

U.S. Bureau of Land Management Nevada Groundwater Projects

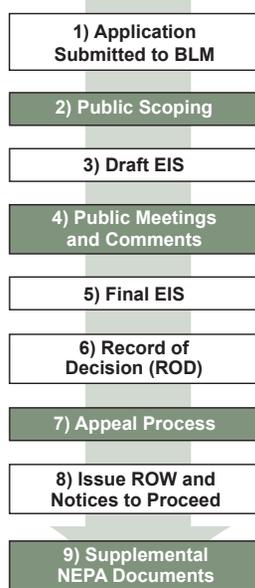
Southern Nevada Water Authority
Right-of-Way Project Update

March 2009 – Newsletter No. 4

Our last newsletter (#3) provided an update on the GWD Project. To view previous newsletters, visit our website (listed at the bottom of page 4). In this issue, we detail the environmental process for this Project.

The NEPA Process

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to carefully consider the environmental impacts of proposed actions and provide opportunities for public involvement in the decision-making process. An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) provides a full and fair discussion of significant environmental impacts from a project, describes alternatives, and offers recommendations that will minimize potential impacts (40 CFR 1502.1). The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is preparing an EIS for a right-of-way (ROW) application submitted by the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) for the Clark, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties Groundwater Development (GWD) Project. Page two lists the components associated with the ROW application. Opportunities for public involvement are reflected in the green-shaded areas of the flow chart and described in the following NEPA process for this Project:



1. Application: SNWA submitted to the BLM in August 2004. Decisions on water rights applications and associated hearings and rulings are a State of Nevada responsibility.

2. Scoping: April 8-August 1, 2005, and July 19-October 18, 2006. Public meetings were held in nine communities in Nevada and Utah. A final report, summarizing comments from both scoping periods, is posted on the BLM website (www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/prog/planning/groundwater_projects/eis_home_page/snwa_groundwater_project/public_scoping.html).

3. Draft EIS: Expected release in late 2009. It will include environmental impact analyses of the proposed action and alternatives.

4. Public Meetings/Comments on Draft: Meetings will be held at several locations in Nevada and Utah with dates announced in local media and on the BLM website. The draft will be available for public comment for at least 45 days. The comment period will be announced in the Federal Register, in local media, and on the BLM website. Please refer to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Citizen's Guide for assistance with comment preparation (www.nepa.gov/nepa/Citizens_Guide_Dec07.pdf).

5. Final EIS: Anticipated completion/release in 2010. It will include revised analyses and responses to comments received on the Draft EIS. A 30-day availability period

(not a comment period) will be announced in the Federal Register, in local media, and on the BLM website. The BLM can consider comments submitted within the 30-day availability period that identify significant new information affecting the proposed action.

6. Record of Decision (ROD): Decision document based on EIS analyses. The BLM will decide under what conditions to grant the ROW.

7. Appeal: A decision can be appealed to the U.S. Department of Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA).

8. Issue ROW and Notices to Proceed: ROW issued for Project as defined in the ROD. SNWA will submit final project plans and engineering designs, and will fulfill requirements of other agencies. Based on the BLM's approval of final plans or portions thereof, Notices to Proceed are then issued and construction can begin.

9. Supplemental NEPA Documents: SNWA will submit applications to the BLM for additional ROWs for well sites and supporting facilities. The BLM will complete additional NEPA analyses for each ROW.



Supplemental NEPA (Tiering)

The BLM is using a “tiered” approach for this Project. Tiering, when used for larger projects, addresses broad programs and issues in initial (Tier 1) analyses, and evaluates site-specific proposals and impacts in subsequent tiered studies. Tiering is appropriate when it helps the lead agency focus on the issues which are ripe for decision and delays consideration of those issues not yet ripe.

Tier 1 - This EIS

For this project, some site-specific details of the proposed action, such as the main pipeline alignment, are known (see part A below). These known components will be addressed in the initial Tier 1 document at a site-specific level. Details that are not known, such as the exact number of well sites and specific power line routes, will be analyzed based on a conceptual analysis in the Tier 1 document. In this example, the conceptual analysis will rely on a set of assumptions that encompass the entire area where wells might be drilled and where power line routes might be located. These assumptions will be used as a basis for impact assessment (see part B in next column). Once SNWA determines exact well locations, the impacts will be analyzed in a subsequent tiered document.

