

Question and Answer Fact Sheet
White Mountain Apache Tribe (WMAT) Rural Water System Scoping

Project-Related Questions	
1	<p>What is the project? What is the Tribe or the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (“Reclamation”) proposing to do?</p> <p>The proposal is to construct and operate a rural water system for the WMAT. Pursuant to the WMAT Water Rights Quantification Act of 2010 (the Act), Reclamation and the WMAT are working to plan, design, and construct the WMAT rural water system as provided in the Act. The proposed project includes a new dam, storage reservoir, pumping plant, and water treatment plant on the North Fork of the White River, near the community of Whiteriver, Arizona. The project would also install a water distribution system to deliver treated water to the communities of Whiteriver, Fort Apache, Canyon Day, Cedar Creek, Carrizo, and Cibecue.</p>
2	<p>When will the project be built?</p> <p>Construction of the project would not begin until after the signing of the Record of Decision (ROD) on this EIS. Reclamation anticipates the ROD being signed about January 2023, and if an action alternative is selected, expects construction to take place between 2024 and 2027.</p>
3	<p>Who will operate it?</p> <p>Under the Act, Reclamation would operate the completed rural water system, with participation from the Tribe, for no less than three years. After that time, ownership of the system would be conveyed to WMAT. WMAT would take over responsibility for operations, maintenance and replacements for the system.</p>
4	<p>Who will own the rural water system?</p> <p>Once the Secretary of the Interior formally conveys title in accordance with the Act, WMAT would own the completed rural water system. This would occur after successful operation of the system for a period of three years; after the Tribe has been provided with technical assistance to operate and maintain the system; and after the operating criteria, standard operating procedures, monitoring criteria, emergency action plan, and first filling and monitoring criteria are in place.</p>
5	<p>This project has been discussed and attempted several times in the past. When will it actually be built?</p> <p>The WMAT rural water system has been Congressionally authorized, but remains a major water infrastructure project. Previous environmental planning efforts were put on hold in 2015 due to project complications. Since then, additional engineering and design work has been done, and is continuing. Now, we are again beginning the environmental review part of the project, which will help identify the environmental impacts of, and reasonable alternatives for, construction and operation of the rural water system. All of these efforts are key steps before a project can be built. If an action alternative is selected at the conclusion of the NEPA process, construction could be expected to take place between 2024 and 2027.</p>
6	<p>Should I expect any changes to water delivery?</p> <p>During construction, residents would continue to receive water from the existing ground water supply provided by the Miner Flat wells and the existing water treatment plant. The existing water treatment plant would need to be taken offline periodically while being upgraded, and the Tribe would use water from the Miner Flat wells to meet water demands during these periods.</p>
7	<p>How will this change how I’m getting my water now?</p> <p>If you are on an existing community water system in Whiteriver, Fort Apache, Canyon Day, Cedar Creek, Carrizo, and Cibecue, your water supplies and tap pressure would be consistently safe, adequate and dependable. The proposed action does not include upgrades or modification to existing community distribution systems (e.g., water pipelines that connect individual houses to the water system).</p>
8	<p>If I am a tribal member and not on a water distribution system now, will this project bring water to me?</p> <p>This project would only provide service to individual homes and businesses that are served by an existing public water system. WMAT will continue to upgrade and extend existing public water systems through separate actions.</p>

