

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

December 2004

Windy Gap Firming Project

Project Update

What is the Windy Gap Firming Project?

IN 1985, THE MUNICIPAL SUBDISTRICT, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, constructed the Windy Gap Project near Granby, Colo. Windy Gap diverts water from the Colorado River to the Front Range. The water is conveyed east through the federal Colorado-Big Thompson Project.

Due to storage limitations and other factors, Windy Gap water unit owners have not been able to rely on Windy Gap deliveries to meet a portion of their current water needs, or to meet future requirements. The Windy Gap Firming Project was proposed as a means for improving the reliability of water deliveries from the existing Windy Gap Project to participating Windy Gap owners.

The Windy Gap Firming Project Water Activity Enterprise of the Municipal Subdistrict is developing the WGFP. Participants in the WGFP are the cities of Broomfield, Greeley, Longmont, Lafayette, Louisville, and Loveland; the towns of Erie, Evans, Fort Lupton and Superior; the Central Weld County Water District; the Little Thompson Water District, the Platte River Power Authority and the Middle Park Water Conservancy District. These entities requested the Subdistrict to improve, or “firm,” the reliability of their Windy Gap water units.

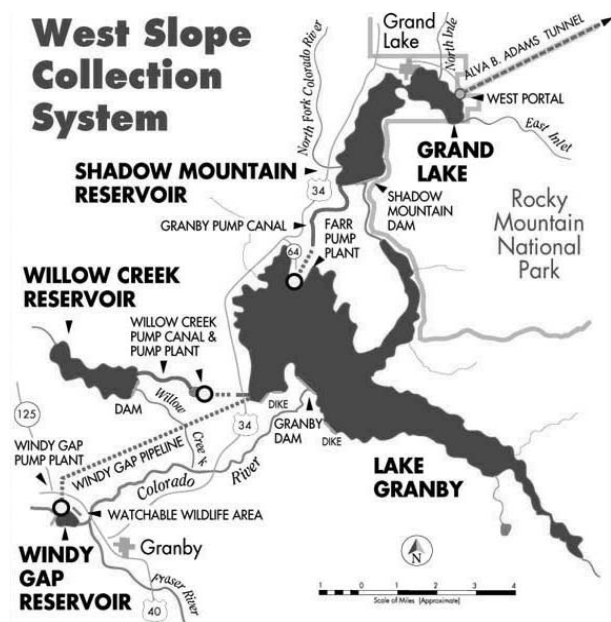
The purpose of the proposed WGFP is to deliver a firm annual yield of up to 30,000 acre feet of water by 2010 from the existing Windy Gap Project. The WGFP would also provide up to 3,000 acre feet of storage to firm water supplies for the Middle Park Water Conservancy District in Grand and Summit counties.

The National Environmental Policy Act

Under the National Environmental Policy Act, any time a proposed project includes a federal action, an environmental evaluation must be prepared and made public. Because the proposed WGFP would require a permit to connect to the Bureau of Reclamation’s Colorado-Big Thompson Project, compliance with NEPA is required. As the federal operator of the C-BT, Reclamation is the lead federal agency responsible for NEPA compliance. Other federal, state and local entities and agencies are also involved in the NEPA process.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is involved in the WGFP’s NEPA process due to their regulatory and permitting authority under the Clean Water Act. The Western Area Power Administration is a cooperating agency because of

West Slope Collection System



the potential for relocation of a transmission line within an alternative reservoir site. Grand County is a cooperating agency because of potential effects in Grand County. It also has regulatory authority for project facilities that could be located in the county.

A NEPA environmental analysis begins with a “scoping process” to collect comments on a proposed project. For the WGFP, Reclamation conducted public and agency scoping meetings on both Colorado’s east and west slopes. The purpose of the meetings was to collect comments on the proposed project, its possible alternatives, related issues and potential effects. Public meetings were held in Granby, Loveland, and Lyons. An agency meeting was held in Denver. In December 2003, Reclamation released a report discussing the issues raised at the meetings.

The report is available on the Reclamation’s Web site at www.usbr.gov/gp/public_involvement.cfm.

