

**Middle Rio Grande Endangered Species Collaborative Program**  
**San Acacia Ad Hoc Work Group Meeting**  
**April 26, 2012 12:30 - 3:30 PM**  
**Albuquerque – Bureau of Reclamation**

**Actions**

- Gina Dello Russo or Robyn Harrison will redistribute the link to the draft FEMA floodplain maps for Socorro County.
- Michelle Mann will distribute the Service's presentation on a Service-led RIP and the Middle Rio Grande Consultation/RIP Establishment Timeline to the workgroup.
- SAR members will send any other edits or comments on the draft white-papers to the workgroup member who drafted the summary; Michelle Mann will develop deadlines for review of the white-papers so that they can be finalized at the next SAR meeting.
- Ryan Gronewold will redistribute the draft report and maps for the Floodplain Encroachment Project.
- Michelle Mann will check with the Program Manager to see if there is a recommendation that the workgroup present to the CC as well as the EC.

**Decision**

- The January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012 SAR workgroup meeting notes were approved with no changes.

**Meeting Summary**

- Gina Dello Russo brought the meeting order. The agenda was approved with the addition of an update on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) Annual Operating Plan and a discussion with Jennifer Faler on the formation of a group to discuss issues in the San Acacia Reach (SAR).
- In the update on the Corps' Annual Operating Plan attendees were updated that water is still being stored at El Vado Reservoir for P&P and Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) emergency drought storage. It's believed that storage for P&P will be about 23,000 acre/ft. At the main stem, 7% is being delivered at the Colorado state line. It's believed that flows peaked at Ottowi and Cochiti Reservoirs in March; this will be the earliest peak since 1975.
- The January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012 SAR workgroup meeting notes were approved with no changes.
- Meeting attendees performed an action item review. All of the January and ongoing action items were completed with the exception of the action item "Gina Dello Russo will ask George Dennis for his FEMA contact" which is ongoing. Gina has emailed George for his contact but has not yet received a reply. Attendees were reminded that the group had wanted to contact FEMA in regard to the SAR floodplain mapping. A link to the draft FEMA floodplain maps for Socorro County was previously distributed to the SAR workgroup. Gina Dello Russo or Robyn Harrison will redistribute the link to the draft FEMA floodplain maps for Socorro County.
- It was shared that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) gave a presentation to describe what a Service-led Recovery Implementation Program (RIP) would look like at the last Executive Committee (EC) meeting. Michelle Mann will distribute the Service's presentation on a Service-led RIP and the Middle Rio Grande Consultation/RIP Establishment Timeline to the workgroup.
- In a working session meeting attendees discussed the draft white-papers for the low flow conveyance channel and agricultural sustainability topics. Meeting attendees reviewed the edits and comments to the white papers and worked on highlighting the issues and recommendations that are relevant to the Program. SAR members will send any other edits or comments on the draft white-papers to the workgroup member who drafted each summary; Michelle Mann will develop deadlines for review of the white-papers so that they can be finalized at the next SAR meeting.

- Jennifer Faler (Reclamation) joined the workgroup to discuss the formation of a group to develop a toolbox for water managers to use in the SAR. It's envisioned that the group will be made up of a balance of federal entities, non-federal entities, and local stakeholders. SAR workgroup members were invited to participate in the group and give suggestions of anyone else who might like to participate. It's anticipated for the group to begin meeting at the end of May. Some of the things that the group will be working on are continuing development of the decision support system for the SAR and a plan for maintaining the species in a worst case scenario (3<sup>rd</sup> year of drought, running out of reservoir water).
- Discussion on the ground-truthing for the Floodplain Encroachment project was tabled for the next HRW meeting. Ryan Gronewold will redistribute the draft report and maps for the Floodplain Encroachment Project.
- Meeting attendees reviewed the draft 2012 Work Plan. The time line for completing tasks was adjusted to better reflect completion of the white-papers. Meeting attendees briefly discussed making a presentation to the Coordination Committee (CC)/EC. It is the workgroup's preference to give one presentation to the EC; however, Michelle Mann will check with the Program Manager to see if there is a recommendation that the workgroup also present to the CC.
- In the Program Update, meeting attendees were informed that the Program Manager will be drafting an email for the workgroups to give direction on tasks that they can work on during the possible transition to a RIP. The tasks will include reviewing the RIP draft documents and participating in the upcoming Database Management System trainings.

