

Public Participation Plan

Watershed Plan - Environmental Assessment for the Upper Turtle River Dam 10 Project

Prepared By:



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

February 18, 2022

Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction 1

2.0 Purpose of Public Participation 1

3.0 Public Participation Process 1

4.0 Public Participation Phases 2

 4.1 Scoping Phase 2

 4.2 Draft Plan-EA Public Meeting 3

 4.3 Final Plan-EA 4

5.0 Schedule 4

6.0 Public Participation Techniques 4

 6.1 Meeting and Collateral Materials..... 4

 6.2 Comment Management 5

 6.3 Web Site/Social Media 5

 6.4 Study Contact 5

 6.5 Media 6

7.0 Identification of Official Stakeholder.....6

 7.1 Issue Identification 6

 7.2 Message Development 6

Figures

Figure 1: Timeline 7

1.0 Introduction

This Public Participation Plan (PPP) has been developed to describe how the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Grand Forks Water Resource District (GFWRD), Grand Forks Soils Conservation District (GFSCD), and other members of the Project Team will conduct the public participation process in preparing a Watershed Plan-Environmental Assistant (Plan-EA) for the Upper Turtle River Dam No. 10 Project. The following pages detail how the team intends to:

- Inform and involve the public, project stakeholders, elected officials, media, and agencies
- Solicit public, stakeholder, and agency input
- Comply with the requirements of NRCS policies and regulations and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

PPP Organization: The main section of this PPP answers the fundamental “what” and “why” questions of the program—detailing what strategies, activities, tools, methods, etc., will be used, and why. The appendices—which include scoping/hearing plans, a media plan, and a roles/responsibilities matrix—answer the more specific questions of “who,” “when,” “where” and “how,” providing all the necessary details for implementation, scheduling, logistics, and team responsibilities, among other things.

Plan-EA Scope: The project team will prepare a Watershed Plan pursuant to PL 83-566 and in accordance with the NRCS National Watershed Program Manual (NWPM-390-500-M, 4th edition as amended January 2015), and evaluate the potential impacts that would result from the Larimore Dam Rehabilitation Project within an EA, pursuant to NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508; NRCS procedures for implementing NEPA 7 CFR Part 650; NRCS General Manual Part 410; and, the NRCS National Environment Compliance Handbook.

2.0 Purpose of Public Participation

The primary goal of public participation, and one of the fundamental elements of NEPA, is to ensure that all interested and affected parties are aware of the proposed action. A strategic, flexible, and dynamic process of public participation and stakeholder communication is paramount to ensuring that stakeholders have reasonable access to study information, as well as ample opportunity to submit comments and input about the study.

An effective outreach program helps the study team achieve its goals and objectives by identifying the people to be reached and engaging them through proven outreach tools and techniques.

This PPP has been developed—and will be continually updated—to help ensure a comprehensive and effective public participation process that aids the study team’s analytical and decision-making processes.

3.0 Public Participation Process

The implementation of a holistic and effective public participation program facilitates the identification of impacts early in the study in order to adequately address potential issues and public concerns. A variety of parties and entities will likely be affected and interested in the project.

Typically, a proactive public participation program that informs and educates the public greatly reduces the probability of misperceptions and project delays by resolving and addressing concerns early in the

process. In addition, input from the public can enhance the Federal decision-making process through the contribution of information and ideas for project alternatives. Furthermore, the public participation program fulfills the vital federal requirement to obtain *meaningful* public participation, thereby yielding a widely supported and sustainable result.

The purpose of this PPP is to provide clear and comprehensive guidance to the project team in the implementation of NEPA-related program components and activities. The program is intended to inform stakeholders about the Project, its progress, and, most importantly, opportunities to provide formal input.

Public participation program efforts will include: early issue identification, public notification, preparation and publication of handout and display materials, advertisements, maps, posters, and meeting logistics. Media sources will include newspaper, radio, Internet, and other sources deemed necessary to reach the affected populations and other interested parties. The Internet will be utilized as practical to review and gauge materials broadcast by affected groups or local newspapers.

4.0 Public Participation Phases

The study is divided into three phases. The **scoping** phase will be the initial introduction of the study to agencies and the public, and will identify issues and potential alternatives. The scoping phase will be followed by the **Draft Plan-EA** phase, where the proposed action and alternatives will be analyzed and public comment requested. The Draft Plan-EA phase is an extensive phase with multiple chances for public participation. The third phase is associated with the **Final Plan-EA** and decision document.

