

RIVER NOTES

A Newsletter of the Carlsbad Project Water Operations & Water Supply Conservation EIS
November 2004

Review Committee Meeting Planned

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission (NMISC) are pleased to announce a meeting of the Review Committee for the Carlsbad Project Water Operations and Water Supply Conservation Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in Roswell on **December 9th 2004** from 9:00 to 11:30 AM. The meeting will be held in the Roswell Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management at 2909 West Second Street. The EIS Review Committee consists of the Reclamation Area Manager, the NMISC Engineer, and invited representatives of each of the EIS cooperating agencies.

The EIS Review Committee was created to facilitate EIS project coordination and information exchange and review important documentation. The Review Committee may make recommendations to the executive committee with respect to the EIS process but has no decision-making role. The meeting will provide an overview of the EIS process and update the committee on progress made since the last meeting. There will also be an opportunity to comment and ask questions. For further information on the review committee please contact Ms. Marsha Carra (505) 462-3602 or Ms. Sara Rhoton (505) 827-3996. For directions to the Roswell Field Office please call (505) 627-0272.

Overview of the Carlsbad Water Operations EIS

Reclamation and the NMISC are preparing the EIS to address changes in Pecos River water operations and implementation of a water acquisition program in the Pecos River basin. Reclamation needs to ensure that the way water is released from Sumner Dam complies with the Endangered Species Act and conserves the threatened Pecos bluntnose shiner (shiner). Modified operations would mean an additional net depletion from the Carlsbad Project water supply which would need to be offset by a water acquisition program.

Alternatives have been developed and screened by interagency technical workgroups. These alternatives focus on flow targets and ranges at either the Acme or Taiban gage, and changes to the frequency, duration, and timing of irrigation block releases. A wide variety of options for offsetting the anticipated depletions to Carlsbad Project water supply or providing flows for the shiner are also being evaluated and impacts will be disclosed in the EIS.

Relevant resource data has been gathered and the Affected Environment chapter of the EIS has been drafted. An initial analysis of the potential effects of the alternatives and water offset options is in progress. The Draft EIS is scheduled to be printed and distributed to the public in August 2005, followed by public meetings and a formal comment period. Comments will be addressed and a Final EIS will be released in May 2006. Following another formal comment period, Reclamation will issue a Record of Decision in July 2006.

EIS Open House Scheduled for Roswell

Prior to the Review Committee Meeting, Reclamation and the NMISC will host an informational open house in Roswell on December 8th, 2004, from 4:00 to 8:00 PM. EIS management and technical staff will be available to answer questions and discuss issues and preliminary results of the impact analysis. Informal presentations will be given on the NEPA process and alternatives, biology, water operations, and modeling and socioeconomics. This will be a good opportunity for stakeholders in the Pecos Basin to discuss issues with the resource experts and EIS management team.

Where: BLM, Roswell Field Office, 2909 West Second Street.

When: December 8th from 4:00 to 8:00 PM.

Schedule:

4:00-6:00 pm – Open House, Poster Session and one-on-one informal discussions.

6:00-7:00 pm – Presentation on NEPA and Alternatives, Biology, Water Operations and Models and Socioeconomics.

7:00-7:30 pm – Question and answer session.

7:30-8:00 pm – Return to open house.

Project Timeline

Draft EIS
August 2005



Public Meetings
Fall 2005



Public Comment Period
August-October 2005



Final EIS
May 2006



Final EIS
Public Comment Period
April-June 2006



Record of
Decision
July 2006

Adaptive Management Guidelines Workgroup Formed

A workgroup consisting of agency representatives and resource specialists has been formed to develop guidelines for an Adaptive Management Plan (AMP). An AMP has been proposed as an element of all of the action alternatives in the EIS. Adaptive management is based on the recognition that the effects of management actions on resource systems are often unpredictable and changes in management may be required to respond to dynamic conditions. Adaptive management defines a procedure for addressing uncertainty and responding to changing conditions that affect management of river operations.

The workgroup is outlining the procedures for monitoring various indicators and modifying river operations, if needed. When completed, these guidelines will provide the framework for the AMP which will be finalized

after the EIS is completed. The final AMP will incorporate the guidelines developed through this collaborative process. The AMP will be designed to ensure that the EIS decisions will satisfy the requirements of the EIS purpose and need. At a minimum, the AMP will contain the following:

- Roles and responsibilities,
- Flow/depletion accounting system,
- General monitoring in addition to flows,
 - Triggers that require changes in river operations or additional offsets,
 - Management options to respond to triggers,
 - Management options to respond to changing conditions and opportunities for additional conservation actions,
 - Decision process, and
 - Record-keeping and Reporting.

The workgroup is coordinating with the EIS Management team and technical workgroups on the content and progress of the guidelines, since they may influence the selection and development of the Preferred Alternative and mitigation measures.

Funding Provided for Water Leasing Program

Reclamation Commissioner John Keys has announced that over \$550,000 in emergency drought funding will be made available for Pecos River water leasing. The Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to undertake activities that minimize losses and damages resulting from drought. Commissioner Keys stated "This emergency funding will allow Reclamation to lease Pecos River water from willing parties to ensure the flows for the Pecos bluntnose shiner..." Reclamation has managed a water leasing program in the Pecos River basin for nearly ten years, and leases water only from interested and willing parties.

Long-Term Miscellaneous Purposes Contract EIS

A separate EIS is being prepared concurrently by the NMISC and Reclamation. Reclamation's proposed Federal action is to allow the NMISC to use Carlsbad Project water for release from facilities serving the Carlsbad Project for purposes other than irrigation. The underlying need for Reclamation's action is to help the NMISC comply with the Pecos River Compact for state line deliveries. Since this action is proceeding independently and on a different schedule than the Carlsbad Water Operations EIS, it has a separate public involvement process. If you are interested in learning more about the Miscellaneous Purposes EIS or commenting on this action, please contact Ms. Sara Rhoton (505) 827-3996, srhoton@ose.state.nm.us or Ms. Marsha Carra (505) 462-3602, mcarra@uc.usbr.gov.

Public Participation Requested

Public participation is a key component of the EIS process. Please call or e-mail your comments. The Bureau of Reclamation point of contact for the EIS is Ms. Marsha Carra (505) 462-3602, mcarra@uc.usbr.gov. The New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission point of contact is Ms. Sara Rhoton (505) 827-3996, srhoton@ose.state.nm.us.

The Draft EIS is currently scheduled for completion in August 2005. When completed, copies of the Draft EIS will be made available for public review and public meetings will be held to answer questions and obtain verbal comments.

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