**Next Meeting: July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012 from 12:30 – 3:30 pm at Reclamation.**

- Tentative agenda items: 1) Finalize the draft white paper; 2) outline presentation to the EC; 3) review the report and maps from the Floodplain Encroachment project and ground-truthing update; 4)

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## Meeting Notes

### Introductions and agenda approval

- Gina Dello Russo brought the meeting order.
- The agenda was approved with the addition of an update on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) Annual Operating Plan and a discussion with Jennifer Faler on the formation of a group to discuss issues in the San Acacia Reach (SAR).

### Update on the Corps' Annual Operating Plan

- Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) is still storing at El Vado Reservoir for P&P and Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District (MRGCD) emergency drought storage and will continue to store until the runoff is complete. It's believed that the P&P storage will be 23,000 acre/ft; storage is currently at 20,000 acre/ft. Off the main stem, Colorado is delivering 7% at the state line. Flows at Embudo River are at ~900 cfs; this is an increase from the 400 cfs flows from last week. The increase is mostly coming from Embudo Creek and Red River as high elevation snow is coming off. It's not likely that Cochiti River will have flows over 1,500 cfs. It's believed that Ottowi and Cochiti flows peaked at the end of March; that was before irrigation started in Colorado so water wasn't being pulled from the main stem at that time. If the peak did occur at the end of March, it will be the earliest peak since 1975.
- It was shared that MRGCD will begin contingency planning and discussing whether water will need to be limited for some users. In the past MRGCD has had to limit some users and has had to shorten the irrigation season.
- The transition to La Niña is approaching. Recently the transition from El Niño to La Niña has been occurring more quickly than in recent years. There may be a slight El Niño pattern by monsoon season; this indicates that the monsoon season may be wetter than in previous years but the Nation Weather Service is still saying that there are 50/50 odds of having either a wet or dry season.

### Approval of the January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012 SAR Meeting Notes

*Decision:* The January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012 SAR workgroup meeting notes were approved with no changes.

### Action Item Review

- January Actions
  - **Gina Dello Russo will distribute the Floodplain Encroachment SOW to the SAR workgroup.**
    - Complete
  - **Ryan Gronewold will check with his supervisor to see if he can attend the February 1<sup>st</sup> CC meeting to answer any questions the CC may have on the Floodplain Encroachment project.**
    - Complete. The second part of the Floodplain Encroachment project will not be funded in FY12.
  - **Michelle Mann will email the draft Program Document and the presentation of the proposed structure to meeting attendees.**
    - Complete

- It was shared that Michelle had distributed the Middle Rio Grande Consultation/RIP Establishment Timeline to the Habitat Restoration Workgroup (HRW). Meeting attendees briefly discussed that the Executive Committee (EC) has not yet made any decisions on the Recovery Implementation Program (RIP) transition or the structure. The main decision that the EC is considering is whether the RIP will be managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) or a 3<sup>rd</sup> party. The Service has given a presentation and distributed some documents to describe what a Service-led RIP would look like.

**Action:** Michelle Mann will distribute the Service's presentation on a Service-led RIP and the Middle Rio Grande Consultation/RIP Establishment Timeline to the SAR workgroup.

