

RECORD OF DECISION
FOR THE
FINAL PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR
IMPROVEMENTS TO THE TIJUANA RIVER FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT

Approved by:



Carlos Marin, P.E.
Commissioner, United States Section

Date 6/30/08

**INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION
UNITED STATES AND MEXICO
UNITED STATES SECTION**

Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Long-term Improvements to the USIBWC Tijuana River Flood Control Project in San Diego County, California.

AGENCY: United States Section, International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC)

ACTION: Record of Decision

SUMMARY

This notice is provided in accordance with 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) parts 1500-1508 of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and USIBWC procedures for implementing NEPA. The USIBWC anticipates the need to improve maintenance practices or functionality of the Tijuana River Flood Control Project (Tijuana River FCP) located in southern San Diego County, California. Measures under consideration include changes in vegetation management within the floodway, water quality improvements, and support to local or regional initiatives for multipurpose use of the project for wildlife habitat development and other environmental improvements. Identified measures were incorporated into a Multipurpose Project Management (MPM) Alternative for long-term improvement of the Tijuana River FCP.

A Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) was prepared to evaluate potential consequences of changes associated with the MPM Alternative relative to the continuation of current operation and maintenance (O&M) activities (No Action Alternative). The USIBWC will apply this programmatic evaluation as a guideline for the environmental impacts assessment of future individual projects considered possible at a conceptual level, but not currently anticipated for implementation. Following the programmatic evaluation of potential impacts, the MPM Alternative was adopted as the preferred option for long-term improvements to the Tijuana River FCP. In implementing this alternative, the USIBWC will continue to improve functionality of the Tijuana River FCP to meet its mandate for flood control while supporting regional initiatives for improvement of water quality and environmental conditions.

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The USIBWC operates and maintains the Tijuana River FCP located in southern San Diego County, California. The flood control project, constructed in 1978, provides flood

protection in urban, suburban, and agricultural areas in the United States. It consists of a two-levee system that runs along a modified stream channel 2.3 miles long, extending from the international border to the start of the natural Tijuana River channel. The floodway between the levees encompasses approximately 400 acres. The Tijuana River FCP is located upstream of natural resources conservation areas managed by the County of San Diego, State of California, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These conservation areas are of great regional value as they contain a diversified plant and animal species assemblage that includes many protected animal and plant species.

The USIBWC anticipates a need for improvements in O&M practices of the Tijuana River FCP. Potential changes would include measures to support local and/or regional initiatives to improve environmental conditions and/or water quality, incorporated into the MPM Alternative. Most improvements are conceptual-level measures considered feasible but not currently envisioned for implementation. Known or anticipated improvements are typically associated with utilization of the flood control project in support of local or regional initiatives for multipurpose use of the Tijuana River FCP for wildlife habitat development and other improvements in environmental conditions.

A PEIS was prepared to assess potential consequences of implementing new maintenance practices and improvements that would allow USIBWC to meet its mandate for flood protection while minimizing potential impacts and taking advantage of environmental improvement opportunities. Potential consequences of the MPM Alternative were evaluated relative to the No Action Alternative, which is continuation of current O&M activities. A Draft PEIS was released for a 45-day public review period on August 10, 2007. Comments on the Draft PEIS were received from four federal agencies, four California State agencies, the County of San Diego, the City of Imperial Beach, and two individual reviewers. Oral comments were also received from three presenters during a public hearing held in the City of Imperial Beach, California on August 30, 2007. The Notice of Availability of the Final PEIS was published in the Federal Register on May 14, 2008.

Alternatives Considered in the Final PEIS

No Action Alternative. The No Action Alternative is the continuation of current O&M practices, including actions planned or identified for short-term implementation. Current practices include levee system maintenance measures, such as grading the levee surface and mowing the exterior bank of the levees; floodway maintenance and vegetation control measures such as periodic mowing of large sections of the floodway, and operation of a leased sod farm covering nearly 40 percent of the floodway; and river channel maintenance measures such as sediment removal from the low-flow channel, and disposal of up to approximately 7,500 cubic yards of removed sediment per year.

Multipurpose Project Management Alternative. The MPM Alternative, developed with extensive public review and involvement, incorporates potential changes in current O&M practices; regional initiatives by federal agencies, local governments, and other organizations, such as development of a multi-agency river/estuary management plan and coordination on trash removal operations and construction of trash collection structures;

and bi-national initiatives, such agreements with local governments and municipalities to further address erosion and trash control on both sides of the border.

USIBWC Decision

The MPM Alternative was selected as the preferred option for implementation of improvements to the Tijuana River FCP. This alternative was also identified as the environmentally preferred alternative. This selection is consistent with the core project mission of flood control, and supports regional initiatives for habitat improvement and management of natural resources. Participation in such initiatives would be largely conducted as cooperative agreements with the proposing agencies or organizations.

In implementing the MPM Alternative, the USIBWC will continue to improve functionality and maintenance of the Tijuana River FCP to meet its mandate for flood control while supporting regional initiatives for improvement of water quality and environmental conditions. The USIBWC will apply the programmatic evaluation as an overall guidance for evaluation of future improvement projects considered possible at a conceptual level, but not currently anticipated for implementation. As improvement projects are developed for implementation, site-specific environmental documentation will be prepared on the basis of PEIS findings and project specifications.

Basis for Decision and Issues Evaluated

In the selection of a preferred alternative, the USIBWC considered potential environmental consequences identified in the PEIS, as well as its potential to meet the project's core objective of flood control. The decision-making process also took into consideration comments and recommendations from agencies, individuals, and public and private organizations. Potentially significant environmental consequences were identified in the areas of water resources and biological resources. The selected alternative would have limited or no impacts on cultural resources, socioeconomic resources, land use, and environmental health (noise, air quality, and environmental hazards).

Water Resources. Small-scale changes in extent or timing of vegetation removal would not have any effect on the ability to control floodwaters, or result in changes to hydrology or groundwater resources. Small improvements in water quality would be expected as additional best management practices are implemented for trash and sediment removal.

Biological Resources. Small-scale changes in the extent or timing of vegetation removal in the floodway would occur, including riparian vegetation development along the river channel. Support of a watershed management program for better sediment control would improve, to various degrees, development of vegetation and wildlife habitat outside the floodway, including protected plant and animal species habitat. Regional wildlife habitat conservation initiatives may also improve sensitive areas, including riparian areas and grassland areas, downstream of the Tijuana River FCP.

Cumulative Impacts. Cooperative agreements for erosion control in Tijuana River tributary canyons would reduce sediment load reaching the Tijuana River estuary. Storm

water quality improvements would result from participation in additional bi-national plans for upstream control of point and non-point pollution sources.

Finding. Because of its potential to improve biological resources and environmental conditions, the MPM Alternative was identified as the preferred option for long-term improvement to the Tijuana River FCP. In implementing the MPM Alternative, the USBWC will continue to improve functionality and maintenance of the Tijuana River FCP to meet its mandate for flood control while supporting regional initiatives for improvement of environmental conditions, including improved water quality and wildlife habitat development, both within the floodway and downstream from the Tijuana River FCP.