

RIVER NOTES

A Newsletter of the Carlsbad Project Water Operations & Water Supply Conservation EIS

October 2002

Environmental Study to be Prepared

The US Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) are preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) addressing re-operation of the Sumner Dam and implementation of a water acquisition program in the Pecos basin.

The Carlsbad Project Water Operations and Water Supply Conservation Project is needed for Reclamation to comply with the Endangered Species Act by protecting the threatened Pecos bluntnose shiner. In 1991, the US Fish and Wildlife Service issued a biological opinion indicating that operation of Reclamation's Pecos River facilities was jeopardizing the continued existence of the shiner.

In 1992, Reclamation began a cooperative research program aimed at determining how to meet the needs of the Pecos bluntnose shiner and downstream water users. This ongoing investigation has revealed that operating Sumner Dam in a manner that would protect the Pecos bluntnose shiner would mean an additional net depletion from the Pecos River system. Therefore the project is needed to

conserve the Carlsbad Project water supply.

To meet these legal mandates, Reclamation and ISC are proposing to revise dam operations and develop a water acquisition and management program. Supplemental water may be obtained from a variety of sources, including water rights acquisition from willing sellers and water rights leasing. The effect of revised dam operations on New Mexico's Pecos River Compact obligations and water deliveries at the New Mexico-Texas state line will be analyzed as a resource impact indicator.

Key issues to be addressed in the EIS include:

- * What are the needs of the shiner?
- * How much water will be required to meet these needs?
- * How can operations be modified to provide flows?
- * How will water be obtained to protect the shiner and to maintain supply to the Carlsbad Project while meeting delivery obligations at the New Mexico-Texas state line?

The EIS is being prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act

(NEPA). This law requires federal agencies to assess environmental impacts of their proposed action before action is taken. Compliance with NEPA is generally obtained by preparation of an environmental assessment or a more intensive EIS.

In 1997, Reclamation began preparation of an environmental assessment. After obtaining input from the public and other federal and state agencies, Reclamation determined that an EIS should be prepared. Reclamation and ISC have worked to develop a Memorandum of Agreement for conducting the EIS as joint leads. In order to address conflicting goals between the two lead agencies, Reclamation proposed that two EISs be conducted: one addressing Reclamation's needs (the Carlsbad Project Water Operations and Water Supply Conservation EIS) and another focusing on ISC's needs.

Public Involvement Encouraged

Public participation is a key component of the EIS process, allowing decision-makers to fully understand the concerns and interests of individuals, organizations, and agencies. Additionally, public involvement helps identify relevant environmental and socioeconomic issues and data, and allows for refinement of alternatives to the proposed action. Reclamation and ISC are implementing a public involvement process for the EIS.

Four scoping meetings will be held the week of October 21st in Santa Rosa, Ft. Sumner,

Carlsbad, and Roswell, New Mexico. This is an opportunity for the public to learn more about the project and to provide their comments.

Reclamation and ISC are also soliciting written comments, including letters, faxes, or e-mail.

To keep the public informed, newsletters will be distributed periodically. Copies of the Draft EIS will be made available for public review and comment, likely sometime in the fall of 2003. Public meetings will be held to answer questions on the Draft EIS and obtain verbal comments.

Public Meetings Schedule

Endangered fish!

Carlsbad Project needs!

Appropriated river!

Water for fish!

Water rights acquisition!

Compact obligations!

Please come help us identify other environmental issues and concerns. Reclamation will conduct four scoping meetings to obtain public input on the Carlsbad Project Water Operations and Water Supply Conservation EIS. The dates and locations are below. All meetings will take place from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm.

October 21st, City Hall Meeting Room,
141 5th St., Santa Rosa, NM

October 22nd, Village Community House,
204 N. 4th St., Ft. Sumner, NM

October 23rd, Pecos River Village Confer-
ence Center, Room 3, 711 Muscatel,
Carlsbad, NM

October 24th, Bureau of Land Management
Conference Rm, 2909 W. 2nd St.,
Roswell, NM

Project Timeline

Publish NOI
October 2002



Public Scoping Meetings
October 2002



Alternative development
and analysis
winter 2002/2003



Draft EIS
fall 2003



Public Meetings
fall 2003



Final EIS
summer 2004

Pecos Bluntnose Shiner Studies

The Pecos bluntnose shiner (shiner) is a member of the minnow family that is found only in a 225-mile stretch of New Mexico's Pecos River between Sumner Dam in De Baca County and Brantley Reservoir in Eddy County. In 1987, the shiner was federally-listed as a threatened species, along with its critical habitat, under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. About 100 miles of the Pecos River were designated as critical habitat for the shiner.

In 1992, several federal and state agencies began to research the shiner and its habitat needs. Information was collected on both the shiner and flows within the Pecos River. It was found that the best habitat for the shiner is between Taiban Creek and the City

of Roswell in Chaves County, New Mexico.

The shiner has an extended reproduction season and is able to spawn (release eggs) from April through September, although the peak spawning season is during the summer months.



The shiner is stimulated to spawn by increases in river flows. It releases eggs that float for up to two days prior to hatching. After hatching, the young drift for up to four days before settling in still-water areas for feeding. When irrigation deliveries are made and large amounts of water are released from Sumner Dam, the shiner spawns and eggs and larvae are transported downstream. Since the young shiner are unable to escape the current until they are about six days old, many are carried downstream and into Brantley Reservoir when irrigation deliveries are made. The shiners do not survive in Brantley Reservoir.

Shiners can live up to two to three years and have an average length of about 2.2 inches, but can grow to over three inches. Shiners

prefer shallow areas with low-velocity flows over a sand bottom. Habitat needs are complex and involve not only the depth and speed at which the water is flowing, but also the shape of the river bottom. The shiner and other native fish use underwater dunes, pools, and backwaters created by a shifting sand river bottom. These types of habitats are not available at extremely low or extremely high flows.

Information collected during these studies will be used to develop guidelines for operating Sumner Dam. Modified operations are expected to help conserve the shiner in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. At Reclamation's request, some initial flow management recommendations have been made. Fish researchers have recommended that irrigation releases from Sumner Dam should not last longer than 15 days to help reduce the washing of young downstream. To help make river habitat suitable for the shiner, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has recommended a constant flow at the US Geological Survey's Acme gauge.

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Cooperative Effort

The successful implementation of the Carlsbad Project Water Operations & Water Supply EIS requires the participation and expertise of many federal, state, and local agencies. The following agencies have been requested to participate in the preparation of the EIS:

US Fish and Wildlife Service

US Army Corps of Engineers

NM Department of Game and Fish

Chaves County

Eddy County

Carlsbad Irrigation District

Fort Sumner Irrigation District

Pecos Valley Artesian Conservancy District

Pecos Valley Water Users Organization

DeBaca County