- **Gina asked workgroup members to verify that their agency's primary and alternate workgroup members are included on the SAR mailing list.**
  - Meeting attendees discussed that this action item is not of high importance as it is not critical for members to have alternates at this point in time.
- **Tetra Tech will distribute the SAR mailing list to the workgroup.**
  - Complete.
- **Tetra Tech will pass Ayesha Burdett's request to be removed from the SAR mailing list to Ali Saenz.**
  - Complete.
- **Ongoing Actions**
  - **Robert Padilla will talk to Jim Wilber about (1) correcting the Floodplain Encroachment Project cost estimate (\$30,000 not \$55,000); (2) the 2003 BO reference in support/justification for the project; (3) what are the potential changes with the Program restructuring and becoming a RIP and where does the SAR work group fit in (Ongoing, 12/6).**
    - Robert has talked with Jim and the cost estimate for the Floodplain Encroachment Project has been adjusted to \$30,000 and the 2003 Biological Opinion (BO) reference was added to the description of the project.
  - **Ryan Gronewold will PDF the floodplain maps and will distribute both the maps and the shape files to SAR members for reference purposes (Ongoing, 12/6).**
    - The shapefiles were distributed to Gina but the shapefiles and PDFs of the floodplain maps were not distributed to all members of the workgroup.
  - **Terina Perez will electronically distribute the Program Update once it becomes available (Ongoing, 12/6).**
    - Complete.
  - **Gina Dello Russo will ask George Dennis for his FEMA contact. (continued from 10/27/11)**
    - Gina has emailed George to request for his FEMA contact but has not received a reply. Attendees were reminded that the workgroup had wanted to contact FEMA in regard to the Socorro County floodplain mapping. A link to the draft FEMA floodplain maps for Socorro County was previously distributed to the SAR workgroup. The draft floodplain maps are available for the public to review for errors.

**Action:** Gina Dello Russo or Robyn Harrison will redistribute the link to the draft FEMA floodplain maps for Socorro County.

#### **Discuss draft summaries of white-paper topics**

- In a working session meeting attendees discussed the draft white-papers for the low flow conveyance channel (LFCC) and agricultural sustainability topics.

- Attendees were briefly reminded that the intention of the summaries is to pull together all stake holder positions on an issue as opposed to any one agency's policy or perspective.
  - It was asked if there should be some kind of review of the white-papers with the public.
    - The white-papers will remain in draft form and would be for informational purposes only. The agencies can review the white-papers to make sure that there are not any "red flags" but the intention is to give a range of perspectives, not just from the workshops, but from a technical point of view and for the workgroup to summarize where they are leaving the topic.
    - It was pointed out that in the case of agricultural sustainability, the issue is outside of the Program and the majority of the perspective that is included in the white-paper is from the public. It would be helpful to address the issue of agricultural sustainability but it may not necessarily be an issue that should be tackled by the Program.
      - It was commented that when an agency is doing restoration or projects in an area they should be informed of the stakeholders' issues in the area, including private stakeholders.
    - It was suggested that if the largest audience will be the EC, then the workgroup should highlight the issues and recommendations that are relevant to the Program.
    - Meeting attendees agreed that it would be good to highlight the actions that the Program might take or a recommendation that the EC may be interested in and point out where there are endangered species connections.
      - It was pointed out that in the water rights/adjudication white-paper one of the first recommendations is to determine if this is an issue to endangered species and whether it would be an issue that the Program would be interested in taking on.
- Meeting attendees agreed to focus on the recommendations and primary issues in the white-papers during today's meeting and any edits or comments on the other sections of the white-papers (introductions, background, current status, etc.) could be sent to the workgroup member who drafted the white-paper. The drafters can then try to incorporate the edits and distribute a second draft for the workgroup to review.
- *LFCC white-paper* –
  - Attendees discussed whether levee issues will be included in this white-paper.
    - It was one opinion that though the levee and the LFCC have a relationship with one another (the levee protects the LFCC) they do not necessarily go hand-in-hand.
  - Attendees discussed a bullet point in the white-paper that the active floodplain is constricted to the eastern side of the valley by the LFCC and area levee.
    - One of the comments on this bullet was that this statement had not been evaluated and that vegetation also restricts the active floodplain.
      - It was acknowledged that vegetation also has a big role in channel alignment.
      - Attendees discussed that the word "constricted" may not be appropriate as it implies that there are forces on both sides; the LFCC and the levee are only on one side. Meeting attendees agreed that the word "confined" may be more appropriate.

