

Maintenance Alternative (No-Action), comprising the current USIBWC vegetation maintenance program, and the impacts of three vegetation maintenance alternatives that vary from the current USIBWC vegetation maintenance practices along the Lower Rio Grande Valley. No final decision can be made on this proposal during the 30 days following the filing of this FEIS, in accordance with the Council on Environmental regulations, 40 CFR 1506.10(b)(2).

ADDRESSES: Comments should be addressed to: Carolyn Murphy, Chief, Environmental Section, Department of the Army, Galveston District, Corps of Engineers, P.O. Box 1229, Galveston, Texas 77553-1229. Copies of the FEIS are available for inspection and review at the following locations: Brownsville Public Library, 2600 Central Boulevard, Brownsville, Texas; Harlingen Public Library, 410 '76 Drive, Harlingen, Texas; and McAllen Public Library, 601 North Main Street, McAllen, Texas. The FEIS is also available on the USIBWC Home Page at: <http://www.ibwc.state.gov>; and at the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Galveston District, Home Page at: <http://www.swg.usace.army.mil/>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Douglas Echlin, Environmental Protection Specialist, Environmental Management Division, USIBWC, 4171 North Mesa Street, C-100, El Paso, Texas 79902 or call (915) 832-4741, e-mail: dougechlin@ibwc.state.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The USIBWC vegetation maintenance program is performed along the United States portion of the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project (LRGFCP). The vegetation maintenance program was established to fulfill the United States Government's obligations under International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) Minutes No. 212 and No. 238 and to protect life and properties in the United States and Mexico from Rio Grande flooding events.

Under Minute No. 212, the United States and Mexico agreed to annual concurrent channel bank mowing to reduce heavy brush growth in the river reach and to ensure a river channel capacity of 20,000 cfs at the Brownsville-Matamoros area. This maintenance mowing is considered necessary to prevent flooding in Brownsville and Matamoros for the design flood and to ensure that brush does not deflect river flood flows toward either country, thus altering the international boundary alignment by erosion. Minute No. 238 calls for

equally dividing flood flows into interior floodways in each country, thereby ensuring the 20,000 cfs maximum flow at Brownsville and Matamoros.

On November 1, 1989, the Sierra Club *et al.* filed a civil action suit against the USIBWC alleging vegetation maintenance program violations of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (CA No. 89-3005-RCL (1990 WL 116845 (D.D.C.)), Jul. 31, 1990). The plaintiffs alleged that the USIBWC had not prepared an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) relative to the operation and maintenance activities for the United States portion of the LRGFCP as required by NEPA. The plaintiffs also alleged that the USIBWC had not entered into formal consultation with the USFWS pursuant to Section 7 of the ESA with respect to the impacts of the United States portion of the LRGFCP on federally-listed threatened or endangered species.

In a 1990 Consent Decree, the USIBWC agreed to enter into formal consultation with the USFWS regarding the impacts of all vegetation clearing activities of the LRGFCP on federally listed species. The consultation process resulted in an issuance by the USFWS of a Biological Opinion (BO) on May 6, 1993. The USFWS has recently issued a new BO. In addition to formal consultation with USFWS, USIBWC agreed to the preparation of this EIS, which specifically addresses alternative vegetation maintenance practices.

This FEIS presents and analyzes the impacts of current and alternative USIBWC vegetation maintenance practices to fulfill commitments under the IBWC Minutes, the Consent Decree, and the new BO. The pertinent elements of the LRGFCP vegetation maintenance program are based on the need to:

- Maintain channel banks to provide adequate flood conveyance.
- Equitably divert flood flows into interior floodways.
- Remove brush and other obstructions within floodways.
- Maintain a wildlife corridor per the USFWS BO and the 1994 LRGFCP Off-River Wildlife Travel Corridor Plan.

Four potential vegetation maintenance alternatives, including the current USIBWC maintenance program, are considered and analyzed in the FEIS. The Preferred Alternative is the Continued Maintenance Alternative (No-Action), representing the continuation of the current USIBWC vegetation maintenance program.

A Record of Decision will be issued on this proposal after a minimum of 30

days following the filing of the FEIS. Any comments on the FEIS must be received no later than 30 days after the date of publication of the notice of availability by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the **Federal Register**. No action will be taken on the proposed action before 30 days following publication of the notice of availability of the FEIS by EPA.

Dated: December 15, 2003.

Mario Lewis,
General Counsel.

[FR Doc. 03-31670 Filed 12-23-03; 8:45 am]

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INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION, UNITED STATES AND MEXICO

United States Section; Notice of Availability of Draft Environmental Impact Statement, River Management Alternatives for the Rio Grande Canalization Project, Sierra and Doña Ana Counties, NM and El Paso County, TX

AGENCY: United States Section, International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico.

ACTION: Notice of availability of Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

SUMMARY: Pursuant to section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the United States Section, International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC), in cooperation with the United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) on River Management Alternatives for the Rio Grande Canalization Project (RGCP) located in Sierra and Doña Ana Counties, NM and El Paso County, TX. The DEIS analyzes effects of the No Action Alternative and three action alternatives on the future RGCP operation, maintenance, and implementation of environmental measures. One public hearing will be held to receive oral comments on the DEIS from interested organizations and individuals through transcription by a certified court reporter. Written comments may be submitted at the public hearings or mailed to the USIBWC contact and address below.

