

Alternative Development Underway for the Pojoaque Basin Regional Water System Environmental Impact Statement

The United States (US) Bureau of Reclamation, Albuquerque Area Office (Reclamation), is in the process of developing alternatives for the Pojoaque Basin Regional Water System (RWS) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Below is an explanation of the ongoing alternative development process, a discussion of key resource studies, and identification of next steps in the project. Additional information is available on the project website at www.PojoaqueBasinEIS.com.

Guiding Principles for Alternative Development

Alternative development is the heart of the EIS process. National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) regulations require agencies to rigorously explore all reasonable alternatives that meet the purpose of and need for the proposed action. For alternatives eliminated from detailed study, the EIS must document the reasons for elimination. Agencies must also include a “No Action” alternative and identify the agency’s preferred alternative or alternatives, if one or more exists, in the draft and final EISs (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1502.14; 43 CFR 46.415[b]).

Projects that require an individual permit by the US Army Corps of Engineers under the Clean Water Act must comply with the Section 404(b)(1) guidelines for discharge of dredge and fill material into waters of the US (40 CFR Part 230). The Section 404(b)(1) guidelines require that the US Army Corps of Engineers permits the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative. Section 404(b)(1) criteria were incorporated into the alternative development process.

Reclamation is also bound by the Principles and Requirements for Federal Investments in Water Resources (Council on Environmental Quality 2013), which lay out broad principles to guide water investments. The principles are based on the federal objective as set forth in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007. The objective specifies that federal water resources investments shall reflect national priorities, encourage economic development, and protect the environment. The objective and guiding principles were incorporated into the alternative development process.

“Components” and “Elements” of a Water System

In general, a water system consists of six components:

Water collection

Treatment

Short-term storage

Long-term storage (or supplemental supply)

Transmission and distribution

Power source

There are different ways these components can be implemented; these are referred to as project elements. For example, water collection could be from diversion of surface flows or capture of subsurface water using wells or other methods. Part of alternative development identifies the different project elements available for each component.

Summary of the On-going Collaborative Alternative Development Process

The Pojoaque Basin RWS alternative development process to date has involved intensive collaboration with interested stakeholders as well as internal engineering and feasibility analysis. Reclamation used public scoping to help identify issues and concerns; comments identified in the August 2013 scoping report related to alternatives were carried forward into alternative development. Additionally, Reclamation is coordinating with 11 cooperating agencies in developing alternatives. Reclamation has held three alternative development workshops with the cooperating agencies to date, plus an additional meeting with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and US Army Corps of Engineers.

Through these workshops, Reclamation developed preliminary alternative project elements and screening criteria to determine which elements will be carried forward for detailed analysis.

Key Outputs of Alternative Development

1. Refinement of Purpose and Need Statement

The Purpose and Need Statement has been reviewed by cooperating agencies at multiple alternative development workshops in addition to undergoing internal review with Reclamation. The statement included below is not expected to change significantly during the remainder of the alternative development process because it serves as a benchmark against which alternatives are evaluated.

Reclamation's proposed action, as authorized by Section 611 (a) of the Claims Resolution Act of 2010, Public Law 111–291, 124 Stat. 3065 (Settlement Act), is to plan, design, and construct a RWS consisting of surface water diversion facilities at Pueblo de San Ildefonso on the Rio Grande and any treatment, transmission, storage, and distribution facilities and wellfields for the County distribution system and Pueblo water facilities that are necessary to distribute up to 4,000 acre-feet per year (afy) of water within the Pojoaque Basin (Settlement Act § 611(a)(2)(B)). Reclamation's proposed action includes: (1) substantially completing construction of the RWS by June 30, 2024 (Settlement Act § 623(e)); (2) bringing portions of the RWS into operation as they are constructed; (3) performing operations, maintenance and replacement for the RWS until construction is substantially completed; (4) contracting with the Pueblo de San Ildefonso, Pueblo of Nambé, Pueblo of Pojoaque, and Pueblo of Tesuque (Settlement Pueblos) for 1,079 afy of San Juan-Chama Project water (Settlement Act § 613(a)(2)); (5) completing the Pojoaque River Barrier Dam modification project; and (6) completing the Rio Tesuque channel modifications project.