- Meeting attendees discussed that the LFCC is an important supplemental source for water users and endangered species. Previously, the LFCC was operated for water conveyance but is now a passive drain.
  - The LFCC is an important source for supplemental support for water users in the SAR. The LFCC is a point of diversion for Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The LFCC is the only winter water source for the Refuge during the winter and is also a water source during other times of the year.
  - The LFCC is also important for endangered species as it is a strategic water supply and can be used to supplement the river.
  - The LFCC might also be important to landowners by acting as a shallow groundwater drain.
- Attendees discussed the impact of the LFCC on the ability to keep low flows in the river.
  - One of the comments provided to the white-paper was whether or not the statement that the LFCC impacts the ability to keep low flows in the river had been evaluated. It might be possible to tie the statement in by saying that the LFCC serves as a river drain and may impact the ability to keep the low flows in the river.
  - It was mentioned that it wasn't known if the LFCC is factored into MRGCD's overall irrigation supply because the water from that source is not a guarantee. The pumps are metered and there is a gauge at San Marcial so it may be possible to measure the amount from the LFCC.
  - Because the LFCC serves as an area drain for shallow groundwater in certain areas it may impact the ability to keep low flows in the river.
  - The LFCC also serves to drain historic farmlands.
- Attendees discussed a bullet that said that updated options for alignment construction design of the LFCC have not been evaluated.
  - There has been some evaluation for drainage but there hasn't been an evaluation with respect to endangered species.
  - The LFCC has not been evaluated since the EIS, reservoir decline, and sediment plugs. Also, updated options for alignment, construction design, and management of the LFCC have not been evaluated.
    - It was suggested that it be added that updated options have not been evaluated and that a list of the needed evaluations be included.
  - The functions of the LFCC have not been evaluated for current conditions.
    - Whether the LFCC operates or not, it is still there. It's the drain capture for the valley and as such has an impact.
    - With the possibility of increased drought the LFCC may need to be used again.
      - It was pointed out that if the LFCC needed to operate again that major rehabilitation would have to occur.
  - Meeting attendees were in agreement that the LFCC is ripe for reevaluation of its management, purpose, and configuration.
    - Some suggested recommendations are to work with stake holders to identify alternatives and develop and implement a comprehensive plan for the LFCC.

- The evaluation of the LFCC would include an evaluation of its operation during the 1950s and 1980s. It was one opinion that this is when farmers would have had waterlog and salt accumulation.
    - When the LFCC operated as a channel there must have been waterlog unless the river side drain was operating. How much is the LFCC doing for the farmers that the riverside drain also does? What benefits does the LFCC serve as opposed to the riverside drain?
- Jennifer Faler (Reclamation Deputy Area Manager) joined the meeting to discuss the formation of a group of technical experts and stakeholders to develop a water management toolbox for the SAR. The intention is for the group to be formed with a balance of federal, state, and local stakeholders. SAR workgroup members were invited to participate in the group and asked to identify individuals who should also be invited to participate in the group. The group should be formed by the end of May. The group will first work on brainstorming strategies to include in the toolbox. The group will then spend the remainder of the year putting the strategies into a plan and making them implementable. The goal is to have a plan for the SAR developed by mid-November.
  - Jennifer shared that one of the first suggestions she received for a task for the group to work on was the hydrology decision support system (DSS) for the SAR reach.
    - In a brief background on the SAR DSS it was explained that the Refuge began discussions with other agencies about the need for a DSS for the SAR; the Refuge manages 10 river miles of the reach and it's hard to make decisions regarding actions for sediment plugs or habitat restoration without having a sense of the future conditions or scenarios. The Refuge has been working with USGS and the University of New Mexico, and Sandia National Laboratories to develop models for the DSS. A DSS is very complicated as there are the physical parameters (water management, water supply, sediment balance) that will need to be tied together and that will also need to be tied into the ecological parameters. Mark Stone (UNM) has begun to work on the ecological portions of the DSS and a graduate student is working on linking some of the ecological parameters for the Yellow-billed Cuckoo to the hydrology.
    - In response to a question of who is currently funding the DSS it was answered that the Science Support Program is currently funding the graduate student's work and the work that UNM and Sandia National Laboratories have been doing is on hold until more funding becomes available. Once funding is received a possible next step is to have a small workshop or roundtable for the experts to develop a strategy for the ecological pieces of the DSS.
    - It was asked if the available science is able to make those predictions.
      - The information on vegetation is available and some of the basic bird requirements are known but there are gaps in the reptile and amphibian data. As with all science there will be assumptions. Some of those assumptions will be agreed upon and some of the assumptions will need more research.
  - The group will also focus on developing a plan for maintaining the species during a worst case scenario (in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of a drought, not in monsoon season, running out of water in the reservoir, etc.). The plan would include determining how to get water to areas with good habitat or where to build good habitat. The group would focus on the SAR as it's believed to be the "worst" area; the plan could then be applied to other reaches.
  - It was asked why a new group (outside of the Program SAR workgroup) is being formed?

