



International Boundary and Water Commission United States Section

For immediate release
June 4, 2009

LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR RIO GRANDE ANNOUNCED

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has announced its decision for long-term management of the Rio Grande Canalization Project (RGCP). The RGCP covers 105 river miles from Percha Dam, New Mexico to American Dam in El Paso, Texas. The Record of Decision, signed June 4 by U.S. Commissioner C.W. “Bill” Ruth, selects the Integrated USIBWC Land Management Alternative, one of several alternatives that were studied.

The selected alternative includes construction and maintenance of river levees to provide enhanced flood protection as well as measures to improve environmental conditions. Environmental improvements include erosion control, restoration of native vegetation, and reconfiguration of the river channel at arroyo mouths to enhance aquatic habitat. To ensure efficient water delivery, the selected alternative allows for maintenance of the river channel and dredging when necessary. There will be no impacts on prime farmland.

“We have already begun levee construction in the area. This decision now allows us to move forward with the environmental component of our management strategy,” said U.S. Commissioner C.W. “Bill” Ruth.

Key features of the plan include establishing restoration sites to promote native riparian vegetation and ecological improvements along the river. Floodway vegetation that is currently mowed will be managed and modified to promote native grass development in combination with efforts to control salt cedar, a non-native species. The existing grazing lease program will be phased out to improve erosion control and water quality. Recreational use of some sections of the floodway will be continued or expanded.

The USIBWC intends to implement the project with the continued involvement of a stakeholder work group. Since 2006, the USIBWC has partnered with the Elephant Butte Irrigation District, World Wildlife Fund, and other stakeholders as part of an effort to identify management strategies that meet the needs of irrigators and environmentalists.

“We worked very hard to find common ground among various interest groups,” Commissioner Ruth added. “This decision shows that the Rio Grande can be managed in a way that benefits both farming and wildlife. At the same time, we are able to provide enhanced flood protection and deliver water to Mexico in accordance with the treaty.”

During the first five years of environmental enhancements, efforts will focus on on-site data collection, planning, pilot projects, and development of water rights agreements. Full-scale implementation of environmental projects will be undertaken in subsequent years.

Levee construction in the RGCP began in 2008 and will be expanded using funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Most levee construction should be completed by early 2011.

A schedule of levee improvements is available at: http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/URG_Schedule.pdf.
The full text of the Record of Decision is available at:
http://www.ibwc.gov/Files/ROD_River_Mgmt_Alt_RGCP.pdf.

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, is responsible for applying the boundary and water treaties between the two countries. Under the Convention of 1906, the United States delivers Rio Grande water to Mexico at Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. The USIBWC is responsible for maintaining the RGCP to ensure treaty compliance.

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