A NEPA analysis also typically includes an alternatives evaluation for a proposed project. Reclamation is currently using information from the scoping meetings to screen and evaluate potential alternatives. Once a set of alternatives is determined, Reclamation will conduct the studies required to identify potential effects. A discussion of the proposed WGFP, its alternatives, and the potential effects will be provided in a draft Environmental Impact Statement, or “EIS.” ▶



U. S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation



Municipal Subdistrict
Northern Colorado
Water Conservancy District

PROJECT TIMELINE

Spring 2000	Feb. 2003	Apr. 2003	Sept. 2003	Oct. 2003	Dec. 2003
Municipal Subdistrict partners with Windy Gap allottees to advance and fund the WGFP.	Municipal Subdistrict releases the Alternative Plan Formulation Report which identifies seven alternatives for the WGFP.	Municipal Subdistrict requests to connect a Firming Project reservoir to the Colorado-Big Thompson Project.	USBR posts a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS in the Federal Register.	USBR holds three public and one agency scoping meetings.	Scoping Report issued that summarizes the comments received during the scoping process.
Jan. 2003 – Present			Present – June 2005		June 2005
USBR working with all cooperating agencies to identify the alternatives that will be evaluated in the EIS, and to document and verify the purpose and need of the WGFP.			Continue developing supporting information for the EIS and writing EIS chapters.		Draft EIS published.

Alternatives Screening

At the public and agency scoping meetings in fall 2003, Reclamation and the Subdistrict presented the WGFP's seven initial alternatives. These seven alternatives were identified in the Subdistrict's *Windy Gap Firming Project Alternative Plan Formulation Report*. Comments collected from the scoping meetings identified additional alternatives.

To ensure a thorough review of the alternatives and to satisfy the Corps' Clean Water Act requirements, Reclamation, in cooperation with an environmental contractor, developed an alternatives screening process. The screening process narrows the field of alternatives to be evaluated in the draft EIS. The seven original alternatives, alternatives collected during scoping, and alternatives identified by cooperating agencies are all subject to the same screening. Approximately 180 alternatives are currently under evaluation.

The first level of screening is based on criteria consistent with the Clean Water Act Section 404(b)(1) guidelines. Those criteria help determine if an alternative meets a proposed project's declared purpose and need, if there are logistical or technical constraints, and if there are substantial environmental consequences.

First Level Screening Criteria

- **Purpose and need**

Alternatives that would not meet or reasonably contribute to meeting the Participants' water supply requirements were eliminated from further consideration.

- **Logistics**

Alternatives incompatible with existing land uses, such as wilderness areas and Superfund sites, and those that did not meet minimum reservoir sizes were eliminated.

- **Technology**

Reservoir sites that were not technically feasible because of constructability or geotechnical issues and other safety issues were eliminated.

- **Environmental consequences**

Sites impacting more than 25 acres of wetlands, containing any fens or residing on streams with year-round flows were eliminated.

Alternatives that survive the first level of screening are subject to a second level of screening. The second screening identifies alternatives that have the fewest potential effects on wetlands.

The final level of screening includes a detailed evaluation of the remaining alternatives. This screening evaluates

how well alternatives address project purpose, project need and other logistical and environmental factors.

A "No Action" alternative, where no Reclamation action would be required, is also being defined and will be evaluated in the EIS.

The results of the alternatives screening will be documented in an alternatives screening report available in spring 2005.

Other Activities and Reports

In addition to a discussion of the alternatives, the draft EIS will also explain existing conditions and the potential effects to human and natural environments associated with each alternative. To this end, Reclamation and its contractor are collecting field data at several of the alternative reservoir sites. So far, wetland delineations, cultural resource surveys, water quality and aquatic habitat studies have been compiled.

EIS contractors are preparing an independent analysis and verification of water use information and demand forecasts for each of the WGFP's fourteen participants. This information will evaluate the need for the proposed WGFP and will be summarized in a separate report.

Need More Information?

For more information on the NEPA process, contact Kara Lamb at the Bureau of Reclamation at (970) 962-4326 or klamb@gp.usbr.gov. To obtain additional information on the NEPA process, visit Reclamation's website at www.gp.usbr.gov.

For more information on the Windy Gap Firming Project proposal, please contact Nicole Seltzer of the Municipal Subdistrict, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, at (970) 622-2277 or nseltzer@ncwcd.org.