- It's intended for there to be a balance of agency and private stake holders and not just representation from Program signatories. The driving force of the group would be endangered species so there will be some overlap in interest between the SAR workgroup and the new group; however, the new group will not be EC driven.
  - It was cautioned that the group should focus on the ecological health of the reach and not just one species.
  - It's likely that the same agencies and stakeholders who participate in the SAR workgroup will be active in the new group as well as those are the people with the expertise in that reach.
- The meetings will take place in the SAR. The meetings will also be facilitated.
- It was suggested that the goals and products of the group be laid out to a certain degree so that people can have a sense of what will need to be accomplished before they commit to participating.
- *Agricultural sustainability-*
  - Initial feedback was that the white-paper should include ties to benefits for endangered species.
    - The white-paper can discuss the importance of the delivery of water rights in the MRGCD and how its travel through the river supports the water tables in the middle valley.
    - It was pointed out that the water is delivered north of the SAR and that none is being delivered to the SAR itself.
    - The agricultural lands and ditches have wildlife benefits. These areas are used as stopover habitat by the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.
    - The Jumping Mouse utilizes ditches. The Jumping Mouse will be on the federal endangered species register in April 2012 and will be listed as endangered by 2013.
      - The Jumping Mouse occurs on the Refuge but wasn't known if there has been a recent survey that indicates whether they occur on the ditches.
    - Farm land provides diversity and helps to prevent anything else from becoming endangered.
    - After the workshop in the SAR, the workgroup had said that they would address the issues raised at the workshop and agricultural sustainability was one of the issues raised at the workshop.
    - Agricultural sustainability is a cultural need and should be sustained along with the species.
    - Farmland also plays a part in recharging the shallow aquifer and drinking water sources.
  - Meeting attendees discussed whether the current price of water is an issue.
    - Water is currently affordable but it will be important to continue to keep it affordable.
  - It was one opinion that water conservation and the potential availability of water for other purposes is where growing crops with the highest market return will come into play. Growing crops that offer the farmer better revenue may conserve water for other uses.
  - Meeting attendees discussed forbearance.
    - In years where water is only available until May or August farmers may feel that it is not worth it to irrigate and there may be an interest for entities to compensate a farmer for not irrigating. The water could then be used to benefit the species.
      - There was agreement that forbearance would be worth looking at; however, in a study it was shown that a whole division or part of a



division would need to not irrigate in order to make any sort of substantial difference.