The purpose of Reclamation's proposed action is to reliably provide a firm, safe supply of treated drinking water for distribution in the Pojoaque Basin in compliance with the Settlement Act.

The need is to reduce reliance on groundwater in the Pojoaque Basin and to allow the Settlement Pueblos to receive a portion of the water provided under the Settlement Act.

Reclamation's proposed action would also facilitate and enable the Settlement Pueblos to utilize funding made available in the Settlement Act for certain water-related infrastructure

improvements if requested. This funding can be used for any water-related improvements that are more cost effective when implemented in conjunction with the construction of the RWS (Settlement Act § 615(d)(7)(A)(ii)).

The Settlement Pueblos' and Santa Fe County's specific objectives for Reclamation's proposed action are to:

- Use water secured under the Settlement Act to meet current and anticipated future demand within the Basin.
- Provide adequate water volume and pressure for fire suppression.
- Reduce the effects from groundwater pumping.

2. Development of Screening Criteria

Screening criteria are organized into three categories: (1) purpose and need, (2) technological and economic feasibility and practicability, and (3) Clean Water Act Section 404(b)(1)/Endangered Species Act compliance. Any alternative that did not satisfy one of these criteria was eliminated from further consideration.

3. Preliminary Identification of Elements to Carry Forward

Reclamation is currently carrying forward 20 project elements that may be combined into alternatives and analyzed in detail. Elements may be adjusted or eliminated before alternatives are finalized for impact analysis based on the results of additional engineering and feasibility studies or additional information from project stakeholders.

4. Preliminary Alternative Concepts

Reclamation is developing alternative concepts that combine the various elements into an implementable RWS. As the elements are refined through ongoing feasibility studies, these concepts will evolve into standalone alternatives.

5. Development of Working Draft No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the RWS would not be constructed and the Settlement Agreement could be nullified. Uncertainty would continue to surround the water rights in the Pojoaque Basin. Groundwater would continue to be the primary source of drinking water.

Discussion topics from each meeting to date are summarized below.

Alternative Development Workshop 1

- Refined the preliminary draft Purpose and Need Statement for the RWS.
- Brainstormed alternative elements as options for implementing six RWS components. Each component has various alternative elements (e.g., side-channel diversion vs. horizontal radial collector well for primary collection). Scoping comments suggesting RWS elements were also considered.
- Discussed alternative RWS service areas.

- Brainstormed screening criteria to evaluate alternative elements based on their ability to satisfy the purpose of and need for the RWS, their technological and economic practicability and feasibility, and their environmental impacts.

Alternative Development Workshop 2

- Reviewed the refined draft Purpose and Need Statement.
- Revised screening criteria.
- Applied the screening criteria by assigning a score between 0 and 5 to each element for each criterion, where 5 = element fully satisfied criteria and 0 = did not satisfy criteria.

Ongoing Data Collection Activities

Reclamation and its contractors are continuing to collect engineering and resource data within the RWS study area to determine the feasibility of alternative project elements and to identify potential pipeline and facility constraints. The studies described below are ongoing or planned for the next six months. Feasibility studies for particular RWS elements are only to determine preliminary feasibility of that element and do not mean that the element will be part of the preferred alternative for the RWS.

