Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Bureau of Reclamation Federal Rio Grande Project New Mexico-Texas Operating Procedures, Dona Ana, Sierra, and Socorro Counties, New Mexico and El Paso County, Texas

Proposed agency action:	Implement adjusted operating procedures for the Bureau of Reclamation's Federal Rio Grande Project.
Type of statement:	Environmental Assessment
Lead agency:	Bureau of Reclamation, Upper Colorado Region, Albuquerque Area Office
Cooperating agencies:	None
For further information:	Mr. Filiberto Cortez Bureau of Reclamation, El Paso Field Division 10737 Gateway West, Suite 350 El Paso, TX 78935 (915) 534-6300 fcortez@uc.usbr.gov
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Finding of No Significant Impact

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA), the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Albuquerque Area Office has conducted an environmental assessment of a proposed action to finalize adjusted Operating Procedures for the Rio Grande Project. Reclamation is responsible for managing the Rio Grande Project and is the lead agency for the purposes of compliance with NEPA for this proposed action.

Alternatives

The environmental assessment analyzed the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action of adjusting the Operating Procedures for the Rio Grande Project.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation integral to both alternatives is to increase and improve monitoring of all water deliveries and return flows and reduce spills of Rio Grande Project water. Reclamation's Water 2025 Challenge Grant Program funding has been provided to the Elephant Butte Irrigation District (EBID) in New Mexico and the City of El Paso, Texas to install additional flow monitoring at various locations within the Rio Grande Project irrigation system. The City of Las Cruces, New Mexico has also been provided Water 2025 Challenge Grant Program funding to improve water control by the use of a re-regulating pond. In addition the El Paso County Water Improvement District No. 1 (EPCWID) has also installed an additional measurement station on the Rio Grande near the New Mexico-Texas state line.

Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact

I have reviewed the attached environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental effects. My decision was made after carefully weighing economic, social, and technical considerations, as well as the potentially significant environmental effects analyzed in the environmental assessment, and in consideration of comments and concerns of agencies, organizations, tribes, and individuals. I have determined the Proposed Action Alternative described in the assessment is essentially a water delivery accounting change which will not cause a deviation from historic parameters of water in storage or in the Rio Grande. Because the adjustment of Operating Procedures is a continuation of ongoing operations which will cause no change in the amount of water released or stored outside the range of historic operations, the Proposed Action Alternative would not have any significant effect on the human environment and an environmental impact statement is not required. It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action Alternative.

Evaluation of Environmental Issues

I have considered the following factors in determining that the effects of the proposed action would not significantly impact the human environment.

1. The action would not have a significant adverse effect on any environmental resource; the only effects would be beneficial.

2. The action would not have a significant adverse effect on public health or safety. No minority or low income community would be disproportionately affected by the proposed action.

3. There are no unique characteristics (park lands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers) that would be adversely affected by the action.

4. Effects of the action on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial.

5. There is no uncertainty or unknown risk because the Operating Procedures merely formalize how Reclamation has operated the Rio Grande Project over time. The procedures for accounting of the waters available to the Project and the Project water users will be adjusted to account for water allotted to each of the irrigation districts but not utilized by said districts during the water year. Overall use of water by the Project will not change.

6. The action will not establish a precedent because this action is the continuation of a process of adjustments to the water accounting procedures which have been made as the Project has evolved.

7. There are no cumulative adverse effects of the action.

8. The action would not adversely affect historic properties.

9. The action would not adversely affect threatened or endangered species or critical habitat.

10. The action violates no federal, state, local, or tribal law, regulation, or policy.

Approved:

Connie L. Rupp

Area Manager
Albuquerque Area Office

6/11/2007
Date