



UPPER COLORADO RIVER COMMISSION

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September 28, 2009

Mr. Ed Virden, Assistant Area Manager
U. S. Bureau of Reclamation
Yuma Area Office
7301 Calle Agua Salada
Yuma, Arizona 85364

SUBJECT: Comments on Yuma Desalting Plant Pilot Run Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

Mr. Virden:

I am writing on behalf of the Upper Colorado River Commission (UCRC) to comment on the Bureau of Reclamation's FONSI on the Yuma Desalting Plant Pilot Run. The UCRC is an administrative agency created by the Upper Colorado River Basin Compact of 1948. Five Commissioners make up the UCRC, one representing each of the Upper Division States of Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming and a Commissioner representing the United States who serves as Chairman of the UCRC. I am the Executive Director of the staff of the UCRC. The UCRC has a vital interest in water use in the entire Colorado River Basin, which is why I am commenting on the subject FONSI today.

The FONSI states that "[t]he purpose of the Proposed Action is to operate the Yuma Desalting Plant (YDP) as designed at a sufficient flow and appropriate duration to gather benchmark performance and cost data which can only be obtained through actual plant operations; determine whether any additional corrective actions to plant design or equipment would be necessary for long-term operation of the plant; and test changes and corrections (such as the fully-automated distributed control system) which have already been implemented at the YDP as part of maintaining its ready reserve status" (YDP Pilot Run FONSI, p. 1). The UCRC fully supports the purpose of the Pilot Run as outlined in the foregoing sentence.

The UCRC understands that the Pilot Run is different than contemplated "normal" operations of the YDP, because Lower Basin entities "have collectively indicated an interest in partially funding the cost of implementing the proposed Pilot Run in exchange for one-time ICS credits [pursuant to the 2007 Interim Shortage Guidelines] for the water conserved as a result of the proposed Pilot Run" (EA, p. 9). However, the UCRC has concerns based upon statements made in the Final Environmental Assessment for the YDP wherein it is indicated that Lower Basin water managers are evaluating the use of the YDP to stretch existing water supplies. The UCRC believes the future function of the YDP must continue to be compliance with Minute 242 pursuant to the Mexican Treaty, with any secondary savings of water in meeting Mexican Treaty obligations accruing to the benefit of both the Upper and Lower Basins.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the YDP Pilot Run FONSI. Please contact me at the address and telephone number listed on this letterhead if you have any questions about these comments.

Very truly yours,

Don A. Ostler, P.E.
Executive Director and Secretary

Cc: Upper Colorado River Commissioners
Herb Guenther
Gerald R. Zimmerman
Pat Mulroy