Water Quality Bureau after the Corps makes its determination. Excess sand and

soil from the bankline cuts would be redistributed onsite. Where there is bank lowering, the material would be spread out to create a sloped bank up to 60 feet from the current bank. There is the possibility of using excess soil on old well pads on the east side of the river that could be reseeded.

The USFWS has baseline fishery information for future monitoring. It is assumed that their fish monitoring would continue and can be written into a monitoring plan to assess restoration effects.

Reclamation will work with the ISC to prepare a water budget for inclusion in the EA. The existing gages at the top and the bottom of the restoration can be used to determine any new depletions. An agreement with the ISC is needed on the use of the Strategic Water Reserve to cover any water owed.

There is baseline information from a university study 3 years ago on the river geomorphology. BLM will provide data and a point of contact.

### **Meet property owners on required rights of way**

This was deferred for a future meeting with the landowners and land managers when more information is available on project needs. Another landowner, Steve Patterson, has riverfront property and may be interested in a future project.

The BLM contact for rights of way and real estate issues is Angel Mayes. The Reclamation contact is Susan Woods (participating via telephone). Ann Demint is the point of contact for the access permit with the NM State Land Office.

### **Discuss resource data sources with BLM**

The BLM has many relevant documents and GIS data on a variety of resources. Reclamation will work with the BLM on the methods of data transfer and exchange of reference documents for inclusion in the EA.

Glen Garnand is the NEPA point of contact for the Roswell Field Office. A question was asked whether the BLM would sign a joint FONSI for this project or whether separate decision document would be signed for each agency. This will need to be determined.

Jeremy Iliff is the point of contact with BLM for Cultural Resources and will provide information on archaeological clearance.

### **Project timelines and next meeting schedule**

No dates were set for the next meeting, expected to be in the spring. The NEPA process needs to be completed by fall of 2012. Work can continue on drafting the text based on assumptions but the schedule for release of the draft is dependent on interagency and agreements. Kevin will outline a schedule showing the critical paths to meet the target release date for the draft and final.

## **Action Items**

- EMPSi/Tetra Tech to continue preparing sections of the EA using available information.
- EMPSi/Tetra Tech to prepare a schedule outlining target dates and critical paths for completing the NEPA process by fall 2012.
- Reclamation, BLM and EMPSi/Tetra Tech to work on acquiring BLM data for supporting the EA.
- Reclamation to assist EMPSi/Tetra Tech in refining the proposed action and mapping all project disturbance areas.
- Reclamation and BLM to continue discussions and meetings with landowners and agency land managers leading to agreements on access and project expectations.
- Reclamation and ISC to collaborate on the water budget for the project and an agreement regarding monitoring and addressing depletions.
- Reclamation, the USFWS, BLM and other agencies to collaborate on a post project monitoring plan and agreement.
- Reclamation to look into the rules restricting herbicide use near the river.