

CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

This chapter provides background information as well as a statement of purpose and need for the proposed project. Lines in the margin mark changes to the text of the EA.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) discusses the proposed relocation of three pipelines to allow the construction of the Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir, part of the Animas-La Plata (ALP) Project authorized by Congress for construction by the U. S. Department of the Interior (Interior) Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). The relocation of a natural gas distribution pipeline, a county road, and an electric transmission line are discussed as related actions in this EA as well.

The existing pipelines would be partially removed and partially abandoned in place, and new pipelines constructed on a route alignment outside the future reservoir. The three pipelines include a:

- 26-inch-diameter natural gas transmission pipeline, owned by Northwest Pipeline Corporation (Northwest);
- 16-inch-diameter natural gas liquids (NGL) pipeline, owned by Mid-America Pipeline Corporation (MAPCO); and
- 10-inch-diameter NGL pipeline, owned by MAPCO.

The ALP Project has been the subject of previous National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses, the most recent being the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) in July 2000 (Reclamation 2000a). This EA “tiers” from the FSEIS and discusses the environmental settings for the proposed action that are new or different than those discussed in the FSEIS, and their potential environmental impacts and proposed measures to avoid or ameliorate their impacts.

1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

1.2.1 The Animas-La Plata Project

Reclamation is planning to construct Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir as an integral component of the ALP Project. The ALP Project is a major water project designed to provide water for municipal and industrial uses in the Four Corners region of Colorado and New Mexico (Reclamation 1980; Reclamation 1992; Reclamation 2000a). Ridges Basin is a perched basin located southwest of Durango, La Plata County, Colorado. See figure 1-1, General ALP Project Area.

The ALP Project was authorized by the Colorado River Basin Project Act of 1968 (P.L. 90-537). The ALP Project is a participating project under the Colorado River Storage Project Act and utilizes part of the stream flows allocated to Colorado and New Mexico by the Colorado River Compact of 1922 (P.L. 84-485) and the Upper Colorado River Basin Compact of 1948. These two compacts allocate water for development in the Colorado River Basin.

