

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FOR  
Alamo Dam Flushing Flow Release  
La Paz and Mohave Counties, Arizona**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), proposes to release water from Alamo Dam, outside of typical base flow releases, to facilitate inspection and evaluation of potential needed repairs of the intake sill. The release would serve two purposes: 1) to remove accumulated sediment from the intake sill to facilitate manual inspection, and 2) to lower the lake's water surface elevation to increase diver safety and reduce risk. Inspection of the intake sill is one step in the longer process of inspecting the dam's upper conduit for structural integrity, functionality, and safety. The conduit at Alamo Dam is scheduled for inspection once every 5 years, as part of the normal dam safety project inspection protocol. However, because of operation/safety constraints associated with scheduling an appropriate draw down to facilitate the inspection, regular upper conduit inspections have lapsed. The last upper conduit inspection was conducted in June 1990. The upper conduit inspection that preceded the 1990 inspection occurred in October 1977.

Typical operations at Alamo Dam are covered under the 1999 Alamo Lake Feasibility Report, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and the subsequent 2003 Water Control Manual (WCM). Operations outlined in the 1999 EIS consist of a target water surface elevation (WSE) of 1,125 ft for Alamo Lake. When the reservoir's WSE is below 1,125 ft, minimal year round base flows between 20-50 cfs are maintained in order to sustain downstream habitat. When the WSE exceeds 1,125 ft, flood control releases are increased to return the WSE to 1,125 ft. The 2003 WCM and associated 1999 EIS also allow for deviation from these operations under a variety of scenarios.

Since the time of the 1999 EIS, two environmental resources (biological resources protected under the Endangered Species Act, including the northern Mexican gartersnake, and recreational resources) were identified as having changed to an extent that impacts as the result of a release from Alamo Dam could potentially have effects outside of those previously evaluated. Biological resources have changed significantly since the time of the 1999 EIS, as a result of new species and habitats being listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The northern Mexican gartersnake was listed under the ESA and has been observed in the project vicinity and must be evaluated for potential impacts from the proposed action.

The other resource potentially impacted by the proposed project are recreational resources below Alamo Dam. Conditions have changed, as the result of the completion of the Arizona Peace Trail, a popular Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) trail, that provides access along and across the Bill Williams River. As a result of these changed conditions, the Corps has prepared the attached Environmental Assessment to evaluate potential impacts to these environmental resources. Since the other resource areas were adequately evaluated in the 1999 EIS and conditions have not changed regarding the impacts to these resources, the scope of the EA was limited to only those changes in biological resources and recreational resources related to this proposed action identified above.

The attached EA discusses a variety of different options to achieve inspection of the intake sill. The options discussed include dredging sediment from the sill and allowing the lake level to recede naturally. In addition, the enclosed EA discussed various timings for the proposed water release.

Natural draw down of the reservoir was eliminated as an option, due to the unpredictable nature of weather in the region, the uncertainty behind when draw down could reasonably be achieved, and the associated risks to cost, schedule, and safety associated with further delays of critical inspections.

Dredging was eliminated as an option, as it would still require divers to operate suction dredge equipment, and ultimately require the same draw down as the sill inspection, adding additional unnecessary steps and costs. Various timings of the proposed release were considered, including immediate releases, or a postponed release to April or later in 2018. The Corps eliminated the option to release water between April and September, due to the significant additional impacts to species and habitats protected under the ESA that would potentially occur as the result of a summer release. In particular, the Corps determined that summer releases would likely have additional adverse effects to southwestern willow flycatcher, Yuma clapper rail, yellow-billed cuckoo, and the northern Mexican gartersnake that could be avoided by an earlier release. The Corps eliminated postponing release to beyond September, as this would increase the risk of the lake level rising as the result of the late summer monsoon season and making the necessary inspections unfeasible.

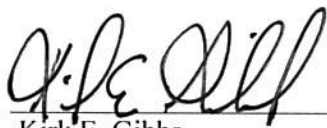
As a result of the considerations presented in the attached EA, the Corps identified the selected alternative as a release from Alamo Dam in early March, with the peak of the release to be completed prior to March 15, 2018. The hydrograph would to the maximum extent practicable, mimic a spring storm event typical for the watershed. However, the ascending limb of the hydrograph, would be ramped up more slowly as a conservation measure to avoid potential impacts to the northern Mexican gartersnake.

A public notice issued on January 10, 2018, describing the project, was distributed to local residents, members of the Bill Williams River Steering Committee, and other known interested parties. An electronic notice was also available on the Los Angeles District homepage, where the draft EA and associated Biological Assessment were available for download and review. Comments were received during a 30-day public comment period and a total of 178 comments were received during the public review period, which was from January 10, 2018 to February 10, 2018. Responses to these comments are contained in the EA, in Appendix B.

The EA is written in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and all applicable environmental laws and regulations. The Corps determined that the project was likely to adversely affect the northern Mexican gartersnake, and as a result, the Corps formally consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. A final Biological Opinion was received from the Service on February 27, 2018.

Based on the assessment of potential impacts from the proposed action in the EA, and in consideration of the scope of the EA, it is my determination that the implementation of the proposed alternative would not result in significant environmental impacts. Therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

3-1-18  
DATE

  
Kirk E. Gibbs  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
Commander and District Engineer