



International Boundary and Water Commission United States Section

For immediate release
June 5, 2019

USIBWC OPENS PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD AND PLANS PUBLIC HEARINGS FOR TWO DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS FOR THE RIO GRANDE CANALIZATION PROJECT

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States Section (USIBWC) has completed two Draft Environmental Assessments (EAs) for projects within the Rio Grande Canalization Project (RGCP), which extends for 105.6 miles along the Rio Grande from Percha Diversion Dam in New Mexico to American Diversion Dam in El Paso, Texas. In June 2009, the USIBWC signed the *Record of Decision (ROD) for the River Management Alternatives for the RGCP*, committing the agency to implementing changes to the long-term management of the river corridor, including restoring riparian and aquatic habitat at up to 30 sites over 10 years (through 2019) and updating the River Management Plan (RMP). With the conclusion of the ROD, the USIBWC has completed one EA to evaluate aquatic habitat restoration projects and the other EA to continue the implementation of the RMP beyond the ROD timeframe.

The purpose of the first EA, the *Draft Environmental Assessment for Aquatic Habitat Restoration in the Rio Grande Canalization Project*, is to identify, design, and implement aquatic habitat restoration sites to satisfy USIBWC's commitment for aquatic habitat in the 2009 ROD. Restoration actions could include invasive vegetation removal, native vegetation planting, overbank lowering, bank cuts, natural levee breaches, secondary channels, bank destabilization, channel widening, arroyo mouth management, construction of inset floodplains, and use of supplemental water for on-site irrigation.

The aquatic habitat EA evaluates potential environmental impacts of eight alternatives, including the No Action. USIBWC's Preferred Alternative is to implement four aquatic habitat restoration sites (Broad Canyon Arroyo, Selden Point Bar, Las Cruces Effluent, and Downstream of Courchesne Bridge).

The second EA, the *Draft Environmental Assessment for the Continued Implementation of the River Management Plan of the Rio Grande Canalization Project*, evaluates potential impacts of seven alternatives, including the No Action Alternative, regarding levee maintenance, vegetation management, continued implementation and maintenance of restoration sites, endangered species management, channel maintenance, and channel maintenance alternatives (CMAs) within the USIBWC right-of-way (ROW). The EA will replace the ROD and proposes a timeline to implement the RMP through 2030. Under the Preferred Alternative, USIBWC would continue implementation of the RMP; designate up to 65 miles through the USIBWC ROW for the New Mexico Rio Grande Trail and Texas trails; re-evaluate and implement CMAs potentially outside the ROW; increase efforts to engage stakeholders through the Sediment Control Initiative Federal Workgroup and stakeholder groups; and establish partnerships to move up to 500 acres of No Mow Zone managed grasslands or habitat restoration to areas outside USIBWC jurisdiction where they would have greater chance of success. .

The evaluation performed in each EA concludes that there would be no significant impacts to the human environment as a result of the implementation of any of the alternatives in either EA. Therefore, the USIBWC is issuing Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and will not prepare an environmental impact statement unless additional information which may affect this decision is brought to our attention within the 30-day public comment period.

USIBWC will be conducting the following public hearings for the Draft EAs:

Aquatic Habitat EA
June 12, 2019, 5-7 p.m.
Las Cruces City Hall

2nd Floor, Conference Room 2007B
700 N. Main Street
Las Cruces, NM 88001

RMP EA

June 18, 2019, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Las Cruces City Hall
2nd Floor, Conference Room 2007A
700 N. Main Street
Las Cruces, NM 88001

RMP EA

June 19, 2019, 5 to 7 p.m.

USIBWC American Dam/Carlos Marin Field Office
2616 W. Paisano Drive
El Paso, TX 79922

The public comment period for both Draft Environmental Assessments is until **July 5, 2019**. Both Draft EAs are on USIBWC's website at http://www.ibwc.gov/EMD/EIS_EA_Public_Comment.html. The Notices of Availability for the Draft EAs were published in the Federal Register on May 31, 2019.

Written public comments are due by **July 5, 2019** and should be submitted to:

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