

## Peer Review Plan

### Technical Analysis Supporting the Lower San Acacia Reach Improvements Project

Date: October 7, 2024

Updated: July 22, 2025

Originating Office: Bureau of Reclamation, Upper Colorado Region, Albuquerque Area Office, 555 Broadway Blvd NE, Albuquerque, NM 87102

#### Reclamation Roles:

Director or delegated manager: Jennifer Faler, Albuquerque Area Office Manager, Upper Colorado Basin Region, Bureau of Reclamation

Peer Review Lead: David (Sonny) Cooper, Project Manager, Albuquerque Area Office, Albuquerque, NM

#### Subject and Purpose:

The Middle Rio Grande is a sediment laden river that requires extensive management to meet the needs of municipalities and irrigation districts that depend on it. The Bureau of Reclamation is authorized by the Flood Control Acts of 1948 and 1950 to conduct work within the channel and floodplain. Since 2000, the ongoing drought has continued to exert pressure on the water resources and ecosystem of the Middle Rio Grande. Examples include the State of New Mexico's inability to meet their Rio Grande Compact obligations for 8 of the last 13 years and the continued listing of threatened and endangered species that rely on the river corridor for habitat.

Two river realignment alternatives and the no action alternative will be considered in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Extraordinary Maintenance (XM) Report. The project is driven by the need to improve conveyance and water delivery to Elephant Butte Reservoir, as well as enhance ecosystem health to protect the endangered Rio Grande silvery minnow and southwestern willow flycatcher under the Endangered Species Act. Additionally, the project is a long-term sediment management strategy that will provide the river room to seek the low point in the valley as sediment accumulates in its path. By aligning with geomorphic processes, emergency channel maintenance actions will be less frequent and reduced in magnitude.

This Peer Review Plan documents reviews of technical studies and environmental resource sections that include topics such as fluvial geomorphology, sediment transport, hydraulic modeling, mobile-bed sediment modeling, vegetation analysis, and habitat availability. The technical studies describe historical and recent conditions and evaluate potential future conditions for the alternatives being considered. Scientific information from these supporting studies will inform the selection of a preferred alternative, along with other non-technical factors that are not scientific information and not within the scope of this Peer Review Plan.

### Impact of Dissemination:

The modeling efforts and technical analysis provide information to determine impacts on water delivery to Elephant Butte Reservoir, habitat available to aquatic and avian endangered species, and sediment dynamics for the EIS and XM Report. Resource sections of the EIS draw from various sources to conduct their impact analysis. Reclamation's Policy CMP-P14, Peer Review of Scientific Information and Assessments, requires an evaluation of whether scientific information to be disseminated must be peer reviewed. The scientific information contained in the EIS and the XM Report provides the technical foundation for the evaluation of alternatives and was therefore deemed Influential Scientific Information (ISI). While this scientific information may further meet the policy definition of a scientific assessment, the geomorphic concepts and technical analyses used to evaluate the alternatives are not new, novel, or a precedent-setting interpretation of the data and is therefore not considered to be a Highly Influential Scientific Assessment (HISA).

The process for choosing a preferred alternative under both the EIS and XM Report also requires that non-technical factors are evaluated and considered, which means that the technically preferred alternative may not be selected due to economic, social, or cultural factors. The scientific information within the EIS and XM Justification Report will support, but will not be the sole basis for, a decision, especially if other factors do not align with the technically favored alternative.

### Peer Review Scope:

Scientific information is described in two technical reports:

- Lower San Acacia Reach: Geomorphology and Alternatives Description
- Lower San Acacia Reach Alternatives Evaluation

Additionally, peer review includes scientific information used in the resource impact analysis sections of the EIS.

Reviewers will assess the analysis methods, modeling assumptions, and results interpretation/synthesis.

### Timing of Review:

Summer 2023 – Lower San Acacia Reach: Geomorphology and Alternatives Description

Summer 2024 – Lower San Acacia Reach Improvements Project EIS – Impact Analysis Methodology Tables

Fall 2024 – Lower San Acacia Reach Alternatives Evaluation

Spring 2025 – Resource analysis impact sections in Lower San Acacia Reach Improvements Project Draft EIS

### Methodology of Review:

Reclamation's Technical Service Center peer review process will be implemented for the Lower San Acacia Reach: Geomorphology and Alternatives Description, and the Lower San Acacia Reach Alternatives Evaluation reports.

The EIS Contractor (AECOM) will provide subject matter expert review for the various resources analyzed for impacts prior to providing sections to their Reclamation counterparts for review.

Number of Reviewers:

Three reviewers for two standalone technical reports that focus on geomorphology, design alternatives, modeling, and habitat analysis. All reviewers are subject matter senior-level engineers and scientists with decades of experience.

For the resource sections of the EIS, each section will have at least one contractor reviewer and at least one from Reclamation. The resource sections that will be reviewed include air quality, climate change, cultural resources, fish and wildlife, surface water, groundwater, geomorphology, water quality, land use, noise, vegetation, and wetlands and floodplains.

Reviewer Selection Process:

Reviewers were selected for their technical expertise in the fields provided above without a study conflict of interest.

Delivery of Findings:

The peer reviewers will each submit their comments to the appropriate author within the time periods identified above.

Response to Peer Review:

The peer review lead will be informed at the conclusion of receiving and implementation of all peer review comments, the details of which will likely be kept between author and reviewer without a summary peer review report being posted to Reclamation's peer review website.

Federal Register Notice:

Federal Register notices will not be provided announcing the formation of a peer review team and completion of the final report.

Applicability of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA):

This peer review is not subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) because the review does not involve open meetings or committee chartering and reviewers are being asked to provide individual reviews on the subject matter. Reclamation is not seeking consensus advice from the reviewers as a group.

Agency Contact:

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