



Animas-La Plata Progect (ALP)
By: Virginia Beyale
Simply Science

History of the ALP Project

The Animas-La Plata Project (ALP), situated in La Plata and Montezuma Counties in southwestern Colorado and in San Juan County in northwestern New Mexico, was approved by the Colorado River Basin Project Act of September 30, 1968. It supplied for a multi-purpose project primarily for irrigation and municipal and industrial utilization. Although scheduled for construction, in the early 1980s, negotiations were initiated to accomplish a negotiated settlement of water right claims of the Southern Ute Indian and Ute Mountain Ute Tribes in southwest Colorado. The Colorado Ute Tribes and other parties subsequently signed the Final Settlement Agreement on December 10, 1986. The Colorado Ute Indian Water Rights Settlement Act of 1988 (Settlement Act) supplied language to implement the Final Settlement Agreement and supplemented the permission of the ALP. The Settlement Act permitted for future expansion of the region and at the same time sheltered existing water uses.

In 1990, founded on new biological information, and identifying the potential of ALP to affect endangered species like the Colorado pike-minnow, the Fish and Wildlife Service issued a draft biological opinion with no logical and practical alternatives. A final Biological Opinion was issued on October 25, 1991, enclosing a Reasonable and Prudent Alternative that would permit construction of several ALP features, but restricted project depletions to 57,100 acre-feet while an endangered fish recovery program was performed. After Reclamation was sanctioned to kick off construction, several challenges were completed regarding the wholeness of the 1980 Final Environmental Statement and Reclamation subsequently repealing the authorization. Reclamation released the Draft Supplement for public review and comment in October 1992, the

FSFES was concluded and filed with EPA in April 1996. In May 1995, reconsultation with the Service addressed new information and modification to the project. A Biological Opinion was issued by the Service in February 1996. This Biological Opinion enclosed a Reasonable and Prudent Alternative that would limit construction to only those project features which would primarily result in an average annual water depletion of 57,100 acre feet. Following the completion of the FSFES in 1996, a process was initiated to search for resolution of the continual disagreement surrounding the Project, and to attempt to gain consensus on an alternative to the original project. The procedure concluded with the proposal of two alternatives, a structural and nonstructural proposal.

On August 11, 1998, the Secretary of the Interior presented an Administration Proposal to build a down-sized version of ALP to apply the Colorado Ute water rights settlement, removing all irrigation, and included a nonstructural element as part of the settlement implementation. A Final Supplemental EIS (FSEIS) was completed and filed with EPA on July 14, 2000 pursuant to a Record of Decision on September 25, 2000. On December 21, 2000, Public Law 106-554, the Colorado Ute Settlement Act Amendments of 2000 was endorsed. Public Law 106-554 provides for the construction of a scaled down project: Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir, Durango Pumping Plant, Ridges Basin Inlet conduit, with an average annual depletion of 57,100 acre-feet. The law also provided for the building of a pipeline to distribute water for domestic use on the Navajo Nation at Shiprock, New Mexico. The Navajo Nation requested that a water conveyance pipeline which is going to be entitled the Navajo Nation Municipal Pipeline (NNMP) that is included as a structural component in the ALP Project, to improve the service now being provided for seven Navajo Nation Chapters in the Farmington-Shiprock Area. The

Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) distributes water to seven Navajo Chapters: Upper Fruitland, San Juan, Nenahnezad, Hogback, Shiprock, Cudei, and Beclaibito.

Why ALP??

The ALP project is being constructed to fulfill the water rights settlement of the two Indian tribes that live in Colorado & the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and the Southern Ute Indian Tribe. These tribes have water rights that date back to 1868. Fulfillment of the settlement obligations, one of which is completing the Animas-La Plata Project, will supply non-Indian water users in Southwest Colorado certainty to the continued, historical use of water. Storage is a significant aspect of water supply in the semi-arid western United States, where there is usually not a dependable, regular flow of adequate water in streams and rivers to meet water requirements year round. Lastly, the project will provide practically 33% of the storage in Ridges Basin Reservoir for use by non-Indian entities in the Four Corners region.

There are seven entities that will take advantage directly from the construction of the Project and the storage of water in Ridges Basin Reservoir. These are: 1) Southern Ute Indian Tribe, 2) Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, 3) Animas-La Plata Water Conservancy District, 4) State of Colorado, 5) Navajo Nation, 6) San Juan Water Commission and 7) La Plata Conservancy District.

