

Feasibility Study and Environmental Assessment for Chacon Creek, Laredo, Texas

Summary: Section 7001 of the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 (WRRDA 2014) requires the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to publish a notice in the Federal Register to request proposals from non-federal interests for proposed feasibility studies and proposed modifications to authorized USACE water resources development projects or feasibility studies. Proposals should include the following information:

1. *Provide the name of all non-Federal interests planning to act as the sponsor, including any non-Federal interest that has contributed or is expected to contribute toward the non-Federal share of the proposed feasibility study or modification.*

City of Laredo, Texas

2. *State if this proposal is for a feasibility study or a modification to an authorized USACE project or feasibility study and, if a modification, specify the authorized project or study.*

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3. *State the project purpose of the proposed study or modification.*

The primary purpose of the Chacon Creek Feasibility Study is to identify and implement potential measures that would reduce the risk of flooding and restore degraded aquatic ecosystems.

As of 2010, this study was nearing completion of the feasibility phase and an independent external peer review (IEPR) had been successfully completed when the Southwestern Division's (SWD) Regional Integration Team (RIT) discovered an issue with the study's authority. The study was being conducted under a resolution by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, U.S. House of Representatives, adopted May 21, 2003, which reads:

Resolved by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the United States House of Representatives, That the Secretary of the Army is requested to review the report of the Chief of Engineers on the Rio Grande and Tributaries, published as House Document 39, 62nd Congress, 1st Session, and other pertinent reports to determine whether modifications to the recommendations contained therein are advisable at the present time in the interest of flood damage reduction, environmental restoration and protection, water conservation and supply, water quality, and related purposes in the Rio Grande Watershed below Falcon Dam.

The City of Laredo, Texas and the study area are located *above* Falcon Dam making the authority not applicable. The District worked with the staff of Rep. Henry Cuellar to secure an authority through a resolution from the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee but without success. Language was submitted that would revise the last sentence to read "above Falcon Dam." To date, the committee has not approved that language.

4. *Provide an estimate, to the extent practicable, of the total cost of the proposed study or modification.*

To date, the District has spent approximately \$1.6 million on this study including the cost of the IEPR. The District estimates that that the study can be completed for another \$200,000.

5. *Describe, to the extent practicable, the anticipated monetary and nonmonetary benefits of the proposal including benefits to the protection of human life and property; improvement to transportation; the national economy; the environment; or the national security interests of the United States.*

Chacon Creek is an important natural resource located on the eastern side of Laredo, Texas with a wide range of needs and opportunities including environmental, economic, recreational, and educational. Years of neglect including illegal dumping, rapid urbanization, and storm runoff have led to contamination, erosion, and loss of wetland habitats and vegetation. Invasive plant species have seriously degraded the value of riparian and riverine habitats for wildlife, as well as altered soil productivity and increased the potential for fires. Additionally, 449 structures located in the 500-year floodplain are at risk of flooding. More recently, the city received five to eight inches of rain in a four-hour period in June 2007, which led to the city's first flooding death. A total of 68 homes were reported to have received varying levels of damage during the storm, with several homes along Chacon Creek being almost entirely inundated.

The NED Plan identified in the feasibility report would provide for the permanent evacuation of 73 residential structures, most of which are in the 10-year floodplain, and use the vacated lands for recreation facilities. An update of the Recommended Plan to FY 2015 prices and interest rates shows a \$587,000 reduction in Expected Annual Damages, with recreational amenities adding \$1,144,000 in benefits. Total annual benefits for the project are \$1,731,000. The total first cost of the NED plan is \$22,404,000 including interest during construction. Total annual costs would be \$996,000 with net benefits of \$735,000. The benefit/cost ratio for the NED plan is 1.74-to-1.00.

The NER Plan would restore 401 acres of riparian woodlands by removing buffelgrass and salt cedar and planting native species. Three wetland sites would also be restored and will total approximately 17 acres. The combined NED/NER Plan would result in the overall increase of 248 AAHUs with an annual cost of \$5,000 per unit gained over the No-Action Plan and a total first cost of \$24,020,000.

6. *Describe if local support exists for the proposal.*

The City of Laredo fully supports the feasibility study and intends to participate in the implementation of a recommended plan.

7. *State if the non-Federal interest has the financial ability to provide for the required cost share.*

The non-Federal sponsor, the City of Laredo, Texas, can attest to their capability to meet their financial responsibilities related to this feasibility study. So far City of Laredo paid \$644,000.00 as part of local match to the Army Corps of Engineers.

8. *Submit a letter or statement of support from each associated non- Federal interest.*

Attached