

For immediate release  
July 15, 2003

## USIBWC SEEKS PUBLIC COMMENT ON LOWER RIO GRANDE FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) is currently seeking public comment on the Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). A public hearing on the EIS will be held Wednesday, July 30, 5:00 - 7:00 p.m. in the Hoblitzelle Auditorium of the Texas A & M Agricultural Research and Extension Center, 2415 E. Highway 83 in Weslaco. Written comments will be accepted through August 25, 2003 addressed to:

Ms. Carolyn Murphy  
Environmental Section, CESWG-PE-PR  
United States Army Corps of Engineers  
Galveston District  
PO Box 1229  
Galveston, TX 77553-1229  
or parcel service deliveries to:  
2000 Fort Point Road  
Galveston, TX 77550

The Draft EIS covers the USIBWC's Lower Rio Grande Flood Control Project for 158 miles from Penitas to just downstream of Brownsville, Texas. The purpose of the EIS is to present and analyze the impacts of current and proposed USIBWC vegetation management activities within the United States portions of the project. Pursuant to long standing agreements with Mexico, both the U.S. and Mexican Sections of the International Boundary and Water Commission mow and remove vegetation along the Rio Grande in order to maintain the river's capacity to convey flood flows. In addition to fulfilling its agreements with Mexico, the USIBWC must fulfill commitments arising from both a 1990 consent decree, which requires preparation of the EIS, and a 1993 Biological Opinion of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which led the USIBWC to modify its vegetation maintenance to reduce potential impacts to endangered species. A newly issued 2003 Biological Opinion continues the USIBWC commitments.

The Draft EIS analyzes four alternatives, taking into consideration biological resources, socioeconomic resources and environmental justice, land use, water resources, cultural resources, soil and geology, hazardous materials, air quality and noise. The alternatives are:

**Prior Maintenance Alternative** –Restore vegetation maintenance practices in existence prior to the 1993 Biological Opinion. Vegetation control would cover 1,022 acres.

**No Action Alternative** - Continue vegetation maintenance practices implemented in conformance with both the 1993 and 2003 Biological Opinions. Under this alternative, vegetation would be maintained on 291 acres. This is the USIBWC's Preferred Alternative.

**Suspended Maintenance Alternative** - Terminate all vegetation maintenance activities for 158 river miles.

**Expanded Maintenance Alternative** - Expand current vegetation maintenance practices into additional upstream areas, covering 874 acres.

The schedule for the July 30 meeting is as follows:

5:00 - 5:30	Open House for members of the public to review materials, speak with staff
5:30 - 6:00	Staff Presentation about the EIS
6:00 - 7:00	Public Comment

Copies of the Draft EIS will be available for review at the meeting. Additionally, copies are currently available for review in the *What's New* section of the USIBWC web page, [www.ibwc.state.gov](http://www.ibwc.state.gov), and at these locations:

USIBWC Mercedes Field Office  
325 Golf Course Road  
Mercedes, TX 78570

Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge  
FM 907, 7 miles south of Alamo, Texas and 1/4 mile east of US 281

Brownsville Public Library  
2600 Central Boulevard  
Brownsville, TX 78520

Harlingen Public Library  
410 '76 Drive  
Harlingen, TX 78550

McAllen Public Library  
601 N. Main Street  
McAllen, TX 78501

USIBWC Headquarters Office  
4171 N. Mesa Street, Suite C-315  
El Paso, TX 79902

Once the 45-day public comment period ends, the USIBWC will incorporate the input into the Final EIS, expected to be completed in the fall. Following a 30-day review period for

the Final EIS, the agency will issue its Record of Decision announcing the selection of an alternative.

Members of the public who would like more information about the EIS may contact Doug Echlin, 915-832-4741, [dougechlin@ibwc.state.gov](mailto:dougechlin@ibwc.state.gov).

For more information:

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915-832-4175  
[sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov](mailto:sallyspener@ibwc.state.gov)