Others who profit from the project comprise of: non-Indian water users whose water rights are no longer in jeopardy due to fulfillment of the obligations of the Colorado Ute Indian Water Rights Settlement and recreation users, both on Ridges Basin Reservoir and the Animas River.

Environmental & Economical Impacts

Aquatically speaking, the pumping capacity of 240 cfs could or would have a negative impact on the trout and native fish in the Animas River depending on the timing and extent of pumping. Last summer archaeological surveys conducted within Ridges Basin and the other features composing the Alternative 1 pointed out that there could be substantial impacts. Data indicated that approximately 60 cultural resource sites are located within the defined features of Alternative 1. If you are wondering what will happen to the Native American artifacts in the basin, ALP promised all artifacts from Ridges Basin will be transferred to the Anasazi Heritage Center in Dolores, CO for permanent restoration. Hydrology plays a big part in the production of the dam. This project would negatively impact the flow regime in the Animas and San Juan Rivers. Recreation may be an economical leap, although there is a potential for a small negative impacts to rafting and fishing in the Animas River. There would be a positive impact to increased boating opportunities and the potential for a recreational campground in Ridges Basin. Socioeconomics (Structural): The construction of Ridges Basin Reservoir and Dam would have a positive impact on the local economy. On the other hand, Socioeconomics (non-structural): Impacts would be negative if the Colorado Ute Tribes were to purchase approximately 6 percent of the irrigated lands in the Pine, Florida, La Plata, Mancos Rivers, and McElmo Creek Basins, thereby displacing farmers. This project may sound magnificent; we need to look at threatened or endangered species. This project would definitely not meet the endangered species flow recommendation. The net consequence of pumping 95,000 af into Ridges Basin Reservoir would be that the

water quality would be a corruption on the Animas River with a 2 to 4 percent increase in the total dissolved solids concentration in the Animas River on an average yearly basis, depending on the location. In our Wetlands there would be a significant loss of 121 acres of wetlands in the Ridges Basin Reservoir. Glancing over wildlife and vegetation, Ridges Basin Reservoir would inundate approximately 1,280 acres of wildlife habitat.

What Will Happen??

In March 2003, ALP was situated with their equipment mobilization of setting up their offices and the digging of soil. On April 2003 to November 2003, blasting activity takes place to remove bedrock. September 2003 through the Winter 2004, the starting of construction of coffer dams in Animas River and complete excavation for intake structure and fish bypass pipe. Sometime through March 2003 and April 2008 the construction of Durango Pumping Plant will start in development. Through August 2003 and April 2008 the new construction of Ridges Basin Dam will initiate. The construction of Navajo Nation Municipal Pipeline will take place September 2005 to April 2008. Also, on November 2005 through May 2007 the construction of Ridges Basin Inlet Conduit will be in progress. Finally, in the spring 2008 through Spring 2010 ALP will begin filling our new reservoir.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) converses the proposed relocation of three pipelines to permit the construction of Ridges Basin Dam and Reservoir, part of the ALP Project qualified by Congress for construction by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation. The rearrangement of natural gas distribution pipeline, a county road, and an electric transmission line are talked about as related events in this EA as well.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long will it take to build the project and to fill the Reservoir?

Our construction schedule currently has a project completion date of 2009. The reservoir could begin to be filled in the fall of 2008. Currently, it is anticipated it will take two years to fill the reservoir. This fill period depends upon many variables, including: amount of moisture received in the area, maintaining minimum bypass flows in the Animas River, water rights, as well as structural performance

Why build the pumping plant just downstream of the City's Sewage Treatment Plant discharge?

The location of the Durango Pumping Plant was chosen for environmental and economic reasons. This location is 50 to 100 feet lower than other alternatives routes that were evaluated. Consequently, the pumping cost would be less at this location and the environmental disturbance would also be minimized. At present, evaluations continue regarding moving the City's Sewage Treatment Plant discharge downstream from the Durango Pumping Plant.

What is the current estimated total construction cost of the project?

The total estimated construction (January 2003 price level) is estimated at \$500 million and in which I believe has gone up even more.

How this project is Significant to Me

I related to this project because I believe constructing a 500 million dollars water project is outrageous and the money can be used better spent toward something more beneficial for all of us. To even be more tied into my life, my father is the Superintendent of Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) in which we had some head controversies along the way of my researching. He is so motivated to get this project in progress. I guess we just look at this in different eyes, one as a college student and one as a provider for our Navajo Nation. Although we saw the beneficiaries and negative impacts of what the project has in store, we still stuck to our initial opinions. This has been a valuable learning experience for me. Thank you for the opportunity.