- Visual resource and noise surveys—surveys to photograph existing views from key observation points (e.g., residences and scenic viewpoints) that may be impacted by proposed RWS facilities and to measure existing noise levels near proposed RWS facilities (Fall 2014)
- Asset inventory—surveys to document existing utility infrastructure in the RWS area (Fall 2014 through Fall 2015)
- Water treatment plant pilot study—engineering study to determine the optimal design for the water treatment plant (Fall 2014 through Fall 2015)
- Horizontal radial collector well study—engineering study to determine the feasibility of using a horizontal radial collector well as the primary water collection process for the RWS (Fall 2014 through Winter 2015)
- Geotechnical investigation study for parallel interceptor drain and infiltration galleries—engineering study to determine the feasibility of using a parallel interceptor drain or infiltration galleries as the primary water collection process for the RWS (Fall 2014 through Winter 2015)
- Shallow aquifer storage and recovery well study—engineering study to determine the feasibility of using shallow aquifer storage and recovery wells as a long-term storage/secondary supply component of the RWS (Fall 2014 through Fall 2016)



Surveyors will be easily recognizable by their brightly colored field vests and may be using the following equipment: waders or boots, shovels, sediment-collection sacks, digital cameras, binoculars, measuring tapes, backpacks, handheld GPS units, clipboards, and field notebooks. No surveys will be conducted on private lands without prior permission from the land owner. Visit the project website at <https://sites.google.com/site/pbwatereis/how-to-get-involved/information-for-landowners> for the current survey schedule and more information about these activities.

Meeting with US Fish and Wildlife Service and US Army Corps of Engineers

Reclamation met with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and US Army Corps of Engineers to assign screening scores to elements for the Clean Water Act Section 404(b)(1)/Endangered Species Act compliance criteria. All elements satisfied these criteria to some extent; therefore, no element was eliminated from screening on the basis of these criteria.

Alternative Development Workshop 3

- Reviewed the results of element screening from Workshop 2 to ensure agreement among Reclamation and cooperating agencies.
- Began combining elements currently being carried forward into preliminary alternatives.
- Reviewed and revised the preliminary draft No Action Alternative.

Survey Rights-of-Entry We Need Your Help!

Your permission is critical to the success of the Pojoaque Basin RWS project. Reclamation and its contractors will not access your property to perform data collection and surveys without your express permission (e.g., a signed right-of-entry form). All property owners within 300 feet of the proposed pipeline alignment have been sent two right-of-entry requests. Many letters were returned because of incorrect addresses. If you live close to the proposed alignment and have not received a right-of-entry request or your address has changed, we respectfully request that you please visit www.PojoaqueBasinEIS.com and fill out the right-of-entry form. Both positive and negative responses are appreciated. If you have any questions or would like to have a right-of-entry form mailed to you, please contact Diana Clifton at dclifton@usbr.gov or (505) 462-3591.

Notice of Intent
Published in the
Federal Register

Feb 2012

Public and
Pueblo Scoping
Period

March - May 2013

Alternative
Development and
Special Studies

Fall 2013 - Fall 2015

Draft EIS and
Public Comment
Period

Spring 2016

Final EIS and Issuing
of Record of Decision

Spring 2017

This is the third in a series of newsletters from the Bureau of Reclamation regarding the proposed design and construction of the Pojoaque Basin Regional Water System to serve the Pueblo de San Ildefonso, Pueblo of Nambé, Pueblo of Pojoaque, Pueblo of Tesuque, and other customers in Santa Fe County, New Mexico. This edition of the newsletter provides an overview of the alternative development process to date, progress of supporting studies, right-of-entry information, and information on how to stay informed. Contact us at PojoaqueBasinEIS@usbr.gov if you would like to be removed from the mailing list or receive future mailings via email.

Want More Information?

Get on the mailing list: Send a request to PojoaqueBasinEIS@usbr.gov

Visit the project website: www.PojoaqueBasinEIS.com

E-mail: PojoaqueBasinEIS@usbr.gov

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Future Steps

1. Collect information on remaining data gaps to determine the feasibility of alternative elements.
2. Combine elements being carried forward into standalone alternatives.
3. Perform impact analysis on alternatives.
4. Release a draft EIS for public comment.
5. Revise the draft EIS based on comment and release final EIS and Record of Decision.



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