



Public Notice

US Army Corps
of Engineers
Sacramento District
1325 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-2922

Number: 200575452
Date: December 22, 2005
Comments Due: January 23, 2006

SUBJECT: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District, (Corps) is evaluating a permit application to perform routine annual maintenance within the Blanco Diversion Dam on the Rio Blanco. This notice is to inform interested parties of the proposed activity and to solicit comments. This notice may also be viewed at the Corps web site at <http://www.spk.usace.army.mil/regulatory.html>.

AUTHORITY: This application is being evaluated under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act for the discharge of dredged or fill material in waters of the United States.

APPLICANT: Bureau of Reclamation-Upper Colorado Region Albuquerque Area Office
Ms. Nancy Umbreit, ALB-185
555 Broadway NE, Suite 100
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102
505-462-3599

LOCATION: The project site is located in the Rio Blanco in Section 11, Township 34, Range 1, Archuleta County, Colorado.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The applicant is proposing to perform general maintenance at the Blanco Diversion Dam facility. Based on the available information, the overall project purpose is to maintain the Rio Blanco diversion structure in working condition in order to meet necessary water demands.

The Rio Blanco Diversion structure is part of the San Juan-Chama Project, which consists of a system of diversion structures and tunnels for the transmountain movement of water from the San Juan River Basin to the Rio Grande Basin. Primary purposes of the San Juan-Chama Project are to furnish a water supply to the middle Rio Grande Valley for agricultural, municipal, domestic, and industrial uses. The project was authorized by Congress in 1962. The Blanco Diversion Dam diverts water to the Blanco Feeder conduit, a closed conduit of 520 cfs capacity which conveys the water to the Blanco Tunnel. Blanco Tunnel is a concrete-lined structure with 520 cfs capacity to carry water 8.64 miles from the Rio Blanco to a point near the Little Navajo River, where the Little Oso Siphon carries it under Little Navajo River to the Oso Tunnel. The water is then conveyed through the 5.05-mile Oso Tunnel to the Navajo River. At the Navajo River, the Oso Siphon carries the water under the river and into the 12.8-mile long Azotea Tunnel. At the Azotea Tunnel, it is carried into Azotea Creek in the Rio Grande Basin. This water then flows down Azotea and Willow Creek 11.78 river miles to Heron Reservoir.

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the Blanco Diversion Dam. General annual maintenance involves sediment removal, bank stabilization, and repair and maintenance of the dam and its associated infrastructure.

Sediment Removal

Spring runoff and large rain events cause bedload material to become trapped in front of Blanco Diversion Dam and in front of the conduit tunnel. To pass flows, reduce downstream turbidity, and retain

facility capacity, the material must be removed both upstream, at the dam, and downstream. During clean out, the shale composite material, colloidal in nature passes downstream below the dam and falls out within the detention area immediately below the dam. Reclamation must remove accumulated sediment to a water surface elevation of 7852.37 for the dam to work properly.

Currently Reclamation is working with the Colorado Division of Wildlife to develop a monitoring program to monitor sedimentation affects to fisheries downstream as a result of their construction activities. Reclamation plans to monitor downstream effects during 2005. They will develop an excavation plan based on their 2005 data.

Bank Stabilization

As part of their maintenance plan, Reclamation plans to stabilize eroding shorelines. For 2006 maintenance, Reclamation is planning to place riprap, along the bankline at two different locations where bank erosion is taking place: river left, directly upstream of the dam, and river left downstream of the settling basin. The riprap used for all stabilization techniques will be 6 inch in diameter to 1/4 cubic yard riprap along 150 feet of shoreline.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

All work will be performed during the late fall, early winter season to avoid high flows.

USACE's individual permits are generally valid for a period of 5 years. If a permit is to be issued for this project, it would allow general maintenance activities to occur on an annual basis for a period of 5 years.

Equipment used for sediment removal includes a front-end loader, excavator, and dump trucks.

All sediment will be relocated to specific depository areas located outside of all waters of the U.S.

Reclamation has not obtained a Department of the Army permit for previous maintenance work at the Blanco Diversion Dam site.

The project will not impact any special aquatic sites, such as wetlands.

Alternatives. The applicant has reviewed other alternative for maintenance of the Blanco Diversion Dam. The applicant feels that the proposed alternative is the only practicable alternative for ensure that delivery demands are met and water quality remain at acceptable levels. Additional information concerning project alternatives may be available from the applicant. Other alternatives may develop during the review process for this permit application. All reasonable project alternatives, in particular those which may be less damaging to the aquatic environment, will be considered.

Mitigation. The Corps requires that applicants consider and use all reasonable and practical measures to avoid and minimize impacts to aquatic resources. If the applicant is unable to avoid or minimize all impacts, the Corps may require compensatory mitigation.

OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AUTHORIZATIONS: Water quality certification or a waiver, as required under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act is required for this project. The applicant will be applying for certification.

HISTORIC PROPERTIES: Based on the available information, cultural resources are not within the project's area of potential effect.

ENDANGERED SPECIES: The project will not affect any Federally-listed threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat that are protected by the Endangered Species Act.

The above determinations are based on information provided by the applicant and our preliminary review.

EVALUATION FACTORS: The decision whether to issue a permit will be based on an evaluation of the probable impacts, including cumulative impacts, of the described activity on the public interest. That decision will reflect the national concern for both protection and utilization of important resources. The benefit, which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the described activity, must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors which may be relevant to the described activity will be considered, including the cumulative effects thereof; among those are conservation, economics, aesthetics, general environmental concerns, wetlands, historic properties, fish and wildlife values, flood hazards, floodplain values, land use, navigation, shoreline erosion and accretion, recreation, water supply and conservation, water quality, energy needs, safety, food and fiber production, mineral needs, consideration of property ownership and, in general, the needs and welfare of the people. The activity's impact on the public interest will include application of the Section 404(b)(1) guidelines promulgated by the Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency (40 CFR Part 230).

The Corps is soliciting comments from the public, Federal, State, and local agencies and officials, Indian tribes, and other interested parties in order to consider and evaluate the impacts of this proposed activity. Any comments received will be considered by the Corps to determine whether to issue, modify, condition, or deny a permit for this proposal. To make this decision, comments are used to assess impacts on endangered species, historic properties, water quality, general environmental effects, and other public interest factors listed above. Comments are used in the preparation of an Environmental Assessment and/or an Environmental Impact Statement pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. Comments are also used to determine the need for a public hearing and to determine the overall public interest of the proposed activity.

SUBMITTING COMMENTS: Written comments, referencing Public Notice 200575452, must be submitted to the office listed below on or before January 23, 2006:

Kara Hellige, Project Manager
US Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District
Durango Regulatory Office
278 Sawyer Drive, Suite #1
Durango, Colorado 81303
Email: kara.a.hellige@usace.army.mil

The Corps is particularly interested in receiving comments related to the proposal's probable impacts on the affected aquatic environment and the secondary and cumulative effects. Anyone may request, in writing, that a public hearing be held to consider this application. Requests shall specifically state, with particularity, the reason(s) for holding a public hearing. If the Corps determines that the information received in response to this notice is inadequate for thorough evaluation, a public hearing may be warranted. If a public hearing is warranted, interested parties will be notified of the time, date, and location. Please note that all comment letters received are subject to release to the public through the Freedom of Information Act. If you have questions or need additional information please contact the applicant or the Corps' project manager Kara Hellige, 970-375-9452, kara.a.hellige@usace.army.mil.

Attachments: 3 drawings