RECLAMATION
Managing Water in the West

Proposed Windy Gap Firming Project National Environmental Policy Act, EIS Process
Most Frequently Asked Questions

November 2011

Reclamation has prepared a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Comments from the public and participating agencies have been received, considered and incorporated into the Final EIS as either a change or a response. The following questions are those asked most often of Reclamation staff over the course of the Windy Gap Firming Project NEPA process since its inception in 2003.

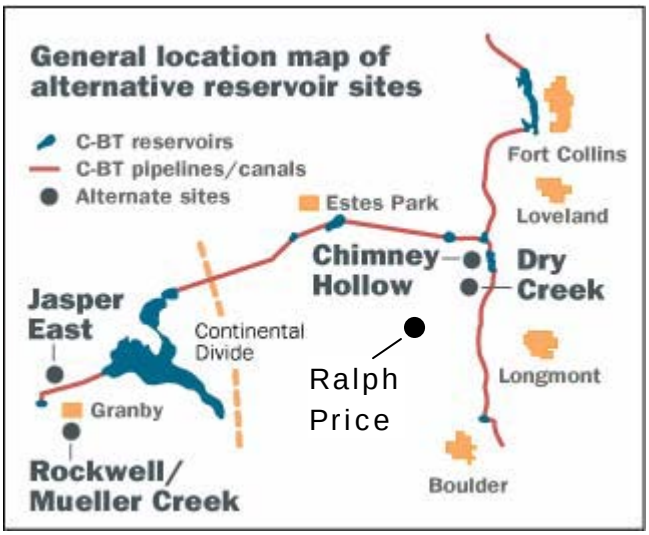
1. Why is Reclamation preparing an EIS for the proposed Windy Gap Firming Project?
The Municipal Subdistrict of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District (Subdistrict) has proposed the Windy Gap Firming Project (WGFP). Reclamation has an existing contract with the Subdistrict for conveyance and storage of water from the existing Windy Gap project. The proposed WGFP may require a new contract, or an amendment to the existing contract and could also include construction of a new reservoir that would link directly or indirectly to the Colorado-Big Thompson project (C-BT). Because Reclamation owns the C-BT facilities, Reclamation is the lead agency for the NEPA review. Reclamation chose to start the NEPA review directly at the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) level because it is anticipated that the proposed WGFP would have significant impacts to the human environment. The preferred alternative and any environmental mitigation measures will be documented in a Record of Decision signed by Reclamation.

2. Who is paying for the environmental review of the WGFP?
Because they proposed the WGFP, the Subdistrict is paying all Reclamation costs related to preparation of the EIS and the necessary contract(s). In accordance with Reclamation policy, payment for environmental reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) are the obligation of the entities making the proposal, ensuring that: 1) Reclamation does not curtail its evaluations based on its federal budget; and 2) *all* federal taxpayers do not pay to analyze a proposal benefiting only a small group.

3. **Will Reclamation gain power generation if WGFP is approved?**
This topic is addressed in the EIS. The WGFP would result in the conveyance of additional water through the CB-T system and the potential generation of additional power. The extent of increased power generation is related to how much additional water goes through the CB--T project power plants and is discussed in the final EIS.

5. What are the alternatives for the WGFP being studied in the EIS?

Five alternatives, including the Proposed Action and a No Action Alternative, are evaluated in the EIS. All action alternatives include development of 90,000 AF of new storage in either a single reservoir on the East Slope, or in a combination of East and West Slope reservoirs. The five alternatives are:



- Alternative 1: No Reclamation Action, contract not amended for use of C-BT facilities. Instead, enlargement of Ralph Price Reservoir and acquisition or construction of other unidentified reservoir storage is proposed as well as maximizing delivery of Windy Gap water using existing infrastructure and agreements.
- Alternative 2: Proposed Action, Chimney Hollow Reservoir (90,000 AF) with Prepositioning
- Alternative 3: Chimney Hollow Reservoir (70,000 AF) and Jasper East Reservoir (20,000 AF)
- Alternative 4: Chimney Hollow Reservoir (70,000 AF) and Rockwell/Mueller Creek Reservoir (20,000 AF)
- Alternative 5: Dry Creek Reservoir (60,000 AF) and Rockwell/Mueller Creek Reservoir (30,000 AF)

To read about the first round of evaluations that narrowed the field of alternatives, please view the Alternatives Report at http://www.usbr.gov/gp/ecao/wgfp_alternatives0905.pdf.

