

Navajo Reservoir Operations Environmental Impact Statement Update

U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation

June 2000

About this Newsletter

This is the second in a series of newsletters intended to give you the latest information about what's happening with the environmental review process in preparation of the draft Navajo Reservoir Operations Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Background

In October 1999, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) published a Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* announcing we would prepare a draft EIS on the operations of the Navajo Dam and Reservoir (Project) to implement flows recommended by the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program. The authorized purposes



San Juan River Below Navajo Dam

of the Project would be maintained while accommodating these recommended flows or a reasonable alternative. It is expected that implementation of these flows in the San Juan River would help conserve the endangered Colorado pikeminnow and razorback sucker.

Cooperating Agency Meetings

Reclamation and the cooperating agencies have met 3 times since issuance of the first EIS news-letter in December 1999. The purpose of meeting is to share information and coordinate EIS activities. These meetings will continue throughout the EIS process as necessary.

Cooperating Agencies include: Jicarilla Apache Tribe; Southern Ute Indian Tribe; The Navajo Nation; Ute Mountain Ute Tribe; The Southwestern Water Conservation District; New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission; San Juan Water Commission; City of Farmington; Albuquerque Army Corps of Engineers; Fish and Wildlife Service; Bureau of Indian Affairs; Colorado Water Conservation Board; National Park Service (Glen Canyon); and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Meeting Held on Flow Impacts Downstream of Navajo Reservoir

In late March, Reclamation and the San Juan Water Commission hosted a public meeting in Farmington, New Mexico, to discuss issues associated with high flows on the San Juan River. This meeting provided water users down-stream of the reservoir, and others, an opportunity to discuss the impacts of the flows, their options, and what assistance might be available to them. The water users were concerned that both high and low flows in the river limit their ability to divert water. The high flows wash out their diversion structures and the low flows make it difficult to divert water.

Representatives of the Army Corps of Engineers, New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, the City of Farmington, Reclamation, and five water user groups attended the meeting.

Test Flows of 250 cfs Planned

From July 10 through 14, Reclamation tentatively plans to conduct a 5-day summer low-flow test of 250 cubic feet per second (cfs) in the San Juan River from the dam to the confluence of the Animas River. The purpose of the test is to analyze potential low flow impacts to the river, recreation, and diversion structures.

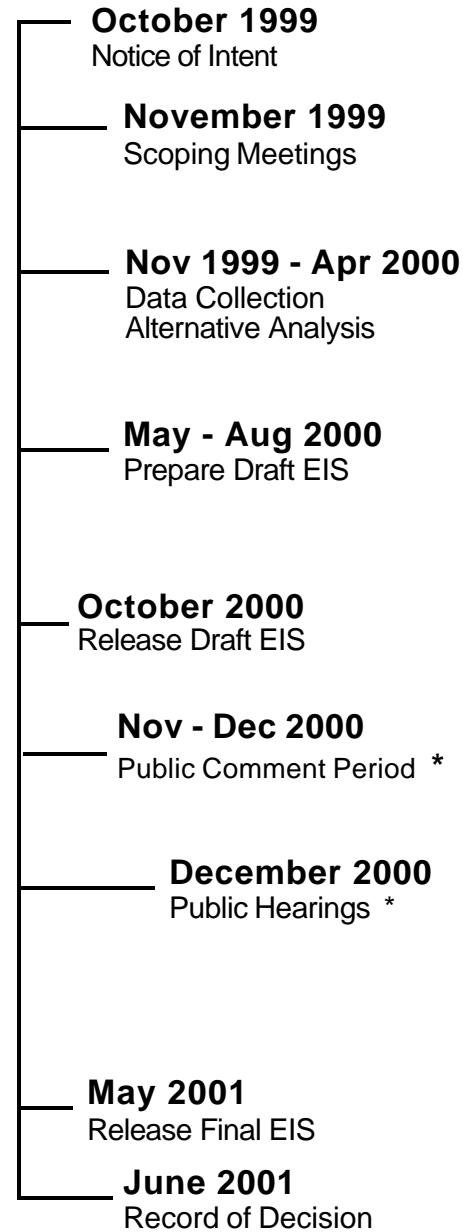
Reclamation’s previous low flow test was conducted in November 1996 through March 1997 and focused on measuring low flow impacts during the winter. This planned test will focus on low flow in



Boating on the San Juan River
Photo: Bureau of Land Management

the summer when use of the river is much higher. Reclamation will closely coordinate the test with the primary users of the river including fly fishermen, recreationists, water users and the City of Farmington. A public meeting to discuss the test and receive public comment is scheduled for 7 p.m. on June 12 at the Farmington Civic Center (200 W. Arrington, Farmington, NM).

EIS Time Line



* Opportunity for formal public participation. However, comments and concerns are welcome at any time.

Effects of 500 cfs Flows on the San Juan River Trout Fishery

Reclamation has contracted with the New Mexico Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces to evaluate the effects winter flows of 500 cfs have on the health of the San Juan River trout fishery immediately below Navajo Reservoir.



San Juan fly fisherman after the big one

For purposes of this study, flows will remain at 500 cfs from October 2000 through March 2001. The same 4 month period, but with flows of 250 cfs, was used in a 1996-97 study of fish health and conditions. The results of the October 2000 through March 2001 research will allow a comparison of the two different flow levels.

EIS Alternatives (Potential Actions)

The draft EIS will consider the following possible alternatives for operating the dam and reservoir to implement the San Juan River Basin Recovery Implementation Program's flow recommendations.

1. No Action

2. Flow recommendations with 250 cfs* (minimum release**) - 5,000 cfs (maximum release)
3. Modified flow recommendations with 500 cfs (minimum release) - 5,000 cfs (maximum release)
4. Modified flow recommendations with 250 cfs (minimum winter release), 400 cfs (minimum summer release) - 5,000 cfs (maximum release)
5. Modified flow recommendations with 250 cfs (minimum release) - 6,000 cfs (maximum release)
6. Modified flow recommendations with 500 cfs (minimum winter release) - 6,000 cfs (maximum release)

*cubic feet per second

**all releases to be made from the dam

Reclamation plans to identify a preferred alternative based on its ability to meet recommended flows for endangered fish and consideration of environmental, economic, technical and other factors. Based on public and agency comments received during the draft EIS review process, the preferred alternative may or may not be the final alternative selected.

The draft EIS will present the predicted effects of the alternatives on the human environment in comparative form, providing a clear basis for choice among the options for the decision maker and the public. As a reminder, Reclamation plans to have a draft EIS ready for public review and comment in October 2000 (see EIS Time Line).

Who to Contact

If you have questions, need additional information, or want to be added to our Navajo Reservoir Operations EIS mailing list, contact:

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Information is also available at Reclamation's Internet web site: www.uc.usbr.gov
(select Environmental Studies, Summaries, & Reports.)

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