

PUBLIC AND INTERAGENCY PARTICIPATION PLAN

November 2018

Environmental Impact Statement (Plan-EIS)
for the Willow Creek Watershed Project
Browning, Montana

PREPARED FOR

Natural Resources Conservation Service

PROJECT SPONSOR

Blackfeet Nation

PREPARED BY

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARMP	Agricultural Resources Management Plan
BEO	Blackfeet Environmental Office
BF	Blackfeet
BTBC	Blackfeet Tribal Business Council
BF F&W	Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife
BF TTP	Blackfeet Tribal Transportation Program
BIA	Bureau Indian Affairs
BNRCD	Blackfeet Natural Resources Conservation District
BNSF	Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway
BTBC	Blackfeet Tribal Business Counsel
BOR	Bureau of Reclamation
CWA	Clean Water Act
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
IHS	Indian Health Services
MDT	Montana Department of Transportation
NECI	Northern Engineering and Consulting Inc
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NOA	Notice of Availability
NOAA	U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NOI	Notice of Intent
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
ROD	Record of Decision
TERO	Tribal Employment Rights Office
THPO	Tribal Historic Preservation Office
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey

1.0 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Willow Creek Watershed Planning Study is being undertaken by the Blackfeet Tribe and US Department of Agricultural (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to prevent or reduce flood damages caused by Willow Creek floodwater in the town of Browning. Northern Engineering Consulting Inc (NECI) has been contracted by the NRCS to develop and evaluate reasonable alternatives and prepare a physically, environmentally, socially, and economically sound project plan and environmental impact statement (Plan-EIS).

In 1975, a Project Plan and EIS were developed for a Willow Creek Flood Control Project. It included a floodwater retarding dam on Willow Creek southwest of Browning, and two floodwater diversions west of Browning. However, the final design was suspended in 1976 because the necessary land rights could not be acquired. The 1975 plan is no longer feasible due to development over the proposed floodwater diversion routes.

The NRCS is initiating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process to identify and document the potential environmental effects of the proposed project and reasonable alternatives that would meet the project purpose and need. The NRCS has determined that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will likely be needed for this proposed project plan. The consultant project team will work with the NRCS to produce a clear, concise, and legally defensible Plan-EIS consistent with NEPA and NRCS regulations within an 18-month timeframe. The Plan-EIS will also address other relevant regulatory requirements, such as Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), and Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

2.0 PURPOSE OF PARTICIPATION PLAN

Stakeholder engagement is an essential component of an environmental review under NEPA. *Stakeholder* is a very broad term that refers to any entity that may be interested in or affected by a proposed action under review. This includes tribal, federal, local, and state agencies that may have regulatory jurisdiction over a proposal; Native or tribal entities that have consultation rights under federal law; elected officials; and the many entities that make up the general public, including adjacent landowners, residents, businesses, non-profit civic and environmental groups, and many other entities.

NEPA is designed to improve federal decisions by providing information on environmental consequences of potential actions so that agencies can identify alternatives that meet the purpose and need for the project while avoiding or minimizing possible adverse environmental effects. As part of this process, NEPA calls on agencies to make environmental information available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made, and to encourage and facilitate public involvement in decisions that affect the quality of the human environment.

In addition to the regulatory requirement to involve stakeholders in the NEPA review process, there are other reasons to have a strong stakeholder engagement process. Many of the stakeholders that will be involved in the review process have specific local, traditional, or scientific knowledge that can:

- Improve the understanding of the type, extent, magnitude, and duration of potential environmental effects
- Identify new concerns or issues that may have been overlooked
- Identify potential alternatives that could achieve the project purpose and need
- Identify potential measures that could avoid, minimize, or mitigate for project impacts

The Participation Plan for the Willow Creek Watershed Plan-EIS is intended to summarize the anticipated stakeholders, identify engagement measures to be implemented for various types of stakeholders, and document the processes for collecting, reviewing, and addressing stakeholder input into the process. This includes the formal comment periods associated with the NEPA process and ongoing engagement throughout the environmental review process.