6. What is prepositioning and what is Reclamation's role in deciding if it can be implemented?

"Prepositioning" is a component of Alternative 2, the Subdistrict's Proposed Action, that would place, or "preposition," C-BT project water in a new East Slope reservoir that is not part of the C-BT Project. Putting C-BT water in this reservoir would make room in Granby Reservoir for WGFP water. This available storage in Lake Granby improves the yield of the WGFP in a manner similar to providing a storage reservoir (such as Jasper East or Rockwell/Mueller) on the west slope. Windy Gap water pumped into Granby would be exchanged for the C-BT water stored in the new East Slope reservoir. Under the proposed operation, prepositioning does not change the total amount of C-BT storage or delivery, but it would affect the location of storage and increase the Windy Gap Project's firm yield.

It is Reclamation's responsibility to determine whether or not prepositioning can be implemented in a manner that does not conflict with existing Reclamation authorities and the operating principles for the C-BT Project as outlined in Senate Document 80.

7. What is the study area for the EIS?

The study area for the WGFP EIS includes all areas potentially affected by the alternatives being considered in the EIS. On the West Slope, this generally includes the Colorado-Big Thompson system including the Three-Lakes area, Willow Creek, the potential Jasper East and Rockwell/Mueller Creek Reservoir sites, and the Colorado River downstream of Granby and Windy Gap reservoirs to Gore Canyon. On the East Slope this includes C-BT storage facilities at Carter Lake and Horsetooth Reservoir, streams receiving Windy Gap water, and potential new reservoir sites at Chimney Hollow and Dry Creek. In addition, the study area for the No Action alternative includes Ralph Price Reservoir and North St. Vrain Creek and St. Vrain Creek.

8. What studies were conducted to evaluate the effects of the WGFP?

Reclamation and its environmental contractor conducted numerous studies in the evaluation of the five alternatives for the WGFP proposal. Technical Reports detail that work and related findings. Reports include air quality and noise, aquatic resources, geology and soils, water quality, land use, recreation, socio-economics, water modeling for lakes, reservoirs and streams, vegetation and wildlife. These reports are available to the public at www.usbr.gov/gp/ecao.

9. How were effects to water quality evaluated?

Water quality in the Colorado River was evaluated using a QUAL2K model that was initially developed by the Environmental Protection Agency. The model evaluated effects of the alternatives on temperature, nutrients, dissolved oxygen, and conductivity in the Colorado River. Additional temperature analysis was done using a dynamic model developed specifically to evaluate the effects of the WGFP on temperatures in the Colorado River from Granby Reservoir to the confluence with the Williams Fork. Potential water quality effects in Lake Granby, Shadow Mountain Reservoir, and Grand Lake were evaluated using the Three Lakes water quality model developed in 2003 to address changes in water quality for these reservoirs. Water quality in other streams and reservoirs in the study area were evaluated using the results of the above model outputs and other sources of data. The EIS presents the anticipated effects on water quality from the proposed WGFP and its alternatives.

10. How were effects to fisheries and other aquatic resources evaluated?

Fishery effects in streams and reservoirs were evaluated using output from hydrologic, water quality, and instream flow modeling, output from the dynamic temperature model, and other available data from a variety of sources. Potential effects to aquatic resources in the Colorado River were evaluated using streamflow measurements and modeling of changes in aquatic habitat. Reclamation also consulted with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In particular, work with the Fish and Wildlife Service focused on possible effects related to the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program. The Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Biological Opinion in 2010. The Section 7 consultation process would be completed, assuming an action alternative is selected, when the Subdistrict pays a depletion fee for depletions to the Upper Colorado River attributable to the WGFP.

11. What reasonably foreseeable actions were considered in the cumulative effects analysis?

"Reasonably Foreseeable" is a term used to describe future actions that are considered likely to occur regardless of the implementation of any of the WGFP alternatives. As such, they are included in the NEPA study under a "cumulative effects analysis." For the WGFP EIS, reasonably foreseeable actions include:

a) The expansion of Denver Water's Moffat Collection System to divert an average annual 18,000 acre-feet of additional water from the Fraser basin.
b) Changes in the delivery of the East and West slope water users commitments to deliver 10,825 acre-feet of water to the 15-mile reach on the Colorado River as part of the Recovery Program for endangered fish. It was assumed that water will not be released from Wolford and Williams Fork Reservoirs in the future, but will be delivered from some point downstream of Grand County.
c) Changes anticipated by Denver Water in management of the Big Lake Ditch near Williams Fork Reservoir
d) Relaxation of the Shoshone Power Plant water rights call under certain dry year conditions per the agreement between Denver Water and Excel Energy.
e) Additional growth and demand for water in Grand and Summit Counties.