- The same argument can be made about the “patchy” way that water rights are sold to benefit the species.
- There is also the issue that the same amount of head may be needed to get water to people who are still irrigating.
- Though the same amount of head may be needed, water that is not used will come back to the river.
  - Being conservative on how often you’re running and at what times will increase the amount of water that is returned.
- It was not believed that the forbearance study had considered whether or not more farmers would be interested in forbearance if there was an established forbearance program or if more farmers might be interested during multiple years of drought.
- It was shared that Interstate Stream Commission (ISC) has been looking into leasing water for half of a year if there are people who don’t want to utilize their water rights for a whole year.
- The issue that might be discussed in the white-paper is water supply and continual drought.
  - Keeping water rights with land is also an issue.
- It was suggested that water availability and options to farmers in drought years be included as an issue and that evaluating opportunities for forbearance or strategic water reserve be included as a recommendations.
- Water could be put into the low flow channel and then used at the pumps; the pumps need enough water in order to operate.
  - Providing an adequate amount of water to the pumps would allow for water to be pumped back to critical areas. However, it’s not known if there will be issues in terms of channel capacity.
- Another issue that was discussed at the workshop was the quality of irrigation waters and the salinity in the water sources.
  - It was believed that staff at MRGCD had tested salinity on the river and it was not believed to be an issue.
  - Sustaining the water quality should be included as an issue.
  - A suggested recommendation was to relook at the salinity issue.
- A general suggestion was that descriptions be added to all of the issues outlined in the document.
- Meeting attendees agreed to provide edits and comments on the remaining draft white-papers to the workgroup member who drafted each summary. They workgroup can then review the revised white-papers at the next SAR workgroup meeting.

**Action:** Michelle Mann will develop deadlines for review of the white-papers so that they can be finalized at the next SAR meeting.

### **Floodplain Encroachment project**

- Meeting attendees were reminded that the workgroup had decided at a previous meeting to develop a more thorough report (more thorough than a white-paper) for the Floodplain Encroachment project. A first draft of the report has already been developed and was distributed some time ago.

**Action:** Ryan Gronewold will redistribute the draft report and maps for the Floodplain Encroachment project.

- Further discussion on the Floodplain Encroachment project was tabled for the next HRW meeting.

### **SAR Workgroup 2012 Work Plan**

- Meeting attendees reviewed the draft 2012 Work Plan. The time line for completing tasks was adjusted to better reflect completion of the white-papers.

### **Floodplain Encroachment Ground-truthing**

- Corps staff will be sending out a proposal for the ground-truthing and wrapping up the Floodplain Encroachment project by the end of June.
  - A possible way to complete the ground-truthing is for people familiar with the area to look at the maps and determine if there are any objects that could potentially cause issues. This would be quicker than trying to locate objects in the field.
  - The workgroup will try to have the Floodplain Encroachment report completed by the end of July.

### **Coordination Committee (CC)/EC Presentation**

- Meeting attendees briefly discussed presenting the workgroup's products to the CC/EC. The workgroup should be ready to present the products in August 2012. It is the workgroup's preference to give one presentation to the EC; however the workgroup will check with the Program Manager to see if there is a recommendation that the workgroup give a separate presentation to the CC prior to the EC presentation.
  - It was suggested that the summary from the SAR workshop be included with the SAR workgroup's products so that there is a reference for where the white-paper issues came from.

**Action:** Michelle Mann will check with the Program Manager to see if there is a recommendation that the workgroup present to the CC as well as the EC.

### **Program Update**

- In the Program Update, meeting attendees were informed that the Program Manager will be drafting an email to the workgroups to give direction on tasks that they can work on during the possible transition to a RIP. The tasks will include reviewing the RIP draft documents and participating in the upcoming Database Management System trainings.

Meeting attendees were shown the Middle Rio Grande SAR Habitat Restoration Analysis product that the HRW has been developing. The maps show inundation information at different discharges, vegetation mapping, and historic imagery. The maps and shapefiles are available for agency's to borrow from the Corps.

### **Next Meeting: July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012 from 12:30 – 3:30 pm at Reclamation.**

- Tentative agenda items: 1) Finalize the draft white paper; 2) outline presentation to the EC; 3) review the report and maps from the Floodplain Encroachment project and ground-truthing update; 4)

**San Acacia Reach Ad Hoc Work group  
26 April 2012 Meeting Attendees**

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