3.0 IDENTIFICATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders include all entities that have interest in or are affected by this project. Stakeholders include agencies, companies, organizations, elected officials, and individual citizens. A preliminary list of stakeholders for the Willow Creek Watershed Plan-EIS has been developed (below) and will be supplemented as the project progresses.

3.1 Lead Agency

NRCS

3.2 Potential Cooperating Agencies

BEO

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Safety of Dams

BIA Reality

BIA Environmental

BF F&W

BF Ag Extension Office

Blackfeet Natural Resources Conservation District (BNRCD)

BF Water Resources

Blackfeet Tribal Transportation Program (BF TTP)

BF Housing

BF Planning

Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad

Bureau of Reclamation (BOR)

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Glacier Electric

Indian Health Services (IHS)

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT)

THPO

BF Tribal Employment Rights Office (TERO)

Two Medicine Water Company

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)

3.3 Elected Officials

Blackfeet Tribal Business Council (BTBC) Members

Glacier County Commissioners

U.S. Senators for Montana

U.S. Representatives for Montana

Montana Governor's Office

Montana State Senators

Montana State Representatives

3.4 Other Social, Civic, and Business Organizations

State Chamber of Commerce
Resource Development Council
State District Council of Laborers
Montana State Library
Ducks Unlimited
Trout Unlimited
Audubon Society

3.5 Local Residents

Blackfeet Nation Residents
Community Advisory Board Members
Adjacent Landowners and Allottees

3.6 Media

Glacier Reporter- local newspaper
Radio station KBWG, broadcasting at 107.5 FM.
Montana Public Radio Network (MPR)
Blackfeet Nation Facebook Page- @BlackfeetNDN
Blackfeet Tourism, Parks, & Rec.
Tribal Website: <http://blackfeetnation.com/>

4.0 ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Stakeholders is a broad term and includes a variety of interested entities and individuals. Although all stakeholders are encouraged to participate in the NEPA process, some stakeholders have specific regulatory responsibilities that need to be complied with, and some own leases or land in the area or live in Browning. Other stakeholders may live outside Montana and may only be interested in reviewing information posted on the website and providing comments online. Therefore, there are a variety of stakeholder engagement strategies and processes that will be implemented throughout the process.

4.1.1 Newspaper Articles/Press Releases

Project updates and meeting notices will be published in the local newspaper and displayed at prominent locations around Browning. Prominent locations around town may include the tribal office, post office, community center, senior center, community college, etc. This will serve as the main information conveyance on the project for local stakeholders. The articles will provide access to information on meetings, the project schedule, and suggested means of acquiring relevant documents, such as the Scoping Summary Report and the Draft and Final Plan-EIS. Additional notices through Tribal Facebook and other media will be coordinated with Jim McNeely. The project may also be announced through the Tourism, Parks, and Rec newsletter.

4.1.2 Federal Register Notices

The NRCS will publish certain notices in the Federal Register under NRCS NEPA regulations. The Notice of Intent (NOI) to Prepare a Plan-EIS will be published in the Federal Register to initiate the project's scoping process. A copy of the NOI and information on scoping materials will be sent to the project mailing list and statewide and local media outlets. A Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft Plan-EIS will also be published in the Federal Register with information on the comment period. A NOA for the Final Plan-EIS will be published in the Federal Register, and the Record of Decision (ROD) on the project will be published not less than 30 days after the NOA for the Final Plan-EIS is published.

4.1.3 Scoping Meeting

Scoping is used in NEPA to identify relevant substantive issues and reasonable alternatives so that the Plan-EIS can focus on these issues. NEPA documents should avoid discussion of extraneous issues and focus on what is truly important.

Scoping meetings are public meetings intended to provide opportunities for the public to learn about the proposed action and to provide input on the project area, project

alternatives, issues of concern, anticipated impacts, and potential mitigation measures. These meetings take place during the preparation of the Preliminary Draft Plan-EIS. The project team will provide information on the project and the EIS process, answer questions on these issues, and collect input from attendees. The information collected will inform the scope of issues evaluated in the Plan-EIS and the range of reasonable alternatives. Input received during the scoping meetings will be collected and analyzed to refine the scope of the EIS and documented for agency and public review.

