

San Juan - Chama Project

The San Juan-Chama Project was authorized by Congress and signed into law on June 13, 1962. Project water supply comes from the share of Colorado River water allocated to New Mexico by the Upper Colorado River Basin Compact. Diversion structures on the Rio Blanco, Little Navajo River, and Navajo River divert a portion of the flow, an average annual yield of 96,200 acre-feet, into 27 miles of concrete-lined tunnels under the Continental Divide. The water is stored in Heron Reservoir. Each year, Reclamation allocates this water up to the contracted amount. A portion of the water is left in the three rivers for downstream uses, including prior water rights, sufficient flows for fish and wildlife, and maintenance of sanitary conditions.

In 2003, a three-judge panel from the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 2-1 that Reclamation must consider reducing allocations to contractors, if necessary, to meet the required water flows for the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow. The minnow resides in the Rio Grande between Cochiti Dam and the headwaters of Elephant Butte Reservoir. Some parties in the Minnow v. Keys litigation appealed the decision for review en banc. The 10th Circuit recently vacated as moot the earlier decision.

Major Project Benefits

The cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe intend to use diversion structures on the Rio Grande to divert their San Juan-Chama water for drinking water supply projects and for non-potable projects to water parks and golf courses. The Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District uses its San Juan-Chama water to supplement its Rio Grande water right for irrigation of about 90,000 acres of crops. The Pojoaque Valley Irrigation District, San Ildefonso Pueblo, Nambe Pueblo, and Pojoaque Pueblo use their San Juan-Chama water to supplement irrigation for about 2,800 acres in the Pojoaque Valley. Congress authorized up to 5,000 af of San Juan-Chama water for Cochiti Reservoir to replace the evaporative losses that occur each year. Other cities, the Jicarilla Apache Nation and the Pueblo of San Juan use their San Juan-Chama water for their depletions of the Rio Grande or they contract the water to others. Reclamation has an ongoing Supplemental Water Program for which it leases San Juan-Chama water for the silvery minnow.

The project provides fish and wildlife and recreation benefits at El Vado Reservoir, Heron Reservoir, Nambe Falls Reservoir, Elephant Butte Reservoir and at Cochiti Reservoir, an associated Corps of Engineers' facility.

Major Project Facilities

The facilities of the San Juan-Chama Project include three diversion dams, two siphons, the tunnel system, and Heron and Nambe Reservoirs. The Azotea Channel and channelized Willow Creek are maintained to ensure stream flow capacity capability. The outlet works of El Vado Reservoir, downstream of Heron Reservoir, were enlarged to pass San Juan-Chama water through the dam and into the Rio Chama, which flows into the Rio Grande.

Water Supply

Contractors include: Albuquerque, 48,200 acre-feet; city and county of Santa Fe, 5,605 acre-feet; Los Alamos, 1,200 acre-feet; Los Lunas, 400 acre-feet; Twining Water and Sanitation District, 15 acre-feet; Espanola, 1,000 acre-feet; Taos, 400 acre-feet; Belen, 500 acre-feet; Bernalillo, 400 acre-feet; Jicarilla Apache Nation, 6,500 acre-feet; and San Juan Pueblo, 2,000 acre-feet.

Contractors for irrigation water include: the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, 20,900 acre-feet; and the Pojoaque Valley Irrigation District, 1,030 acre-feet. An annual allocation of about 5,000 acre-feet is available for the Corps of Engineer's Cochiti Reservoir. The Secretary of the Interior is holding 2,990 acre-feet for the Taos Pueblo settlement.