9	<p>Will the project harm the Alchesay National Fish Hatchery?</p> <p>The design of the water system (both construction and operations) is taking into consideration the potential effect on downstream flows and temperatures, with the goal of maintaining and improving aquatic conditions at the hatchery. The EIS will evaluate positive and negative impacts of upstream regulation on the hatchery based on ongoing hydrological modeling.</p>
10	<p>Will the project affect native fish or threatened and endangered species?</p> <p>This is an important issue and the EIS will evaluate potential impacts on native fish and threatened and endangered species. The EIS process includes coordination and consultation with both WMAT and federal agencies with responsibility for protecting and managing wildlife and habitat. The EIS and Record of Decision will include appropriate mitigation, monitoring, and management actions, as needed.</p>
11	<p>Will there be recreational opportunities for the public such as boating, camping and fishing on or near the reservoir once the project is complete?</p> <p>This project does not include development of any new recreational facilities. However, WMAT anticipates that the new reservoir would support recreational activity for tribal members and the public, such as fishing, boating, and limited on-shore access. WMAT may fund future projects under separate actions to support recreational opportunities associated with the new reservoir and downstream flows that may improve the instream fishery. However, any such actions are speculative at this time and therefore outside the scope of the EIS.</p>
12	<p>Why can't we continue to rely on groundwater?</p> <p>Groundwater sources on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, including the Miner Flat Wellfield, are not sufficient to meet the near-term or long-term water demands for the Reservation. The wellfield, however, is an important source of water to supplement the surface water treatment system.</p>
13	<p>How will the Tribe pay to operate the new water system?</p> <p>The Act provides for a WMAT Maintenance Fund for the future operation, maintenance and replacement costs associated with the delivery of water through the rural water system.</p>
14	<p>Will I have to pay for water (or pay a higher rate)?</p> <p>Federal funds are provided by Congress to design and construct the new WMAT rural water system facilities. A separate WMAT Maintenance Fund provides for operations, maintenance and replacement costs associated with the delivery of water through the rural water system. The proposed new WMAT rural water system is not expected to impact water rates, although WMAT will adjust water rates in the future to address necessary improvements in existing public water systems and systems outside the WMAT rural water system.</p>
15	<p>Will the project provide new jobs?</p> <p>The project would likely result in both short-term and long-term employment opportunities related to planning, construction and operation of the rural water system, new recreation and agricultural opportunities, and general regional economic growth. Employment will be addressed in the EIS.</p>
NEPA Questions	
16	<p>What is NEPA?</p> <p>The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a procedural statute intended to ensure information regarding environmental impacts is available to decision makers and the public before decisions are made. More information about NEPA, including associated regulations and guidance, is available at http://doi.gov/nepa.</p>
17	<p>Why does NEPA apply here?</p> <p>NEPA applies to proposals for major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, such as the approval and construction of a WMAT rural water system. Additionally, the WMAT Water Rights Quantification Act of 2010 instructs Reclamation to promptly comply with NEPA and any other applicable federal environmental laws in carrying out its responsibilities under the Act.</p>
18	<p>Why are you preparing an EIS?</p> <p>A Federal agency prepares an EIS when a proposed major Federal action is expected to have significant impacts on the quality of the human environment.</p>

19	<p>What is Reclamation's role in the EIS? Other NEPA roles?</p> <p><i>Reclamation</i> is the lead Federal agency for the EIS and will sign the Record of Decision. <i>WMAT</i> is a cooperating agency and is the primary beneficiary of the proposed water system. <i>The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs</i> is a cooperating agency, and will assist in the identification and approval of rights of way, easements, and/or permits needed for implementation of the proposed water system. The <i>U.S. Army Corps of Engineers</i> is a cooperating agency and has regulatory jurisdiction by law under its delegated authority in Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, as well as special expertise with respect to aquatic ecosystems that could be affected by the proposed action.</p>
20	<p>What alternatives are being considered in the EIS?</p> <p>Part of the scoping process is to elicit input from the public on potential resource impacts, potential alternatives that would achieve the purpose and need for action, and major issue areas of concern. The EIS will evaluate the impacts from a range of reasonable alternatives and will describe how other alternatives were determined to be not feasible.</p>
21	<p>How do I comment and is there a deadline to comment?</p> <p>Get more information and submit comments on the project website (https://www.wmat-rws-eis.com). Email comments to dgraziani@usbr.gov Mail comments to: Phoenix Area Office, Bureau of Reclamation, Attn: WMAT RWS NEPA Project Manager 6150 West Thunderbird Road, Glendale, Arizona, 85306-4001 Comments must be received by May 19, 2021</p>
22	<p>How will you use my comments?</p> <p>Scoping comments are used to identify issues of concern to evaluate in the EIS. Comments may also assist in identifying sources of information and alternatives to consider in the EIS. While specific responses are not provided to scoping comments, public input received during scoping will be considered during development of the EIS.</p>
23	<p>Were there prior scoping meetings in 2013?</p> <p>Yes, Reclamation and WMAT held scoping meetings for this project in 2013. The project was rescheduled to allow time for additional engineering studies for the new proposed dam. Reclamation and WMAT are ready to move forward with the EIS, and have decided to hold another round of public scoping.</p>