

SUMMARY

S.1 INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/S) analyzes the impacts associated with proposed flood control measures for the upper Guadalupe River in San Jose, California. The EIR/S fulfills regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) that require agencies sponsoring these federal civil works projects to prepare a document that explains the consequences of the action on the environment. This feasibility study evaluates the extent and nature of the flood control problem. It investigates several different levels of protection, and identifies a flood control protection plan, called the National Economic Development Plan, that optimizes the size of the project from an economical point view. The cost of the NED plan determines to what extent the federal government is able to fund the construction of the project, or share funding with a local sponsor. The Corps of Engineers, San Francisco District (Corps), is the federal lead agency for the project and the Santa Clara Valley Water District (SCVWD) is the non-federal (local) sponsor. The feasibility study of flood control needs along the upper Guadalupe River is authorized by Section 205 of the Flood Control Act of 1948 (33 U.S.C. 701s), as amended.

The feasibility study area includes a 5.5-mile segment of the Guadalupe River in the City of San Jose. For flood control engineering descriptive purposes, the river has been divided into a number of "reaches," segments distinguished by major street and railroad crossings. The feasibility study area contains Reaches 7 through 12, extending from the Southern Pacific Railroad bridge just south of I-280, upstream 5.5 miles to the Blossom Hill Road bridge. The feasibility study area also includes areas of Ross Creek extending 5,200 feet upstream from its confluence with the Guadalupe River, and Canoas Creek extending 2,800 feet upstream from its confluence with the Guadalupe River. This part of the river, including Reaches 7 through 12, has flooded on several occasions in the past, with major episodes occurring in 1986 and 1995.

The principal objective of the proposed flood control work is to protect homes and businesses in this portion of the Guadalupe River drainage from flooding damage. Other flood control projects on areas of the river downstream (northward) have been analyzed and are under construction (i.e., the downtown Guadalupe River project, providing flood protection from Interstate 880 to Interstate 280), or are in the planning stages (including the upper Guadalupe River project improvements proposed by the SCVWD extending from U.S. 101, two miles north and downstream of the feasibility study area, through Reach 12).

The Corps feasibility study evaluated a number of potential flood control alternative plans. Two alternative plans for providing flood protection on the upper Guadalupe River with the greatest net benefits are analyzed in detail in this document: a Channel Widening Plan, and a Bypass Channel Plan.

The Channel Widening Plan would provide protection from all floods up to an approximate 50-year flood event (a flood that occurs on the average of once every 50 years, or has a 2 percent chance of occurring in any one year). The major components of the plan include widening and benching along portions of the river to provide an expanded area for floodwaters, and a maintenance road and access points.

The Bypass Channel Plan would provide protection from all floods up to an approximate 100-year flood event (a flood that occurs on the average of once every 100 years, or has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any one year). Major components of the Bypass Channel Plan include a secondary channel located adjacent to much of the existing river that would not require removing important riparian vegetation on river banks during construction. Although construction of a bypass channel would reduce biological impacts, it would require relocation of a number of businesses and residents whose homes would be removed. Relocation of displaced businesses and residents would be provided by the Corps. In areas that would not include a bypass channel, the Plan includes widening and benching of the river to a much greater extent than under the Channel Widening Plan. Within some of the modified river banks and benches, hard bank protection including gabions (rock-filled wire cages) arranged in rows and concrete cribwall (a design allowing vegetation to grow through patterned openings) would be used. Where river banks would not be widened, natural vegetation would be retained except for where hard bank protection would be required for erosion control or for access ramps. A multi-use recreational trail would be incorporated running along maintenance roads constructed in the Bypass Channel Plan.

Summary

The Corps has determined that the NED Plan is the Channel Widening Plan. Although the SCVWD is expected to construct the Bypass Channel Plan supported by SCVWD, the federal financial contribution may be limited to what would have been spent to construct the smaller Channel Widening Plan. Alternatively, the Corps may cost-share the Bypass Channel Plan as the project is located in an urban area. This policy decision will be made by the Corps in Washington D.C.

S.2 MAJOR CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

All significant impacts under either alternative plan would be mitigated. Several significant impacts during construction that could not be mitigated in the short-term, or in the intermediate-term until proposed revegetation plantings are fully established, would be mitigated in the long-term. Areas of environmental concern include the following: air quality; geological resources; water resources; biological resources; aesthetics and recreation; noise; transportation; land use; public services and utilities; cultural resources; hazardous materials; public safety; and socioeconomics. Unavoidable significant adverse impacts on land use would result under the Bypass Channel Plan due to a removal of homes and associated loss of residential neighborhood cohesion. All other long-term impacts would be mitigated to insignificance.

The alternatives' environmental consequences are summarized in Table S-1 at the end of this section. The table briefly describes the consequence or impact caused by each alternative plan by reach, any mitigation proposed in the EIR/S to address the impact, and the resulting level of impact after mitigation implementation. All environmental consequences are discussed in Chapter 4.

The Channel Widening Alternative is considered the Environmentally Superior Alternative. This alternative would require overall, less construction disturbance of biological habitat. Far fewer residences would be removed under the Channel Widening Alternative, requiring less relocation, and avoiding the significant long-term impacts resulting from the Bypass Channel that would permanently fragment the residential neighborhood on the west side of Mackey Avenue and parts of Willow Glen Way to Malone Road. All other environmental impacts would be basically equivalent for both alternatives.

Either plan would provide substantial flood protection to residents and businesses, a beneficial impact. The Bypass Channel Plan would provide enhanced recreational access and amenities under a Recreational Trail plan funded in part by the City of San Jose. The Bypass Channel Plan would provide a greater level of flood-control protection (from a 100-year event rather than a 50-year event) and would also increase the long-term continuity of riparian forest habitat. It therefore is considered the recommended plan.

A comparison of flood control alternatives by resource issue is shown in Table S-2, following Table S-1.

S.3 AREAS OF CONTROVERSY AND CONCERN

Public meetings on March 7, 13, and 29, 1989 and an initial feasibility study meeting/workshop on March 27, 1991 identified the following major concerns: housing relocation and compensation; street tree and biological habitat removal; increased exposure to Almaden Expressway noise and view; elimination of flood zone hazards; increased public access and nuisance to areas adjacent to backyards abutting the river resulting from new flood control access roads; removal of historic landmarks (either city, state, or national) for flood improvements; decreasing property values for those residents remaining adjacent to the flood control improvements; and traffic congestion during construction of flood control improvements.

The SCVWD held a public hearing on April 3, 1997 to solicit comment on their Draft EIR/S (Parsons Engineering Science 1997). The Corps held a public hearing on the public draft of this EIR/S on October 9, 1997. Concerns identified at these meetings are described in section 1.4.

S.4 UNRESOLVED ISSUES

The Channel Widening Plan is at a preliminary design stage. While the Channel Widening Plan is less developed than the Bypass Channel Plan, whichever plan is constructed would require additional development and elaboration prior to construction.

S.5 RELATIONSHIP TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION STATUTES AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL REQUIREMENTS

Table S-3, located after Table S-2 at the end of this section, summarizes the project's compliance with environmental requirements. These environmental requirements are described in section 3.3, and instances of either partial compliance or non-compliance are explained in that section as well.

Table S-1 Summary of Environmental Consequences

Table S-2 Comparison of Flood Control Alternatives

Table S-3 Project Compliance with Environmental Requirements

