



Categorical Exclusion

for the El Paso County Northwest Upper Valley Water and Wastewater Improvements Project

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 intends to provide grant funds through the Border Water Infrastructure Program (BWIP) and the Border Environment Infrastructure Fund (BEIF) for the **El Paso County Northwest Upper Valley Water and Wastewater Improvements Project** located in Canutillo, El Paso County, Texas.

EPA's approval of grant funding for the proposed Project is a federal action requiring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 USC §4321 – 4370(f). A federal agency may categorically exclude certain actions from detailed environmental review that do not individually, or cumulatively, have a significant effect on the quality of the environment. To qualify for a categorical exclusion, a project must conform to one of the categories listed in 40 CFR §6.204(a) and it must not involve any of the extraordinary circumstances identified in 40 CFR §6.102(b).

Project Description

The project area is located on the west side of El Paso County in the designated area of Canutillo, Texas, within the Schuman Estates, Ponderosa Estates, Serene Acres, and Western Village subdivisions. Residents in these subdivisions currently rely on individually owned on-site sewage systems consisting of cesspools and septic tanks with leach drain fields. Based on the age and condition of these systems, the on-site sewage systems are in poor condition and do not appear to meet current Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) Chapter 285 rules or County of El Paso Health Department guidelines and regulations. A new wastewater collection system is required to decommission the existing on-site sewage systems and eliminate existing or potential safety and health hazards.

The proposed Project will construct a new gravity wastewater collection system to convey sewage from the subdivisions to an existing sanitary sewer lift station located less than half a mile north of the Western Village subdivision. The existing sanitary sewer lift station and downstream infrastructure are owned and operated by El Paso Water Utilities (EPWater) and

can accept the wastewater flows from these four subdivisions. The Project also includes replacement of existing water mains to provide potable water service to properties with aging infrastructure. The existing 3-inch water main is providing low pressure to the properties and will therefore require replacement. The wastewater and water infrastructure will be owned and maintained by EPWater. Approximately 340 properties will be connected to the proposed sanitary sewer system, and water service will be improved for 20 homes.

Eligibility for Categorical Exclusion

In accordance with the EPA's regulations for implementing the NEPA, 42 USC §4321-4370f, EPA Region 6 has determined this Project to be eligible for a categorical exclusion under 40 CFR §6.204(a)(1)(ii), which allows projects to be categorically excluded when the projects involve: "actions relating to existing infrastructure systems (such as sewer systems; drinking water supply systems; and stormwater systems, including combined sewer overflow systems) that involve minor upgrading, or minor expansion of system capacity or rehabilitation (including functional replacement) of the existing system and system components (such as the sewer collection network and treatment system; the system to collect, treat, store and distribute drinking water; and stormwater systems, including combined sewer overflow systems) or construction of new minor ancillary facilities adjacent to or on the same property as existing facilities."

The proposed Project qualifies for the categorical exclusion set forth under 40 CFR §6.204(a)(1)(ii) as it involves minor upgrading or expansion of existing infrastructure systems and system components. In addition, the Project does not involve new or relocated discharges to surface or ground water; will not result in the substantial increase in the volume or the loading of pollutants to the receiving water; will not provide capacity to serve a population of 30% greater than the existing population; and will not directly or indirectly involve upgrading or extending infrastructure systems for the purpose of future development.

The proposed action is directly related to improving wastewater collection and potable water service for the residents of the Project area, and the social and economic conditions of the affected subdivisions will be improved. The proposed action is located in areas identified as Flood Zones A and AE; however, the local floodplain administrator was consulted, and the proposed improvements were determined not to have a significant impact on the existing floodplain. A Floodplain Development Permit from El Paso County is required.

The proposed action is not expected to impact threatened or endangered species or habitat.

Extraordinary Circumstances (40 CFR §6.204(b)(1) through (b)(10))

EPA has reviewed the proposed Project and determined that it does not involve any extraordinary circumstances listed in 40 CFR §6.204(b)(1) through (b)(10). The proposed

construction activities will occur primarily within existing rights-of-way, along existing roadways, and within acquired easements on already developed properties, and no significant new land disturbance is expected.

Finding

EPA finds the proposed action conforms to the category of actions eligible for exclusion from detailed environmental review under CFR 40 CFR §6.204(a)(1)(ii) and will not involve any extraordinary circumstances. Accordingly, EPA will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed action. EPA may revoke this categorical exclusion if changes in the proposed action render it ineligible for exclusion or if new evidence emerges which indicates that serious local or environmental issues exist or federal, state, or local laws would be violated.

Sincerely,

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Claudia V. Hosch
Manager
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