A. The main Project components to be specifically addressed in Tier 1 include:

Water Facilities

- Pipelines: approximately 306 miles of buried water pipelines, between 16 and 84 inches in diameter
- Pumping Stations: 5 pumping station facilities
- Regulating Tanks: 6 regulating tanks each with a capacity of between 3 and 10 million gallons
- Pressure Reducing Stations: 3 facilities
- Water Treatment Facility/Buried Storage Reservoir: 1 site with a 150-million gallons per day water treatment facility and a 40-million gallon buried-storage reservoir

Power Facilities

Power Lines: approximately 323 miles of 230 kilovolt (kV), 69 kV, and 25 kV overhead power lines

Electrical Substations:

2 primary electrical substations (230 kV to 69 kV) and 5 secondary substations (69 kV to 25 kV)

Access Roads

Roads to provide maintenance access to the facilities above

B. The conceptual portion of the Tier 1 document includes:

Production Wells

The number of production wells will depend on the results of exploratory well drilling and individual well yields. For analysis purposes, the assumptions for production wells are:

- Spring Valley: 52 to 64 wells
- Snake Valley: 39 to 48 wells
- Cave Valley: 4 or 5 wells
- Dry Lake Valley: 10 or 11 wells
- Delamar Valley: 3 wells
- Collector Pipelines: It is assumed that 100 to 250 miles of collector pipelines will convey water from the production wells to the main and lateral pipelines.

Pumping Stations

Based upon known topography of the Project area, it is anticipated that two additional pumping stations (one each in Delamar and Dry Lake Valleys) may be required to convey water from production areas into the main and lateral pipelines.

Power Facilities

Additional 25 kV distribution power lines would be needed to convey power to the wells and pumping stations. Additional secondary substations may be required in Delamar and Dry Lake Valleys to reduce power from 69 kV to 25 kV. Hydroturbines (permitted by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission) may be installed to generate electrical power as the water flows from higher to lower elevations.

Roads

Roads for maintenance access to wells and collection facilities may be either new roads or improvements to existing roads within the ROW. The road improvements may include grading, widening, and installing culverts.



Photo courtesy of BLM Ely District Office

Subsequent Tiers

After SNWA identifies specific details of the conceptual components described in part B on page 2, it will submit additional ROW applications. BLM will address these site-specific components in subsequent tiered documents. The hydrologic model used for Tier 1 and baseline assessments for all resources will be updated in subsequent tiered analyses on site-specific components. These subsequent tiered documents will conform to NEPA with full public involvement, including scoping and document review.

See SNWA's December 2008 Plan of Development (POD) for more information about the Project components and future site-specific actions. The POD can be downloaded from SNWA's website at http://www.snwa.com/html/system_gdp.html. This link will take you to the web pages that describe the entire Groundwater Development Project. To view the POD, click first on the "Documents" tab and then click on "Conceptual Plan of Development – Dec. 2008".

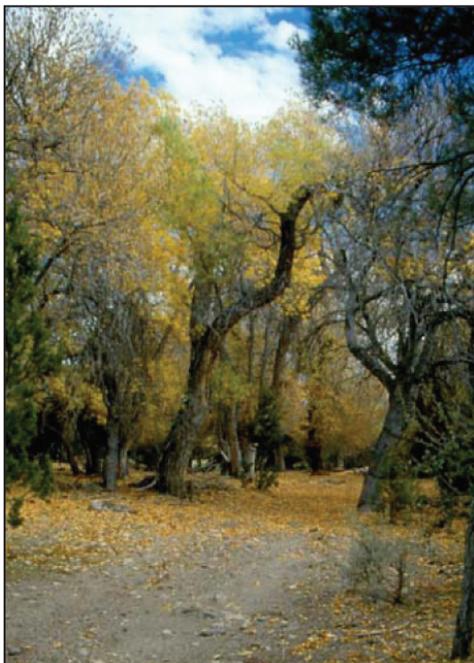


Photo courtesy of BLM Ely District Office

Future Newsletters

Newsletter #5 will include the following topics:

- Water rights process
- Water rights stipulated agreements
- Related laws
- BLM's and other agencies' roles in the water rights process

Cooperating Agency Involvement

BLM is the lead Federal agency to supervise the preparation of the EIS for the GWD Project. Therefore, it is BLM's responsibility to request the participation of cooperating agencies.