4.1 Scoping Phase

Scoping is the first formal step in the NEPA process. The scoping process must consider the 31 concerns listed in NWPM Section 501.24, plus any other issues relevant to this watershed. It is a public and open process to identify and focus on the relevant natural resource concerns in the watershed, as well as opportunities to address identified concerns. The scoping process will include a 30-day public comment period and an agency and public scoping meeting.

Scoping will provide an opportunity for agencies and the public to learn about the Dam 10 Project and express concerns, ideas, and comments. The scoping phase will initiate an information exchange between the study team, the public, and affected or interested agencies.

The following assumptions are currently driving planning for the scoping meetings:

Scoping Meeting Locations/Dates:

A public scoping meeting is also planned for this project and is scheduled for 1:00, March 8th, 2022, at the American Legion in Larimore, ND. The public scoping meeting will be held after initial data collection and research is completed, in order to present most current information to the public during the meeting. The Sponsors and NRCS will cover planning history, current knowledge on natural resources in the watershed, alternatives that could be considered during planning, and anticipated issues of concern. The purpose of the public meeting will be to identify potential alternatives to be examined, and public concerns regarding these alternatives. The scoping process should include generating feedback related to multiple functions of watershed projects, notably water resources related to flood control and irrigation, as well as recreation opportunities.

An interagency scoping meeting is planned to occur early in the process to receive feedback from agencies on potential issues regarding typical watershed study implementation features. The meeting is expected to occur virtually in March of 2022.

Meeting Facilities: The Project Sponsors (GFWRD and GFSCD) will reserve a room and publish the location with at least 14 days advanced notice to the public.

Public Noticing: Prior to the public scoping meeting, study and meeting information will be announced through the local newspapers and other local media. Newspaper notices announcing the public scoping meeting will be published in the paper of record at least 14 days prior to the meeting. The proposed media list will include major media within 50 miles of the scoping meeting, plus major media within the state capital.

Agency Scoping Invitations: Letter invitations will be distributed to Federal, state, and local agencies at least two weeks prior to the agency scoping meeting.

Tribal Consultation: Tribal government-to-government consultation will be handled by the NRCS's cultural resource specialist or planning coordinator, who will inform tribal representatives of the scoping process and meetings and coordinate, as necessary, with tribal wildlife and cultural resource personnel.

Media/Additional Outreach: In addition to placing public scoping meeting ads in the newspapers of record, additional media strategies and tools will be considered to maximize publicity for the study and meetings. These may include:

- Press releases/advisories
- Social media announcements
- Radio calendar announcements/PSAs
- Community/civic group outreach

Scoping Report: Comment forms will be prepared for use at the public scoping meetings to record all public comments. Following the 30-day scoping comment period, Draft and Final Scoping Reports will then be produced summarizing the scoping process and the comments received. The Scoping Report will include attendance level, number of comments (written and verbal), issues raised, government (Federal, tribal, state, and local) representation, special interest group representation, comment position, and document/mailing requests.

Following scoping activities, public participation efforts will be evaluated and updated, as appropriate, to meet the needs of the study as it progresses toward the Draft EA. Two meetings in summer 2022 will be held to present and discuss alternatives; the second meeting is planned to decide on the final alternative(s).

4.2 Draft Plan-EA Public Meeting

The purpose of the public meeting will be to review content and findings of the Draft Plan-EA and solicit public comment on the Draft Plan-EA.

Meeting Location/Dates: It is anticipated that the public Draft Plan-EA meeting will be held at location in Grand Forks County to be determined at later date based on alternative location and downstream effects. The PPP will be updated with the specific date for the public meeting, once it is known.

Noticing/Review Protocols: Public notices announcing the Draft Plan-EA meeting will indicate the availability of the Draft Plan-EA and how it can be obtained/viewed and how comments can be submitted. Project files will be available on the NRCS website ([Watershed Operations | NRCS North Dakota \(usda.gov\)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/water/watershed-operations)) when they are ready for release.

Court Reporter: Because these are **not** formal hearings, a court reporter will not be present at the meeting to record comments.

Comments: Meeting attendees will be informed that a summary of all commenters, comments, and responses may appear in the Final Plan-EA with actual comment letters included as an appendix.

Public and Agency Coordination: The EA section addressing Public and Agency Coordination will summarize the public and agency coordination efforts that have been implemented during the project.

This section will include public and agency participation and scoping; list of contacts; list of agencies, organizations, and persons who received copies of the document; and public comments and responses.

