

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Final Environmental Assessment
CONTRACT BETWEEN THE UNITED
STATES AND THE PINE RIVER
IRRIGATION DISTRICT FOR THE
USE OF PROJECT WATER FOR
MISCELLANEOUS AND OTHER USES

United States Department of Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Upper Colorado Region
Western Colorado Area Office
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Summary of Environmental Assessment

The environmental assessment evaluates a proposal to execute a contract allowing use of a limited amount of irrigation water from the Pine River Project for other purposes, primarily drinking water supplies, in order to meet the needs of a growing population in portions of La Plata and Archuleta Counties in southwest Colorado.

Vallecito Reservoir of the Pine River Project regulates and stores flows of the Pine River for irrigation and flood control purposes. The project was constructed by the Bureau of Reclamation and is operated by the Pine River Irrigation District. The District has the right to 5/6 of the water stored in Vallecito Reservoir to meet the demands of its shareholders. In addition, 1/6 of the water stored in the reservoir is held by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in trust primarily for the Southern Ute Indian Tribe under the Pine River Indian Irrigation Project. The District, as operator of the Project, releases water to serve both the Pine River Irrigation District shareholders and the Pine River Indian Irrigation Project, which serves mainly tribal interests. Approximately 55,000 acres of Southern Ute Indian Tribe and private land receive water from the project. The project service area is experiencing increased residential growth and this trend is expected to continue. Domestic water supplies in the area include individual wells and, in developed areas such as the town of Bayfield, treatment and distribution systems. There are both quality and quantity problems with the existing domestic supplies.

The Proposed Alternative provides a contract between Reclamation and the Pine River Irrigation District to allow the use of a limited amount of District irrigation water for other miscellaneous uses. The Southern Ute Indian Tribe's 1/6 portion of the Project water is explicitly excluded from the contract and the contract would in no way limit the Tribe's ability and right to fully use its allocation of stored water. Making water available for miscellaneous uses is seen as the most practicable method of meeting existing and future domestic water supply needs. The impact analysis shows making water available for other uses would not be detrimental to existing Project supplies and only minor, insignificant changes in streamflows and reservoir content would result. The present trend of residential growth and smaller agricultural tracts is expected to continue. Resources such as fish and wildlife, endangered species, wetlands, recreation, and cultural resources are not expected to be significantly affected. In addition, there are no Indian Trust Assets or Environmental Justice concerns in the area that would be adversely affected by the Proposed Alternative.

Public scoping meetings and public contract negotiations were held during preparation of the environmental assessment. Following public review of the draft, this final environmental assessment was prepared.