

September 27, 2000

Commissioner John M. Bernal  
International Boundary and Water Commission  
The Commons, Building C, Suite 310  
4171 N. Mesa Street  
El Paso, Texas 79902

Dear Commissioner Bernal:

This letter is in response to the August 8, 2000, letter (copy attached) from Debra J. Little, Principal Engineer of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) Engineering Section, regarding the concerns raised by Mexico's Commission Internacional de Limites y Aguas (CILA) in connection with the Sustainable Water Project (SWP). Ms. Little described CILA's concerns about the projected water quantity and water quality effects to Mexico's delivery allotment of Rio Grande Project Water resulting from the implementation of the SWP, and requested a statement from the New Mexico-Texas Water Commission (Commission) describing the extent of these effects.

As Co-Chairman of the Commission, both Karl Wood and I question why the IBWC is requesting such a statement from the Commission. Since the IBWC is the Lead Federal Agency for the SWP and is also a member of the Commission's Steering Committee, your staff has full knowledge concerning the findings of the SWP Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The Commission's NEPA Consultant, CH2MHill, has provided several responses addressing Mexico's concerns, which I have enclosed for your reference. Would it be more appropriate, considering the nature of IBWC's charter, for your organization to compose a written response to CILA citing the information contained in this enclosure? Karl Wood and I are available to review your response and answer any further questions.

Please contact either of us if you have any concerns or questions regarding this matter. We would be pleased to work with you in any manner necessary to resolve the concerns of CILA.

Sincerely,

Edmund G. Archuleta, P.E., General Manager  
El Paso Water Utilities - PSB

Karl Wood, Director  
New Mexico Water Resources Research Institute

Xc: New Mexico-Texas Water Commission Members

Responses to letter dated August 08, 2000, from Debra L. Little, IBWC, to Edmund G. Archuleta, General Manager, EPWU-PSB

By CH2Mhill, New Mexico-Texas Sustainable Water Project NEPA Consultant

1. The New Mexico-Texas Sustainable Water Project (SWP) Purpose and Need statement clearly states that the obligations of the Treaty of 1906 with Mexico will be honored. The Commission approved that Purpose and Need statement at the beginning of the NEPA process. It continues to honor that obligation .
2. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Bureau), working with the Elephant Butte Irrigation District and the El Paso County Water Improvement District No.1, manages the Rio Grande Project (Project). They are required by compact and treaty to meet Mexico's right to 60,000 acre feet per year. The sponsoring utilities of the SWP would acquire rights to use water from the irrigation districts who in turn call on water from the Bureau. The Commission developed the SWP with the understanding that treaty obligations must be met. The Commission does not intend to affect those requirements.
3. There is a concern about the potential for manmade droughts resulting from the SWP because of increased seepage during the non-irrigation season. As stated above, the SWP would acquire the same rights to use water that are currently being held for agricultural uses and will have the same allocations as other agricultural users each year. The SWP sponsoring utilities could not call for water beyond their rights to use water and therefore cannot draw down Caballo Reservoir beyond what the Rio Grande Project allocates. The BESTSM analysis accounted for the additional seepage and differing consumptive uses and adjusted annual total demand so that releases from Caballo would remain within historical ranges. No manmade droughts are predicted by the model. The Commission believes there is no potential for manmade droughts resulting from the SWP.
4. A concern was expressed about the impact the Project will have on the quality of water delivered to Mexico. The predicted changes in Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) at International Dam are described in the attached tables taken from the Project Draft EIS. These tables compare the Preferred Alternative with the No-Action Alternative in Phases 1, 2 and 3. In general , the Preferred Alternative will result in increases of 35 to 63 mg/l in the primary irrigation season and a decrease from 17 to 58 mg/l in the non-irrigation season. The data used to predict these TDS values were generated from daily data taken over the 71 year period of record.

Subsequent to this analysis, a drain blending strategy has been developed to essentially eliminate the primary irrigation season increases in TDS, so that virtually no changes in TDS will be seen at either American or International Dams. A description of that strategy is presented in the EIS. The Commission supports the validity of these results.