



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
Phoenix Area Office
6150 West Thunderbird Road
Glendale, AZ 85306-4001
APR 15 2021

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL AND U.S. MAIL

Memorandum

To: All Interested Persons, Organizations, and Agencies

From: Leslie A. Meyers **LESLIE**
Area Manager **MEYERS**

Digitally signed by
LESLIE MEYERS
Date: 2021.04.15
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Subject: Public Scoping for the White Mountain Apache Tribe Rural Water System
Environmental Impact Statement

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) as the lead Federal agency is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the effects of construction and operation of the proposed White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) Rural Water System. The WMAT, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have been identified as cooperating agencies. The proposed action was authorized in the WMAT Water Rights Quantification Act (Title III of the Claims Resolution Act of 2010) (Act), whereby the United States Congress directed Reclamation to plan, design, and construct the WMAT Rural Water System (also known as the Miner Flat Dam Project) to divert, store, and distribute water from the North Fork of the White River for the use and benefit of the WMAT. In addition, the Act requires Reclamation to operate and maintain the completed system for three years following construction. After the three-year period, the WMAT would take over ownership, operation, and maintenance of the water system.

The proposed action would fulfill Reclamation's statutory mandate under the Act and would also serve the purpose of providing a long-term, dependable, and sustainable water supply for residents and businesses on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. The proposed project includes construction of a dam and storage reservoir on the North Fork of the White River, enlarged diversion facility and pumping plant, water treatment plant, and a water distribution system. A brief description of the proposal is provided as an attachment to this memorandum.

Scoping activities and meetings were originally conducted for the WMAT Rural Water System EIS in 2013, including publishing of the project Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register* on September 6, 2013. The Rural Water System project schedule was extended for additional engineering studies for the new dam. A new NOI was published in the *Federal Register* on April 19, 2021.

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* PARTIAL

This letter announces the public scoping period, during which Reclamation is soliciting public comments and gathering input on the issues to be analyzed in the EIS. Reclamation and the WMAT are hosting a virtual public scoping information meeting to present an overview of the project and provide an opportunity for public comment. The meeting will be held in a virtual format using the Facebook Live platform (<https://www.facebook.com/cotwmat>) in conjunction with the WMAT Chairwoman Gwendena Lee-Gatewood's weekly public address on Saturday, May 1, 2021 at 10:00 AM, Mountain Standard Time. Presentations will be made by WMAT and Reclamation on the proposed action, environmental issues relative to the EIS, and alternatives to the proposed action that could be considered and analyzed in the EIS. Comments will be accepted and recorded throughout the virtual meeting in a chat format.

Reclamation requests your input on issues of concern regarding this proposed action. You may review project information, watch a recording of the virtual scoping meeting if you miss the live broadcast, and submit comments on the project website (<https://www.wmat-rws-eis.com>), or send written comments to the attention of Mr. Dominic Graziani, Phoenix Area Office, Bureau of Reclamation, 6150 West Thunderbird Road, Glendale, Arizona, 85306-4001 or via email at dgraziani@usbr.gov. The comment period for scoping closes on May 19, 2021.

Before including your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, regardless of submittal process, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

For further information on this action, please contact Mr. Dominic Graziani.

Attachment



ATTACHMENT

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT or Tribe) of the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in east-central Arizona has been working to develop a reliable and high quality domestic and commercial water supply system for several decades, having previously depended on limited and sometimes poor quality ground water sources. Since the early 2000s, the Whiteriver area has experienced water outages, declining water quality and a diminishing water source. The WMAT needs a dependable and sustainable water supply for residents and businesses on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation.

The Claims Resolution Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-291, Title III, 124 STAT 3064, 3073 [2010]) (Act) authorized and directed the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to construct the WMAT Rural Water System to divert, store, and distribute water from the North Fork of the White River near the community of Whiteriver, Arizona. Section 304(c) of the Act designated Reclamation as the lead Federal agency with respect to ensuring compliance with applicable environmental laws and regulations associated with implementation of the WMAT Rural Water System. The Bureau of Indian Affairs is a cooperating agency on this project and will assist in the identification and approval of rights-of-way, easements, and/or permits needed for implementation of the proposed water system. The US Army Corps of Engineers is also a cooperating agency and has regulatory jurisdiction by law under its delegated authority in Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

The proposed action would include construction and operation of the WMAT Rural Water System, including a dam, storage reservoir, pumping plant, treatment facilities, and a distribution system that would provide water to communities located on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, including Whiteriver, Fort Apache, Canyon Day, Cedar Creek, Carrizo, and Cibecue. The proposed Miner Flat Reservoir would hold approximately 8,600 acre-feet of water and the dam would be about 160 feet high and 400 feet in length. Water from the Miner Flat Reservoir would be released to the North Fork of White River, diverted from the stream channel upstream of the community of Whiteriver, and subsequently treated and conveyed via pipeline to downstream Fort Apache Indian Reservation communities. Construction of the distribution system would include 50 miles of new water transmission pipeline. While the primary objective of the reservoir would be to provide a more reliable and sustainable fresh-water supply to WMAT residents and businesses, the project is anticipated to provide other benefits, including more reliable commercial water supply, new recreation opportunities, limited flood control, and increased water for irrigation.

The proposed action would fulfill Reclamation's statutory mandate under the Act to plan, design, and construct, as well as to operate, maintain, and replace the WMAT Rural Water System until title to the system is transferred to the Tribe as provided in the Act. For the WMAT, the purpose of the proposed action is to provide a secure, safe and dependable, good-quality, fresh water supply for its communities and tribal members. This project would ensure a long-term and reliable water supply for the Tribe for present and future generations. Upon completion of construction and operation of the new facilities for a period of three years by Reclamation, the WMAT would become the titled owner and operator of the completed water system. The White Mountain Apache Tribe has contracted with Reclamation pursuant to an Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, Public Law 93-638 agreement to perform planning and design of the WMAT Rural Water System.

Additional information on the project can be found on the project website (<https://www.wmat-rws-eis.com>).