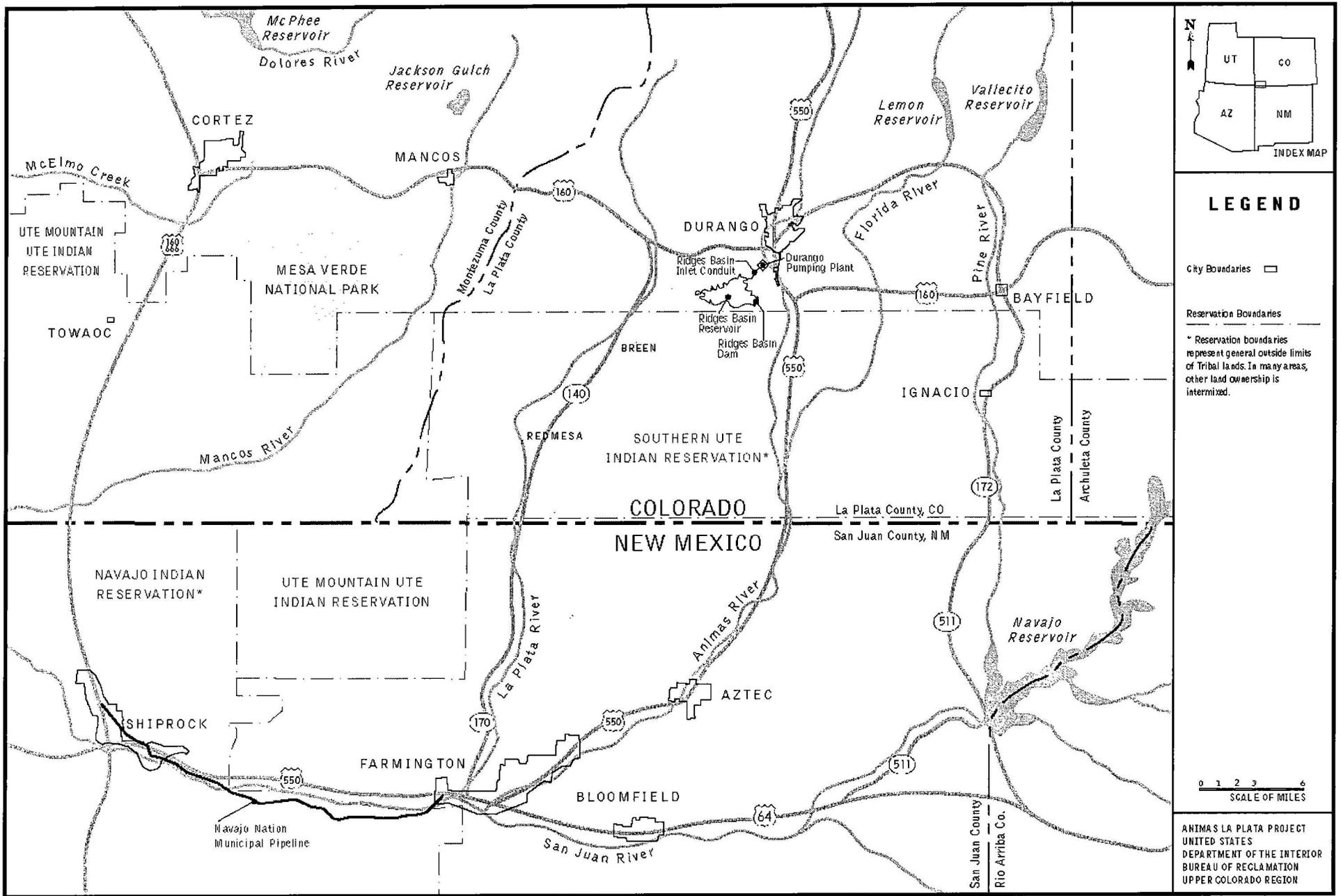


FIGURE 1-1
General Animas-La Plata Project Area
Showing Location of Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir

The Colorado Ute Indian Tribes (the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe) negotiated with the State of Colorado, the Federal government, and numerous local entities to resolve their senior water rights claims and assure a long-term water supply to the Tribes. These negotiations were memorialized in the Colorado Ute Indian Water Rights Settlement of December 10, 1986 and enacted into law with the Colorado Ute Indian Water Rights Settlement Act of 1988 (Settlement Act) (P.L. 100-585).

1.2.2 Animas-La Plata Project NEPA Compliance

On July 14, 2000, the Interior, through Reclamation, in cooperation with the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Colorado Ute Indian Tribes, released a FSEIS for the ALP Project. The FSEIS supplemented the environmental documents prepared by Reclamation in 1980 and 1996 for the ALP Project.

Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt executed a Record of Decision (ROD) on September 25, 2000, which adopted an ALP Project that would involve construction and operation of a 120,000 acre-foot off-stream reservoir at Ridges Basin, a pumping plant on the Animas River near Durango, and appurtenant facilities, including an inlet conduit and the Navajo Nation Municipal Pipeline. The Colorado Ute Settlement Act Amendments of 2000 (P.L. 106-554, Title III) were subsequently signed into law by President William Clinton on December 19, 2000.

