

U.S. Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Albuquerque Area Office
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Draft Finding of No Significant Impact

**El Paso County Riverside Canal and Structure Improvement
Project, El Paso County, Texas**

Manager, Environment Division

Date

Area Manager, Albuquerque Area Office

Date

AAO-07-004
FONSI Number

BACKGROUND

The El Paso County Water Improvement District Number One (District) of Texas established in 1917, provides water by way of the Riverside Canal to 69,010 acres of water rights lands. An evaluation of the Riverside Canal System was performed to identify weaknesses that could be corrected. These weaknesses include seepage and evaporation losses, and excess bypass waste flows from check structures. The project would be in cooperation with Reclamation under a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA, see appendix B). In addition, Authorization and requirements for funding the project are written in the Lower Rio Grande Valley Water Resources Conservation and Improvement Act of 2000 (P.L. 106-576), hereinafter referred to as "The Act".

SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Due to excessive water losses found in the Riverside Canal as a result of evaluations, Reclamation proposes to concrete line the first 3 miles of the canal.

The proposed project area lies within El Paso County, Texas as indicated in Figure 1. The existing components of the segment of the canal system include approximately 16,000 feet of earthen-lined canal with bottom widths varying from 45 to 90 feet. The proposed canal (see Figure 2, section A, B, and C) begins at the downstream end of the existing American Canal. The project is divided into three segments: A, B, and C. Reach B connects to the middle of Reach, A at a point just downstream of the Wastewater Treatment Plant Bridge. Reach A terminates at the Partidor Check Structure. Reach C extends from the Partidor Check structure to the Wasteway One Check Structure.

Canal sections A, B, and C would be concrete lined with side slopes of 1:5:1 and a depth of about 11 feet. Each is designed to carry a maximum flow of 1590 cfs while maintaining about 4 feet of total freeboard. Section A would have a length of 7630 feet and a bottom width of 14 feet. Section B would have a length of 4000 feet and a bottom width of 18 feet. Section C would have a length of 4370 feet and a bottom width of 28 feet.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS RELATED TO THE RESOURCES OF CONCERN

As a result of analyzing the effects of the proposed action in the EA, the following summarizes the reasons why there would be a Finding of No Significant Impact:

Wildlife

Federally listed threatened and endangered wildlife species are not known to occur on or near the proposed project site. The Pecos River Muskrat known to exist in canals similar to the Riverside Canal was listed by Texas Parks and Wildlife as a Threatened Mammal; but has been delisted as a species of concern. A survey was conducted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife on the proposed canal improvement area. The results of the survey indicated that the Muskrat are living on the project site; but the project would not affect the species.

Cultural Resources

The Riverside Canal is included on the National Register of Historic Places. However, the Texas Historical Commission determined that the proposed improvements to the Riverside Canal have no adverse effects (see environmental commitments).

Wetlands

The Rio Bosque Wetlands Park (Park) immediately adjacent to the Riverside Canal would not be affected by lining the Riverside Canal with concrete. Technically the wetlands park is not a true wetlands as defined by the Army Corps of Engineers. However, the park has been planted with riparian vegetation that could be part of some wetlands. To support this vegetation, the University of Texas at El Paso and the “Friends of the Bosque” have provided surface water to the park. Seepage from the Riverside Canal does not provide any water to the park; therefore lining the canal to eliminate seepage to the aquifer would not affect the vegetation of the park.

Water Resources

Lining the Riverside Canal with concrete to eliminate seepage would not adversely affect the shallow Rio Grande Alluvium aquifer immediately under the canal or the Park.

Vegetation

Currently very little vegetation exists on the proposed project site. Vegetation does exist on the banks of the Riverside Canal. Lining the Canal with concrete would permanently destroy this vegetation. Some of the plant species are sacred plants to the Isleta del sur Pueblo. The Pueblo has indicated that transplanting these species would not be required since the same plants can be found near by along the Rio Grande.

Environmental Justice

Implementing the proposed action would not create any unsuitable affects to low-income or minorities out of proportion to the rest of the population.

Indian Trust Assets

There are no ITAs within the project area or within the vicinity to be affected.

Air Quality and Noise

Increased dust (PM10) and noise would increase during construction. However, construction would be restricted in time to avoid interference with religious ceremonies of the Isleta del sur Pueblo. At the conclusion of construction activities the Air Quality and Noise would return to the levels that currently existed before construction.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS

- Construction activities would be scheduled around the religious ceremonies of the Isleta del sur Pueblo.

The Isleta del sur Pueblo request that construction not be conducted from last week of May to the end of January. This request would mitigate effects of construction on the spiritual ceremonies of the Pueblo. In addition, Sacred plants of the Isleta del sur Pueblo that currently exist in the proposed project site would be surveyed under consultation with the Pueblo to insure that the same plants exist upstream and downstream of the project site. In addition, vegetative surveys would be conducted in the Rio Grande to insure that their sacred plants are not permanently destroyed near the Pueblo.

- A letter from the Texas Historical Commission can be found at Appendix A. The letter lists a few conditions if the project were to be implemented.

The Texas Historical Commission requires that the section of the canal that would be lined should be the same width (or as close to the same width as possible) as the current historic canal. In addition, the Commission requires that a representative section of the canal shall be maintained in its original appearance and condition in the event of any future improvements to the Riverside Canal.

- Should evidence of possible scientific, prehistorical, historical, or archeological data be discovered during the course of this action, work shall cease at that location and the Area archaeologist shall be notified by phone immediately, with the location and nature of the findings. Care shall be exercised so as not to disturb or damage artifacts or fossils uncovered during operations, and the proponents shall provide such cooperation and assistance as may be necessary to preserve the findings for removal or other disposition by the Government.

Any person who knows or has reason to know that he or she has inadvertently discovered human remains on Federal or tribal lands, must provide immediate telephone notification of the inadvertent discovery, with written confirmation, to the responsible Federal agency official with respect to Federal lands, and, with respect to tribal lands, to the responsible Indian tribe official. The requirement is prescribed under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (P.L. 101-601; 104 Stat. 3042) of November 1990 and National Historic Preservation Act, Section 110(a)(2)(E)(iii) (P.L. 102-575, 106 Stat. 4753) of October 1992.

COORDINATION

Consultation took place with the Corps of Engineers, Texas Parks and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife, Friends of the Rio Bosque, Isleta del sur Pueblo, Texas Historical Commission, University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso Improvement District #1, and several private individuals who attended the public meeting. These individuals will have an opportunity to review the EA.

A government to government consultation with the Isleta del sur Pueblo took place on September 25, 2003, to review concerns regarding the proposed project. The Pueblo was concerned about air quality and noise during religious ceremonies and the effects on some of their sacred plants on the banks of the canal. Several informal meetings have been conducted with the Pueblo.

A public meeting was held September 10, 2003 to present the proposed project and receive comments from those who attended.

Additional meetings have taken place with the Friends of the Rio Bosque (Park), to insure that their members understand how the project would not affect groundwater or the park's vegetation.

CONCLUSION

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended, and based on the analysis in the EA, Reclamation has determined that lining the Riverside Canal would not result in a significant impact on the human environment and does not require the preparation of an environmental impact statement.