12. Where does water conservation fit in?

Each participating municipality in the Windy Gap Firming Project currently uses water conservation measures to extend their supplies and reduce overall demand. However, as discussed in the Purpose and Need Report for the WGFP published in September 2005, even with these measures in place, water demand will exceed the available firm supply in the near future. Consequently, the declared Purpose and Need of the WGFP is to provide about 30,000 acre-feet of firm water supply from the existing Windy Gap water rights. To assure that WGFP participants make the best use possible of additional water from the western slope, the final EIS includes mitigation that requires all participants in the WGFP to have a water conservation plan developed in accordance with the requirements of Colorado Revised Statute 37-60-126 prior to the initial delivery of any water after construction of the WGFP.

13. What are the minimum flow requirements in the Colorado River and what will the impact of WGFP be on those flows?

In accordance with the Windy Gap project existing water rights, there are three places where minimum instream flows must be met before the existing Windy Gap project can divert water. They are:

- 90 cfs downstream of the Windy Gap diversion
- 135 cfs at the mouth of Williams Fork
- 150 cfs at the mouth of Troublesome Creek.

Additionally once every three years the Subdistrict must provide a 450 cfs flushing flow for 50 hours unless equivalent flows occur naturally.

These requirements are in accordance with an agreement between the Subdistrict and the Colorado Division of Wildlife signed on June 23, 1980 and are not proposed to be changed by the proposed WGFP. However, there would be changes in Colorado River flows as a result of the WGFP. The extent of these effects is disclosed in the final EIS.

14. Will WGFP Participants and the West Slope receive more water from the Windy Gap Project than they currently get?

Overall there would be more water diverted to the eastern slope than under existing conditions or the No Action alternative. However, none of the east slope participants in the WGFP would receive any more water than they are entitled to from the Windy Gap Project. Their shares of Windy Gap water would be delivered on a more reliable basis. In accordance with existing agreements between the Subdistrict and the Middle Park Water Conservancy District, annually Middle Park is entitled to the first 3,000 acre-feet of water from the Windy Gap project when Windy Gap diverts water to Lake Granby. However, this water is not always available depending upon hydrology and availability of storage space in Lake Granby. If, in a particular year, the Windy Gap water rights do not come into priority or there is insufficient excess capacity in Lake Granby to warrant pumping, neither Middle Park nor the participants will receive any water from the Windy gap Project in that year. Discussions are on-going between the Subdistrict and Middle Park on ways to firm the water supply Middle Park receives from the Windy Gap Project.

15. What role does Grand County's 1041 permitting have in the EIS process?

Grand County has regulatory authority under Colorado H.B. 1041, which allows counties to regulate activities designated as matters of state interest, such as municipal and industrial water projects. County permitting requirements are outside of the jurisdiction of Reclamation. As a result, Reclamation takes no position on whether or not a 1041 permit will be required for the WGFP. Reclamation has suggested that Grand County discuss their 1041 requirements with the Municipal Subdistrict.

16. Will there be mitigation for the Firming Project? How is it determined and what might it be?

Yes, mitigation is currently under development. It is based on the magnitude and extent of adverse effects. Identification of alternatives, their study, and public comment help drive what is considered for mitigation.

Additionally, in Colorado, CRS 37-60-122.2 requires proponents of water projects to work with the Colorado Division of Wildlife to develop a Fish and Wildlife Mitigation Plan (FWMP) for identified adverse effects to fish and wildlife resources. Additionally the statute allows proponents to develop a Fish and Wildlife Enhancement Plan (FWEP) to improve fish and wildlife resources to better than what existed prior to the project. The Subdistrict submitted a FWEP along with the FWMP and both were recently adopted by the Colorado Wildlife Commission and the Colorado Water Conservation Board. Reclamation is awaiting a letter from Colorado indicating that the approved mitigation plans are Colorado's position on mitigation required for the WGFP. Reclamation intends to adopt the FWMP and provide it to the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) as the mitigation proposal for the project. They are expected to use the FWMP in the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act Report to Reclamation on the WGFP.

17. When will the final products be available?

The Final EIS came available November 30, 2011. The Record of Decision will be issued no sooner than 30 days after the final EIS is released.

18. Where can I go for more information?

To learn more about the proposed Windy Gap Firming Project, please visit the Municipal Subdistrict of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District's website at http://www.ncwcd.org/project_features/wgp_main.asp.

To learn more about Reclamation's Environmental Impact Statement and NEPA process, please visit http://www.usbr.gov/gp/nepa/quarterly.cfm