

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Santo Domingo Tribe – Endangered Species Habitat Improvement Project- Phase III- Environmental Assessment

Prepared by:

Santo Domingo Tribe
Tribal Utilities Department
Natural Resources Branch
P.O. Box 70
Santo Domingo Pueblo, New Mexico 87052

U.S. Department of Interior
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
Albuquerque Area Office
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Finding of No Significant Impact

Santo Domingo Tribe – Endangered Species Habitat
Improvement Project- Phase III-
Environmental Assessment

Manager, Environment Division

Date

Area Manager, Albuquerque Area Office

Date

AAO-08-001
FONSI Number

BACKGROUND

The installation of impoundments such as the Galisteo Dam in 1970 and Cochiti Dam in 1975, affect the watershed and ecology of the Rio Grande. The regulated hydrograph has led to riverbed incision, creating swift currents, incised river banks, abandoned side channels, isolated backwaters, and thick stands of non-native vegetation. Reduced pulse flows have altered ecological processes, amplified fuel loads, and displaced native vegetation, which further affect habitat for the Rio Grande silvery minnow (silvery minnow) which historically occurred within the Cochiti reach (Bestgen and Platania 1991). Though past surveys of silvery minnow suggest they are capable of persisting in this reach, rejuvenation of in-stream habitats and modifying existing conditions are necessary for establishing habitat conducive to the reproduction and sustainability of silvery minnow populations in this reach.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action involves habitat construction and thinning of non-native phreatophytes in the Rio Grande bosque, which is anticipated to contribute to the enhancement and recovery of silvery minnow and the Southwestern willow flycatcher in the Cochiti Reach of the Middle Rio Grande. The proposed projects are located in the Rio Grande adjacent to Santo Domingo Tribal Lands; two projects are located on the west side and the third is located on the east side of the Rio Grande. The thinning project is intended to complete a FY 2005 project which will enhance habitat in the bosque.

The Rio Grande projects include the diversification of habitat for the silvery minnow by removing sediment from an abandoned oxbow and enhancing two nonfunctioning Bureau of Reclamation restoration sites from the 1990s.

The proposed projects will affect approximately 48.7 acres in the Rio Grande Bosque, which is currently inundated with non-native phreatophytes and provides marginal wildlife habitat.

The Proposed Action is anticipated to benefit terrestrial and aquatic species and result in positive long term benefits in the Cochiti Reach of the Rio Grande. The Federal Action triggering NEPA compliance is the funding of the Proposed Action by the Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Act Collaborative Program through Reclamation.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS RELATED TO THE RESOURCES OF CONCERN

Resources of primary concern associated with the proposed action include the federally threatened and endangered species that could occur within the project area and their habitats, impacts to water quality and erosion into the river, impacts to bosque vegetation, and environmental justice.

Short-term environmental impacts are anticipated during the construction phase of the project, resulting from temporary construction disturbance and noise. Direct environmental impacts may include temporary and localized increases in the level of suspended sediments in the river, and riparian vegetation may be temporarily impacted from clearing and trampling. These short-term direct effects will be minimized by following best management practices, monitoring water quality, using silt curtains to limit sedimentation, conducting construction during low flow periods and outside the nesting season for migratory birds for any potential disturbance.

Indirect effects may result from construction noise above the ambient noise level normally experienced. Indirect long-term beneficial effects to silvery minnow and its habitat will be evaluated and monitored during the course of the project.