A cooperating agency can be a federal, state, local, or tribal government with jurisdiction by law and/or special expertise with respect to environmental impacts. Jurisdiction by law means the agency has authority to approve or deny a part of the proposal (such as jurisdiction over Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, etc.). Special expertise refers to statutory responsibility, agency mission, or related program experience (such as the responsibility of State agencies to manage fish and wildlife).

Cooperating agencies have a four-part role in the EIS process (40 CFR 1501.6):

- Participate in the NEPA process beginning at the earliest possible time.
- Participate in scoping.
- Upon request of the lead agency, assume responsibility for developing information and preparing environmental analyses for areas in which the cooperating agency has special expertise.
- At the lead agency's request, make staff available to support the EIS effort.

For the GWD Project, cooperating agencies have contributed significantly by providing data and identifying data gaps; commenting on draft documents and analyses (e.g., the Hydrology Baseline Report, Natural Resources Baseline Summary Report, Hydrology Model); collaborating on public outreach media; and interacting through frequent conference calls and meetings.

Table 1 on page 4 provides information about the cooperating agencies for the GWD Project.

We have received requests to include information in future newsletters on *desalination* and on *how BLM uses public comments on a Draft EIS*.

If you have topics you would like to see addressed in future newsletters, please send your ideas to nvgwprojects@blm.gov

Table 1. Cooperating agencies for the GWD Project and their jurisdiction/expertise specific to this project.

Agency	Jurisdiction/Expertise
Federal	
Bureau of Indian Affairs	Administers and manages lands held in trust by the United States for the benefit of federally-recognized American Indians, Indian tribes, and Alaska Natives. Has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to protecting and developing Tribal natural resources. Tribal reservations nearby include the Ely Shoshone, Confederated Tribes of the Goshute, Duckwater Shoshone, and Moapa Paiute.
Bureau of Reclamation	Manages the lower Colorado River and water resource projects and programs. Has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to managing the Colorado River to meet water and power delivery obligations, implementing legislation governing Colorado River operations and management, and measuring and accounting for Colorado River water use..
Fish and Wildlife Service	Responsible for compliance with, and has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to several laws, including the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and others. Responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats. Manages several National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) nearby, including Pahrnagat, Moapa Valley, Desert, and Fish Springs NWRs.
National Park Service	Manages national parks system properties. Has jurisdiction over national park system land and resources and special expertise with respect to resource protection and resource management planning (including geology, hydrology, biology, ecosystems, and air quality) and recreational resources and experiences including viewshed. Both Great Basin National Park and Lake Mead National Recreation Area are located nearby.
Forest Service	Manages national forest system lands. Has jurisdiction over national forest system lands or special expertise with respect to natural resources (including hydrology, biology, and ecosystems), and land and resource management planning on national forest system lands. The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is located nearby.
Nellis Air Force Base	Responsible for lands and resources under military jurisdiction, permitting uses on Nellis Small Arms Range, and airspace conflicts. Both the Small Arms Range and the Military Operations Area airspace are adjacent.
State	
Nevada Department of Wildlife	Responsible for and has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to administering the policies and regulations necessary for the preservation, protection, management, and restoration of Nevada's resident wildlife species.
State of Utah	Responsible for water rights and natural resources within the State of Utah. Has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to compliance with land use planning; economic, demographic, fiscal, and community development conditions and trends; natural resources (including hydrology and biology); and water rights permitting and management.
County	
<u>Nevada</u> Clark, Lincoln, White Pine <u>Utah</u> Juab, Millard, Tooele	Responsible for community planning and development within their county. Have jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to compliance with local land use planning and permitting; economic, demographic, fiscal, and community development conditions and trends; and existing resources and water demand projections. Clark County also has responsibilities as the Administrator for the Clark County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan and associated Incidental Take Permit under the Endangered Species Act.
Central Nevada Regional Water Authority	A unit of local government that collaboratively and proactively addresses water resource issues common to the Authority's member counties: Churchill, Elko, Esmeralda, Eureka, Lander, Nye, Pershing, and White Pine. Has special expertise related to water resource management and planning.

BLM Groundwater Projects Office

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 Website: http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/prog/planning/groundwater_projects/eis_home_page/snwa_groundwater_project.html

Cooperating Agencies

Central Nevada Regional Water Authority
 National Park Service
 Nellis Air Force Base
 Nevada Counties: Clark, Lincoln, White Pine
 Nevada Department of Wildlife
 State of Utah
 U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
 U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 U.S. Forest Service
 Utah Counties: Juab, Millard, Tooele