U.S. Department of the Interior – Bureau of Reclamation

SAN LUIS DRAINAGE FEATURE RE-EVALUATION

Meeting Summary

Environmental Stakeholder Meeting (and representatives of Contra Costa County, Contra Costa Water District)

March 13, 2002 – Oakland, California

Alternatives Formulation Discussion

Meeting Participants

Terry Young, Environmental Defense
Angela Sherry, Environmental Defense
Hal Candee, Natural Resources Defense Council
Mike Wall, Natural Resources Defense Council
Gary Bobker, The Bay Institute
Lisa Holm, Contra Costa Water District
John Kopchik, Contra Costa County Water Agency
Jason Phillips, Reclamation
Marian Echeverria, Reclamation
Susan Hootkins, URS
Charles Gardiner, PAM

Reclamation is developing and reformulating alternatives for the San Luis Unit Drainage Feature Re-evaluation. In preparing these alternatives, Reclamation developed a set of guiding assumptions to assist the team in refining the preliminary alternatives and identifying a short list of alternatives for detailed evaluation in summer 2002. Reclamation met with representatives of several environmental organizations, Contra Costa County, and Contra Costa Water District that were unable to attend the stakeholder workshop in Santa Nella on March 6. Participants discussed the status of the alternatives formulation process and the planned milestones for 2002.

Meeting Purpose and Objectives

- Review and discuss approach to alternatives formulation
- Review current alternatives
- Obtain input to make alternatives complete

Drainage Quantity and Quality

Jason Phillips, Reclamation, reviewed the language of the Court Order that specifies that Reclamation will provide drainage service and that a plan that does not provide drainage would be unacceptable to the Court. (Later in the meeting, John Kopchik noted that Reclamation's interpretation of Judge Wanger's comments from the bench sounded unnecessarily narrow. In John's view, any plan that is implementable and ultimately will provide full drainage service will satisfy the Court.) Jason noted that participants in the stakeholder workshop were also interested in interim actions that could be implemented immediately to address the drainage problem. He also reviewed the efforts underway to update the quantity and quality of drainwater for drainage service. Participants had the following comments and suggestions regarding drainage need.

- Reclamation should review recent studies of irrigation efficiency and drainage rates for the San Luis Unit that would provide a more accurate (and lower) projection of drainwater volumes. The current estimates of .5 and .3 as presented in the Preliminary Alternatives Report are definitely too high. Better estimates of irrigation efficiency may be derived from recent and proposed (i.e., 2009) Grassland drainage amounts and drainage outputs from the various stages of Integrated On-Farm Drainage Management.
- Reclamation should review the previous court cases (e.g., Barcellos judgment) to confirm the geographic areas where Reclamation has an obligation to provide drainage service. If there are areas where Reclamation will not provide water (e.g. as a result of Broadview water sale), there would be no obligation to provide drainage service.
- Reclamation should consider economic incentives to achieve reductions in drainwater, including tiered water pricing, tiered drainage pricing, and tradable discharge permits. The program designed to control selenium with the Grassland Area Farmers has already proven that this kind of a system can control drainage efficiently and effectively. Moreover, these mechanisms can be instituted as part of the water conservation activities required by CVPIA.
- In the drainage need analysis, Reclamation should include consideration of the optimal placement of tile systems (shallower) to reduce drainwater volume. Reclamation should include an economic analysis to identify who could install tile drains.
- Reclamation should get a review of the analysis and conclusions that will be presented in the Source Control report from irrigation efficiency experts both within and outside California.

Land Retirement

Jason Phillips reviewed the status of alternatives and the approach to formulating and optimizing alternatives around four disposal concepts. He noted that there will be alternatives that test how drainage service solutions (treatment and disposal) would vary if substantial land retirement were implemented (such as the Westlands proposal to retire 200,000 acres). Participants provided the following comments and suggestions regarding land retirement.

- There is broad agreement that land retirement is a solution to the drainage problems in the San Luis Unit, yet it appears that there is not a land retirement alternative.
- Reclamation should include scenarios with both aggressive (200,000 acres) and intermediate levels of land retirement (as described in the Rainbow Report) as part of every alternative.

The idea that there are "too many alternatives" is insufficient rationale for omitting these land retirement scenarios.

- Reclamation should also consider that the 200,000-acre land retirement proposal may not fully address the drainage problem.

Landfill Alternatives

Participants provided the following comments and suggestions regarding the alternatives focused on landfill disposal.

- Reclamation should use an alternate title (other than Landfill) for these alternatives so that the following two disposal mechanisms are understood as part of this alternative: 1) disposal of leftover salts in a centralized location after implementation of IFDM practices, and 2) marketable reuse of the those leftover salts.
- In developing a complete alternative that would result in marketable reuse of salts, Reclamation should identify the steps necessary to create a market (e.g., research and development) and develop a budget to do so.
- Reclamation should include electricity-generating solar ponds as one of its alternatives, and as a part of other alternatives.

Delta Alternatives

Jason Phillips reviewed the Delta discharge alternatives and noted the challenge of meeting the current 5 part-per-billion selenium standard in the Delta. The team is reviewing potential outfall locations and treatment technologies to determine if a feasible Delta outfall could be developed.

Participants noted that current narrative standards may well preclude a discharge in the amount allowed by a 5ppb numerical standard because it would harm consumers (i.e., fish, birds, and humans) of food chain organisms in the delta and estuary. The more restrictive discharge should be evaluated.

Other Alternatives

Participants suggested several additional alternatives for Reclamation consideration.

- Reclamation should evaluate an alternative where Reclamation does not provide water to areas with drainage problems. Water law prevents delivery of CVP water for uses that do not meet the requirement for beneficial use. Reclamation should not assume that the land in the San Luis Unit is entitled to water deliveries under current law, because the courts have said that determining the reasonable use of water is not a permanent decision, but subject to review.
- Reclamation should evaluate an alternative that examines coordinated groundwater pumping and management (combined with reduced water deliveries) in any area where it would lower the shallow groundwater to manage the drainage problem. This concept was included in the Rainbow Report.

Related Activities

Jason Phillips reviewed the other related activities underway, including the settlement discussions, the "global agreement" discussions, and the Westside Integrated Water Resources Plan (IRP). Participants had the following comments and suggestions about related projects.

- Reclamation should provide a briefing on the Section 3408 Plan (Water Supply Augmentation) and the Westside IRP.
- Reclamation should coordinate the San Luis Drainage Feature Re-evaluation with the EIS for Westlands Contract Renewals, which includes assumptions about drainage service costs and rates.

Other Comments and Suggestions

Participants provided the following additional comments about regulations and costs.

- The listing of water quality standards should include the narrative standards for each potential receiving body.
- Reclamation should consider the limitations in current Basin Plans and Regional Board practices for each potential disposal area. For example, the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board has a ban on construction of new drainage systems.
- The Reclamation portion of the costs of the drainage service alternatives should not include the cost of on-farm drainage management activities, unless these activities are defined as "drainage service" pursuant to the court order. In any case, Grasslands and Westlands should be treated the same (both reimbursed or both not reimbursed).
- Reclamation should inform and involve other CVP water and power contractors, who may be affected by the costs of the drainage service alternatives.

Schedule

Jason Phillips reviewed the anticipated milestones for 2002.

- Final Alternatives (short list of alternatives for detailed evaluation) – June 2002
- Source Control Report (updated analysis of drainage service need) – June 2002
- Preliminary Evaluation of Alternatives (internal evaluation results) – September 2002
- Preliminary Preferred Drainage Service Plan – December 2002