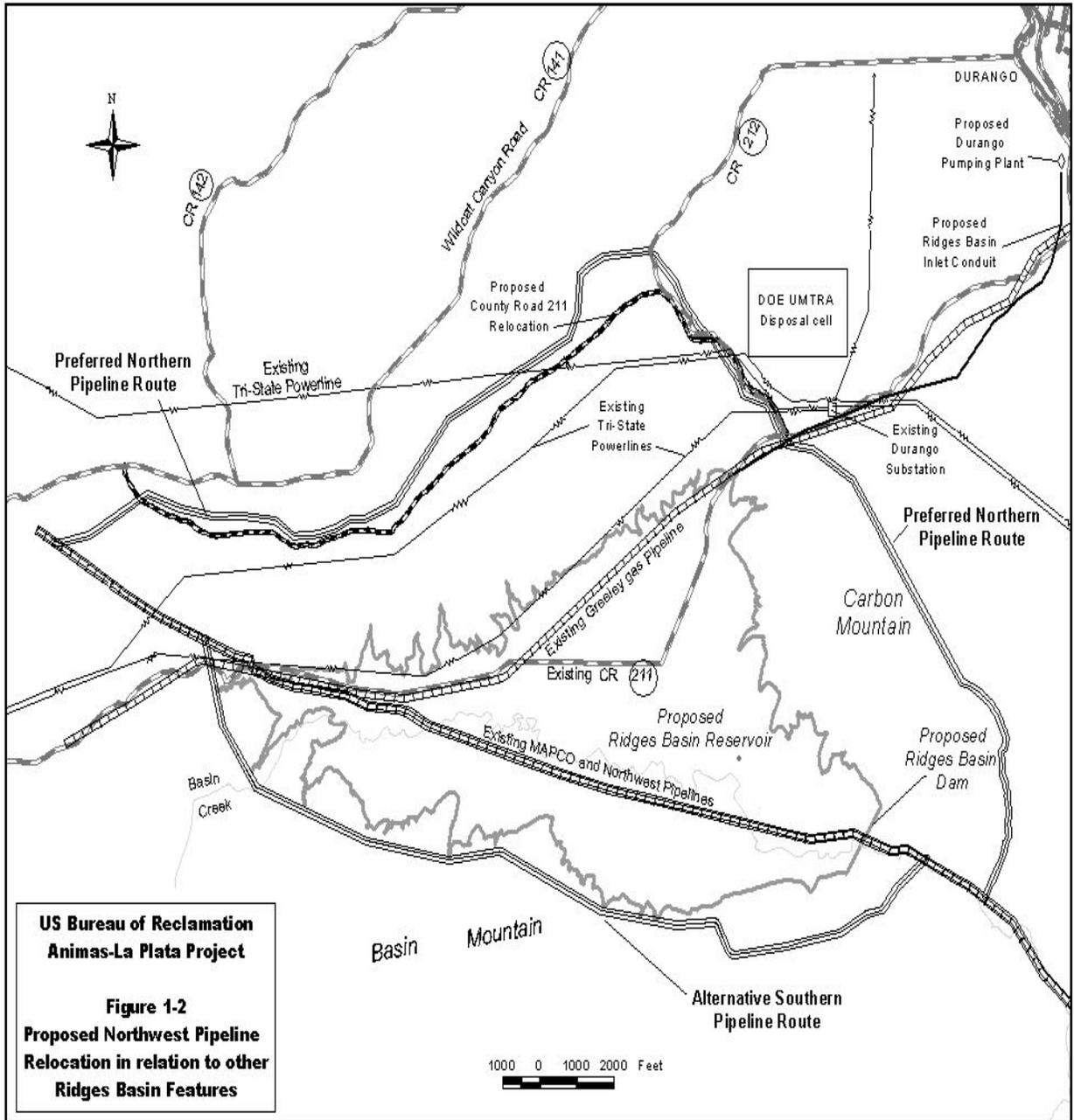
Reclamation's 2000 FSEIS described the potential environmental impact associated with the relocation of the pipelines, road, and transmission line on a gross-impact basis. Since the FSEIS was completed, additional analysis was performed to narrow the 17 potential pipeline routes described in the FSEIS to 2 potentially constructible alternatives. These two routes, the Northern Route Alternative and the Southern Route Alternative, are analyzed in this EA, prepared by Reclamation in compliance with NEPA. The EA tiers off the FSEIS (Reclamation 2000a) and other previous environmental documents prepared by Reclamation. Figure 1-2 shows the existing and proposed facilities at Ridges Basin.

The lead federal agency for the EA is Reclamation. However, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is cooperating with Reclamation because of its responsibilities under the Natural Gas Act (NGA) for determining whether natural gas facilities proposed for use in interstate commerce are in the public interest. Because Northwest's 26-inch-diameter transmission pipeline is under the FERC's jurisdiction, the FERC must issue a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (FERC Certificate) before the pipeline can be relocated. Cooperating with Reclamation in the preparation of this EA will fulfill FERC's responsibilities for a NEPA analysis of Northwest's proposed action.