All scoping meetings are proposed to be held in Browning, Montana. Notification of meeting time and dates will be published in the Glacier Reporter for two consecutive weeks prior to the meeting date.

4.1.4 Agency Collaboration

Regulatory agencies have specific jurisdiction over certain resources or processes and may have resource information that supports the analysis of project impacts. The project team will meet with agencies as needed throughout scoping and the Plan-EIS development process to obtain their expertise and input into the process.

Agency representatives will be placed on the stakeholder mailing list to receive notice of and invitations to participate in all the stakeholder engagement activities that occur during preparation of the Plan-EIS.

An interdepartmental tribal advisory board will be used throughout the review process to guide review and engage in public meetings. The team should include the Blackfeet Environmental Office (BEO), the Blackfeet Land Department, Blackfeet Fish and Wildlife (BF F&W), and Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO).

4.1.5 Public Meeting on Draft Plan-EIS

A public meeting on the Draft Plan-EIS will be held in Browning. The project team will present information on the EIS development process, including the purpose and need for the project, alternatives reviewed, potential effects of the proposed project and reasonable alternatives, and mitigation measures. The project team will take public testimony on the Draft Plan-EIS. Information received during the Draft Plan-EIS review and comment period will be analyzed, summarized and the information and any changes made based on it will be documented in the Final Plan-EIS. Notification of meeting time and dates will be published in the Glacier Reporter for two consecutive weeks prior to the meeting date.

4.1.6 Presentations to Existing Groups

The project team will take advantage of invitations to present the project to interested groups, such as conservation groups, business organizations, and elected bodies.

Information on the project will also be made available to organizations that produce newsletters to reach the broadest possible audience.

4.1.7 Direct Mail/Email

The project team will obtain mailing lists of adjacent or effected landowners/allottees and will collect mailing/email addresses from interested persons at all meetings. Informational materials, meeting notices, and notices of document availability will be produced and distributed throughout the process by U.S. Postal Service and by email.

4.1.8 Individual Meetings/Other Outreach

The project team will take advantage of time spent in Browning to meet with individuals to gather thoughts and information informally to help inform the project. The team has found that these informal conversations with people that may not attend or speak up at public meetings often can provide useful information and perspective on the project and potential project effects. These informal meetings will be documented and included as part of the Plan-EIS process.

4.1.9 Comment Analysis and Response

The NRCS and project team will accept input on the project throughout the development of the Plan-EIS. Specific comment periods occur during scoping and public review of the Draft Plan-EIS. Comments received during those periods will be documented in comment analysis and response documents that will be incorporated as part of the official project documentation. Comments received outside those periods will also be documented and analyzed, and responses to these will be incorporated in the Final Plan-EIS.

5.0 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The attached stakeholder engagement schedule is based on the overall project schedule and includes proposed dates for scoping meetings and other engagement activities. This schedule will be updated throughout project implementation to document scoping and other engagement activities that occur.

Stakeholder participation planning and implementation will be discussed quarterly or as otherwise needed with the NRCS and the Tribe. This plan will be updated and modified based on feedback from stakeholders throughout the project.

NOI published	November 2018
Preliminary Investigations	October 2018 – February 2019
Public and Agency scoping period and meeting	December 2018 – January 2019
Scoping Summary Report	January 2019 – February 2019
Develop 30% Design and Draft Plan-EIS	March 2019 – November 2019
Public and Agency scoping period and meeting	May 2019 – June 2019
Develop 80% Design of Preferred Alternative	July 2019 - December 2019
Public Draft Plan-EIS Meeting	October 2019
Publish NOA	December 2019
Final Plan-EIS review period	December 2019 – January 2020
Finalize Record of Decision	February 2020

The consultant team and the NRCS will take advantage of other regularly scheduled stakeholder meetings to brief interested stakeholders on the project (regional advisory committees, chambers of commerce, local governments).