

July 7, 2004

Planning and Environmental Branch

Notice of Studies and Initial Public Scoping Meeting for the Lower Rio Grande Basin, Texas Flood Control and Major Drainage, Raymondville Drain Project General Reevaluation Study and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

Introduction

This notice provides a summary of the ongoing and planned reevaluation study activities for the Raymondville Drain Project, Raymondville, Texas, and solicits public input regarding the study. The primary purpose of the authorized Raymondville Drain project is to provide flood protection to a watershed area of approximately 322 square miles including the City of Raymondville and surrounding rural and agricultural areas of Willacy County and eastern Hidalgo County. Hidalgo County Drainage District No. 1 is the local sponsor.

Study Background

The Raymondville Channel provides a drainage outlet to the Laguna Madre for a large area in eastern Hidalgo and northern Willacy counties. The flows of floodwaters in the basin are impeded by the relatively flat topography, inadequate drainage structures, irrigation canals that crisscross the area and the lack of adequate outlets. Floodwaters inundate large agricultural areas, improved pastures, and urban areas for long periods, resulting in extensive damage to crops, properties and structures. Floodwaters block transportation arteries causing interruption of economic activities, tourism, school attendance and utility services.

Environmental studies and coordination with resource agencies were first conducted in 1982 for a Lower Rio Grande Basin Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement. The Lower Rio Grande Basin, Texas, Flood Control and Major Drainage Project was authorized by the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 1986. One of three elements of the Lower Rio Grande Basin Project, the Raymondville Drain Project was reevaluated for its purpose, to update the project costs and benefits, and to incorporate current environmental criteria. Findings of the reevaluation were documented in a 1998 Limited Reevaluation Report (LRR). The authorized plan for the Raymondville Drain consisted of 100-year flood protection to the City and provided a major drainage outfall channel with a capacity to contain a 2-year frequency rainfall event for agricultural drainage purposes. The LRR concluded that the Federal project for flood damage reduction and major drainage at Raymondville is economically and environmentally feasible. However, the non-Federal sponsor at the time, Willacy County, was not able to offer an expression of support for the project because of financial reasons. Therefore, all Preconstruction, Engineering, and Design efforts were terminated.

A General Reevaluation Report (GRR) and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement will be completed by the Corps in partnership with Hidalgo County Drainage District #1 as the Local Sponsor. The GRR will present the results of a new plan to provide flood damage reduction and agricultural drainage improvements on the Raymondville Drain in eastern Hidalgo and Willacy Counties as authorized by WRDA 1986. Galveston District will plan and design the project from Delta Lake to the Laguna Madre. Hidalgo Drainage District No 1 proposes to plan and design the project from Edinburg, Texas to La Sal Vieja Lake and also plans to perform the construction of this segment utilizing their own funds. The sponsor will seek credit towards the non-Federal share of the costs of the project from Delta Lake to the Laguna Madre.

Study Status

The Galveston District is developing a recommended plan for flood damage reduction for the project area. We are currently working with the Lead Sponsor on identifying existing conditions and in formulating proposed alternatives that will be studied and then narrowed to a recommended plan. Public input at this stage of the project is needed to help identify possible areas of study, problems, opportunities, and potential alternatives.

Study Process

The study process will include reviewing the problems and needs; identifying other concerns which the public may have; developing an array of structural (channel improvement, levee, diversion channel, etc.) and/or nonstructural components from which detailed alternative plans can be developed; computing and developing annual benefits and costs for all plans considered; evaluating the engineering and economic feasibility of each alternative; assessing the environmental impacts of the selected plan (s); determining possible mitigation measures; and preparing the required documentation to present the studies, findings and recommendations.

Public Scoping Meetings

The Galveston District will hold the two Public Scoping Meetings for the General Reevaluation Study. One will be held in Hidalgo County and one in Willacy County. Prior to the formal meetings an Open House will be held, where displays concerning the project will be available for viewing. Information on the meetings is as follows:

Date:	July 21, 2004
Location:	University of Texas Pan Am for Border Economic Study (IT2 Bldg.) 1201 West University Drive Edinburg, Hidalgo County, Texas
Time:	6:30 pm to 7:00 pm – Open House 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm – Public Meeting
	And
Date:	July 22, 2004
Location:	Raymondville Public Library 193 N. 4th Street Raymondville, Willacy Co., Texas
Time:	6:30 pm to 7:00 pm – Open House 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm – Public Meeting

The purpose of these public scoping meetings will be to inform the communities about the proposed study and how the study will be conducted. The public will be provided the opportunity to help the Galveston District and the Local Sponsor, the Hidalgo County Drainage District #1, identify environmental concerns, identify study efforts needed to resolve these concerns, and to meet the National Environmental Policy Act requirements for preparing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Every effort will be made to address concerns/issues identified during the course of the study. This notice serves as an invitation to the public to attend. The public will be provided an opportunity to make comments.

Specifically, public input is requested concerning:

- ♦ Problem flooding areas
- ♦ Potential study alternatives
- ♦ Potential environmental or endangered species concerns
- ♦ Any information that may be relative to the project or project area

If you cannot attend the public meetings and have information or questions concerning the study please write to the following address:

Sharon Manzella Tirpak
Planning Section, CESWG-PE-PL
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
P.O. Box 1229
Galveston, Texas 77553-1229
409-766-3136 Phone
409-766-3064 Fax

Written comments will be accepted for 30 days following the meetings or until August 22, 2004. If you need additional information concerning the public meetings, please contact Ms. Sharon Tirpak at (409) 766-3136 or by email at Sharon.tirpak@usace.army.mil or Ms. Kristy Morten by phone at (409) 766-3195 or by email at kristy.l.morten@swg02.usace.army.mil or

LEONARD D. WATERWORTH
Colonel, US Army Corps of Engineers
District Engineer