1.2.3 Related NEPA Compliance Activities

The Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently prepared a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on the Questar, Williams, & Kern River Pipeline Project (BLM 2001). That FEIS analyzed two natural gas pipeline construction proposals and a proposal by Williams to convert the existing 220-mile 10-inch-diameter Bloomfield (New Mexico) to Crescent Junction (Utah) NGL pipeline to transport petroleum products. The 10-inch-diameter NGL pipeline is owned by the William's subsidiary MAPCO, and is one of the pipelines which must be relocated.

**Figure 1-2
Ridges Basin Features
and Facilities to be Relocated**



**US Bureau of Reclamation
Animas-La Plata Project**

**Figure 1-2
Proposed Northwest Pipeline
Relocation in relation to other
Ridges Basin Features**

1.2.4 Other Compliance Activities

Reclamation and Northwest would secure all required Federal, state, and local permits and approvals necessary to relocate the facilities with the exception of the FERC Certificate, which Northwest would be responsible for obtaining. Major permits, licenses, and approvals are shown in table 1-1.

TABLE 1-1

Environmental Permits and Actions Related to ALP Project Pipeline Relocations

Agency	Potential Permit/Action	Agency and Applicant Roles
Interior	Environmental review of potential impacts associated with facility relocations, as required by NEPA.	Reclamation assumes lead responsibility for overall project analysis. Reclamation insures that any commitments resulting from process are implemented during construction of the relocation and become part of the environmental commitment plan for the ALP Project.
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)	Coordination, consultation, and reviews associated with Endangered Species Act (ESA). Coordination for Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (Coordination Act) and take permit for Golden Eagle.	Reclamation responsible for preparation of Biological Assessment. Reclamation responsible for obtaining Golden Eagle Nest Takings Permit. Reclamation would take lead on all required mitigation measures.
FERC	Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity.	Northwest responsible for preparation of FERC application.
U. S. Corps of Engineers (Corps)	Waterbody Crossing Permit (section 10). Nationwide Permit (section 404) may be applicable if only intermittent stream crossing.	Reclamation responsible for any required permits.
Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and appropriate Indian Tribes	Coordination, consultation, and reviews associated with Indian artifacts.	Reclamation to lead consultation with Tribes as necessary. Reclamation assumes lead for all treatment, mitigation, and retrieval of impacted sites.
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms	Explosive User's Permit	Construction contractor to apply.

Department of Energy	Correspondence regarding project proximity to Uranium Mill Tailings Remediation Action (UMTRA) disposal cell site.	Reclamation to initiate.
Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife (CDOW)	Consultation, coordination regarding state species of concern.	Reclamation assumes responsibility for mitigation plans if required.
Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)	Coordination, consultation and reviews associated with National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and Archaeological Resource Protection Act. Update to Programmatic Agreement (PA), which includes pipeline relocation, between Reclamation and SHPO in progress.	Reclamation assumes lead for entire section 106 process, including consultation and coordination (e.g., all treatment, mitigation and retrieval of impacted sites associated with pipeline relocation). FERC is a concurring party to the PA.
Colorado Department of Public Health (DPHE) Division Water Quality	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit for discharge to state waters (i.e., hydrostatic test discharge, trench de-watering). Stormwater Construction Permit for discharge of stormwater during construction activities.	Northwest to initiate. Northwest to initiate
Colorado Department of Natural Resources, Division of Minerals and Geology	Permit for construction borrow pits.	Northwest to initiate
State of Colorado	Water use withdrawal permit (i.e., dust control, hydrostatic testing).	Northwest to initiate as necessary
La Plata County	County road crossing permit/road use.	Reclamation to initiate.

1.3 PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of and need for the ALP Project, as stated in the FSEIS (see section 1.3, page 1-9) is:

“...to implement the Settlement Act by providing the Ute Tribes an assured long-term water supply and water acquisition fund in order to satisfy the Tribe’s senior water rights claims as quantified in the Settlement Act, and to provide for identified M&I water needs in the Project area.” [Federal Register Notice, January 4, 1999]

The purpose and need for the proposed action of relocating three pipelines in Ridges Basin is to allow the construction of the Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir, as an integral part of completing the ALP Project and allowing implementation of the Settlement Act.