United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
Albuquerque Area Office
555 Broadway Blvd. NE, Suite 100
Albuquerque, NM 87102-2352

TAKE PRIDE IN AMERICA

IN REPLY REFER TO:

ALB-175
ENV-6.00

JAN 12 2007

Subject: Scoping Notice, San Acacia Fish Passage and Related Works Environmental Assessment, Socorro County, New Mexico

Dear Interested Party:

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), the Bureau of Reclamation is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) to evaluate the environmental and other impacts resulting from four interrelated federal actions. Reclamation will consider the results of the EA in deciding whether to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact or to require additional environmental analysis. The four projects to be evaluated are as follows:

- Construct and operate fish passage for the federally protected silvery minnow at the San Acacia diversion dam (SADD), as required by the March 17, 2003, Biological and Conference Opinions issued by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS);

- Construct and operate a siphon under the Rio Grande to improve efficiency and flexibility of irrigation operations for the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD);

- Conduct maintenance or construction activities to protect a portion of the Drain Unit 7 extension that is just upstream of the SADD; and

- Maintain the apron below the SADD to protect the dam.

All four projects are within the Rio Grande basin and in the general vicinity of San Acacia. The projects are being considered together because elements of their construction, location, and operations are interrelated. Operation of the siphon is likely to affect river flows at the SADD necessary for fish passage and the upstream availability of silvery minnow habitat. The Drain Unit 7 extension maintenance site and the apron maintenance site are near the locations proposed for the fish passage at the SADD. Reclamation is exploring ways to coordinate work in the vicinity of the SADD to ensure effectiveness of the fish passage and to efficiently complete the necessary maintenance projects.

Scoping, as defined in the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, is "an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action." This scoping period is meant to provide interested members

of the public, Native American tribes, local governments, and organizations an opportunity to comment on the proposed projects and to obtain information that will focus the EA on important issues. The MRGCD, the USFWS, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, and the US Army Corps of Engineers have been invited to be cooperating agencies in this NEPA process.

The scoping process helps Reclamation to identify the following:

- The important issues, resource concerns, and possible impacts to be addressed in the EA;
- Those issues that are not important, or that have been addressed by prior environmental review, eliminate from further study;
- Existing information sources;
- Other environmental review, permits, and consultation requirements; and
- Alternatives to be evaluated in the EA.

Please send written comments to the Bureau of Reclamation, Albuquerque Area Office, Attention: Mr. Charles Fischer, 555 Broadway NE, Suite 100, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102. We request your comments no later than March 1, 2007, in order for them to be considered in the preparation of the Draft EA. Comments may also be sent by fax to Mr. Fischer at 505-462-3780 or by e-mail to cfischer@uc.usbr.gov.

We make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from public disclosure, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public disclosure in their entirety.

Public scoping meetings will be held during February in Socorro and Albuquerque. The dates and locations of the meetings are as follows:

February 1, Macey Center (Galena Room) at New Mexico Tech, Socorro

February 2, Student Union Building, Lobo A and B, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque

The meetings will begin at 7 p.m. with an open house, followed at 7:30 p.m. with a brief presentation. The meetings will conclude with additional opportunities to learn about the project and to provide comments.

Following the scoping period, Reclamation will prepare a draft EA and will notify the public of its availability. The draft EA will be posted on Reclamation's environmental documents Web site: http://137.77.133.1/uc/albuq/envdocs/index.html.

The EA will present an analysis of the physical, biological, social, cultural, and economic effects of the proposed action and no action alternative. Any mitigation needed to reduce impacts will be identified. A review period will begin when the draft EA is released to give the public an opportunity to review the document and to offer comments. For further information or questions, please contact Mr. Charles Fischer at 505-462-3656.

Sincerely,

FOR Connie L. Rupp
Area Manager