DATES: Written comments are requested by February 10, 2004. A public hearing is scheduled for Tuesday, January 27, 2004 in El Paso, Texas. *See ADDRESSES* below for location and time.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be addressed to: Mr. Douglas Echlin, Lead

Environmental Protection Specialist, Environmental Management Division, USIBWC, 4171 North Mesa Street, C-310, El Paso, Texas 79902. A public hearing is scheduled from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, January 27, 2004 at the USIBWC Headquarters, First Floor Conference Room, 4171 North Mesa Street, El Paso, Texas 79902 to present your verbal or written comments.

Copies of the DEIS are available for inspection and review at the following locations: Branigan Memorial Library, 200 East Picacho Avenue, Las Cruces, New Mexico; El Paso Public Library, 501 North Oregon Street, El Paso, Texas; New Mexico State University Library, Las Cruces, New Mexico; University Library, The University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso, Texas; and United States Section, International Boundary and Water Commission, 4171 North Mesa Street, El Paso, Texas. A copy of the DEIS will also be posted at the USIBWC Web site at www.ibwc.state.gov "IBWC News."

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Douglas Echlin, Lead Environmental Protection Specialist, Environmental Management Division, USIBWC, 4171 North Mesa Street, C-310, El Paso, Texas 79902 or call 915/832-4741. e-mail: dougechlin@ibwc.state.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The USIBWC is evaluating long-term river management alternatives for the Rio Grande Canalization Project (RGCP), a narrow river corridor that extends 105.4 river miles along the Rio Grande, from below Percha Dam in Sierra County, New Mexico to American Dam in El Paso, Texas. The RGCP is operated and maintained by the USIBWC and was constructed to facilitate water deliveries to the Rincon and Mesilla Valleys in New Mexico, El Paso Valley in Texas, and Juarez Valley in Mexico. The project also includes a levee system for flood control.

The USIBWC currently implements operation and maintenance procedures to enhance ecosystem functions within the RGCP; however, alterations to the river and floodway from events that pre-date RGCP construction continue to affect the river and floodway. Therefore, USIBWC recognizes the need to accomplish flood control, water delivery, and operations and maintenance activities in a manner that enhances and restores the riparian ecosystem.

River management alternatives were considered and developed over a three-year-long public consultation process that included input from the general public and stakeholders such as regulatory agencies, irrigation districts,

and environmental organizations. The No Action Alternative and three potential action alternatives were selected for further evaluation in the DEIS. Levee rehabilitation, changes associated with grazing leases to improve erosion control, floodway management, and river restoration including aquatic habitat diversification and riparian vegetation development are measures considered in the action alternatives. The USIBWC will select a preferred alternative after public comment on the DEIS.

A copy of the DEIS has been filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in accordance with 40 CFR parts 1500-1508 and USIBWC procedures. Written comments concerning the DEIS will be accepted at the address provided above until February 10, 2004.

Dated: December 18, 2003.

Mario Lewis,
General Counsel.

[FR Doc. 03-31664 Filed 12-23-03; 8:45 am]

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NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Notice of Permits Issued Under the Antarctic Conservation Act of 1978

AGENCY: National Science Foundation.

ACTION: Notice of permits issued under the Antarctic Conservation of 1978, Public Law 95-541.

SUMMARY: The National Science Foundation (NSF) is required to publish notice of permits issued under the Antarctic Conservation Act of 1978. This is the required notice.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nadene G. Kennedy, Permit Office, Office of Polar Programs, Rm. 755, National Science Foundation, 4201 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, VA 22230.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The National Science Foundation published notices in the **Federal Register** of permit applications received from the following applicants on:

William Gilmore (2004-011), August 19, 2003; Howard Evans (2004-005), September 29, 2003; Paul R. Renne (2004-017), October 27, 2003; and Thomas A. Day (2004-018), November 10, 2003.

Permits were issued to these four applicants on December 15, 2003.

Nadene G. Kennedy,
Permit Officer.

[FR Doc. 03-31617 Filed 12-23-03; 8:45 am]

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NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

EarthScope Science and Education Advisory Committee; Notice of Meeting

In accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (Pub. L. 92-463, as amended), the National Science Foundation announces the following meeting:

Name: EarthScope Science and Education Advisory Committee (#16638).

Dates/Time: 8 p.m.-9:30 p.m. Wednesday, January 21, 2004, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday, January 22 and 23, 2004. 8:30 a.m.-12 p.m. Saturday, January 24, 2004.

Place: Sheraton 4-Points Hotel, 1201 K Street NW., Washington, DC.

Type of Meeting: Part-Open (see agenda below).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. James H. Whitcomb, Division of Earth Sciences, National Science Foundation, Suite 785, 4201 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, VA 22230, Phone 703-292-8553.

Minutes: May be obtained from the contact person listed above.

Purpose of Meeting: To carry out EarthScope proposal and management review, including program evaluation, GPRA assessments, and access to privileged materials; and to provide advice, recommendations, and oversight concerning EarthScope construction, operation, science and education support.

Agenda:

January 21, 2004

8 p.m.-9 p.m. Closed—Discussions regarding proposals and personnel decisions.

January 22, 2004

8:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Open—Review of EarthScope Execution Plan.

1 p.m.-5 p.m. Closed—Review of funding decisions for personnel and subcontracts for construction phase of EarthScope.

January 23, 2004

8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Open—Advise on education and outreach Management structure, and revision of volcanic area instrumentation.

January 24, 2004

8:30 a.m.-12 p.m. Closed—Review of proposal actions and discussion of proposals still under review.

Reason for Closing: Session having to do with proposal and awards for specific grants, contracts, or other arrangements may properly be closed to the public under 5 U.S.C. 522b(c)(4), (6),