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

i. Geology and Soils- The present day channels are composed of clay, silt, sand, and gravel, similar to the composition of ancestral river deposits. The soils on Santo Domingo are of alluvial origins which are deep and well drained. These soils are also very mobile and because of year round water flow sediment transport in the river are constant and no adverse impacts are expected from the Proposed Action.

ii. Hydrology- Under the Proposed Action, no additional water sources will be utilized to allow water to inundate and travel through each of the constructed projects.

iii. Water Resources and Water Balance- The habitat enhancement projects under the proposed action may create more water surface area, potentially increasing evaporation; however, these areas are well shaded which will limit evaporation.

iv. Noxious Weeds- Implementation of the Proposed Action has the potential to result in the introduction and establishment of state listed noxious weeds; however, a revegetation plan combined with thorough cleaning of all equipment before arriving at the sites will minimize that potential. The Natural Resources Branch of the Santo Domingo Tribe will monitor the construction areas for noxious weeds and will treat them for a period of three years after project completion.

v. Threatened and Endangered Species and Species of Special Status- Habitat construction will occur while water levels are low and species surveys will be conducted

prior to and while restoration activities are being conducted under the proposed action. There would be no anticipated effects to federal or state listed threatened or endangered species and no destruction or adverse modification to designated or proposed critical habitat as a result of implementing the Proposed Action.

vi. Cultural Resources and Traditional Cultural Properties- No sacred sites or traditional cultural properties are expected in the project areas; however, should any such sites or properties be identified during construction activities, then Reclamation will consult with the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office to ensure that no adverse effects result from the Proposed Action.

vii. Indian Trust Assets- The Santo Domingo Tribe is proposing this project. There are no Native American Indian Trust lands or Assets that will be diminished because of the project activities from the Proposed Action.

viii. Socioeconomic Considerations- Positive economic impacts to the Tribal community are anticipated through temporary employment of sawyers and laborers. The Proposed Action will have no adverse impacts to the economy of Sandoval County or the Tribal economy.

ix. Land Use- The Proposed Action will have no effect on the current uses of water for agriculture, ranching, residential, or other activities in the area. The Proposed Action will not affect adjacent agricultural land use and will not change current land status or uses.

x. Environmental Justice- Construction would be undertaken entirely on lands of the Santo Domingo Tribe, a minority population. There are no anticipated environmental effects that would be adverse to tribal members. Employment opportunities for tribal members will have a positive benefit to the Tribe from the projects.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS BY THE SANTO DOMINGO TRIBE

All applicable permits have been obtained prior to implementation of the project, including but not limited to:

- Section 7 of the ESA as administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). To protect shallow water habitat adjacent to the bank line during construction, a silt curtain will be installed. Standard best management practices will be used to prevent pollution and an unnaturally high level of sediment loading in the river. To protect aquatic habitats from spills or contamination, hydraulic lines will be protected from punctures. Additionally, all fueling will take place outside the active floodplain, and all equipment will undergo cleaning and inspection prior to operation. Equipment will be parked on predetermined locations on high ground away from the project area overnight.
- Avoid impacts to birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act by scheduling construction outside of the normal bird breeding and nesting season (approximately April 15 through August 15) for most avian species or conducting preconstruction breeding surveys and monitoring if construction were to occur during the breeding and nesting season, and consult with USFWS if affected species are observed.

- Coyote willow will be collected from private fields on Santo Domingo Tribal Lands and planted on the banks of each constructed channel at Sites Six, Seven and Eight (see page 5, section 2.2.2).
- Noxious weeds will be monitored and controlled with an approved broad spectrum herbicide in each site for a period of two years after completion.
- Baseline water quality parameters (temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH and salinity) will be collected by NRB staff before, during and after each site's construction. After construction is complete, water will be monitored monthly in each site.
- Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) as administered by the New Mexico State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO). 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 Bureau of Reclamation Albuquerque Area Office 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.

COORDINATION

The USFWS has been notified about the proposed action and their determination of impacts to federal endangered and threatened species potentially occurring in the Project is consistent with the impacts described in Chapter 3 of the EA. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) was consulted regarding Clean Water Act, Section 404 permits. The USACE has determined that permits would not be needed for the proposed action.

CONCLUSION

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4331-4335) as amended, and based on the analysis in the EA, the Bureau of Reclamation has determined that implementing the preferred plan presented in the EA for the Santo Domingo Tribe would not result in significant impact on the human environment and does not require preparation of an environmental impact statement.