4.3 Final Plan-EA

As a final step in the NEPA process, the public will have an opportunity to review the Final Plan-EA and draft decision document. An availability notice for the Final Plan-EA and draft decision document will be published in appropriate local media. Project files will be available on the NRCS website ([Watershed Operations | NRCS North Dakota \(usda.gov\)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/water/watershed-operations)) when they are ready for release. NRCS will be responsible for preparing and publishing the final decision notice.

5.0 Schedule

Appendix A outlines the schedule for the agency and public scoping process. Future Plan-EA schedule milestones will be tracked by the NRCS team and updated as necessary.

6.0 Public Participation Techniques

The following section describes potential outreach methods or “techniques” that may be used during the public participation process.

6.1 Meeting and Collateral Materials

Project-related collateral materials, such as fact sheets, postcards, surveys/comment cards, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and other relevant types of communication materials will be developed throughout the duration of the study. Project files will be available on the NRCS website ([Watershed Operations | NRCS North Dakota \(usda.gov\)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/water/watershed-operations)) when they are ready for release.

Collateral materials are intended to be clear, concise sources of important project information such as the project summary, Project overview, NEPA process, technology information, schedule, and contact information.

Distribution: Distribution of collateral materials may include postings on the NRCS’s website, through stakeholder outreach (via meetings, mail, e-mail), and through public meetings. Materials will be made available in both electronic and hardcopy formats, as appropriate. Distribution of key informational materials such as the postcard announcement of public meetings/hearings will be circulated to the database of governmental entities and other interested parties, as necessary.

Agency and public scoping meeting materials include (but are not limited to):

- Sign-in sheets
- Comment forms
- Fact sheets
- Maps
- Display boards

6.2 Comment Management

Per NEPA requirements, all study-related comments will be stored in a common location and documented within a secure comment database or spreadsheet to ensure efficient, organized, and thorough recordkeeping. The comment system will be designed to support the NEPA process by: (1) tracking and documenting public and agency comments in all phases of the Plan-EA, (2) managing documents with comments and corresponding responses, and (3) establishing workflow for environmental discipline leads to generate analysis in the Plan-EA document itself.

All substantive comments received during the formal scoping period and public comment period must be responded to and considered before reaching a decision. All substantive comments and responses will be catalogued in a searchable database to ensure that the appropriate consideration of comments is incorporated into the Plan-EA.

6.3 Web Site/Social Media

Up-to-date information regarding the study and public comment opportunities will be made available on the NRCS’s regional and project webpages at:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/nd/technical/engineering/?cid=nrcseprd775806>

The website will provide factual, accurate, and transparent information about the development of the Upper Turtle River Dam 10 Project and the Plan-EA process. All public materials will feature the URL for the NRCS’s project website in order to drive stakeholders to additional online resources for the study.

No communication via social media is planned for this project. If a need to communicate via social media is identified based on public interest, this document will be updated to outline the expected platforms.

6.4 Study Contact

A single point of contact for public comments will be established for the duration of the project and all comments will be documented and routed to the appropriate public participation or technical team members to ensure up-to-date, timely, and accurate information is being conveyed. Comments will be directed to:

U.S. Mail: NRCS Christi Fisher
E-mail: Christi.fisher@usda.gov

6.5 Media

The media outreach effort will begin in advance of the public scoping meetings. Outreach is the responsibility of the sponsor (GFWRD & GFSCD) throughout the Scoping and Draft Plan – EA Phases. The NRCS responsible for the Final Plan – EA phase outreach. The overall goal of media outreach is to utilize multiple media sources (e.g., print, radio, television, etc.), as well as paid advertisements in newspapers of record, to comprehensively reach out to the affected communities and region with project information and meeting details. Press releases will be developed and distributed to the Project-area media database to announce the scoping meeting at least two weeks prior to the scoping meeting.

NRCS Public Affairs Contact:
Tanya Koch, NRCS ND Public Affairs Specialist
tanya.koch@usda.gov, 701.530.2096

Generally, comments from the press will be directed towards Tanya Koch, NRCS.

7.0 Identification of Official Stakeholders

NRCS will develop and maintain a mailing list that includes state and Federal agencies, tribal governments, local government officials (city and county), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), key community leaders, and major industry. The stakeholder group listed in Table 1 of the Feasibility Report have been initially identified as being potentially interested in the scope and the development of the EA. These stakeholders, as well as others gathered throughout the study, will be invited and encouraged to participate in the EA process:

7.1 Issue Identification

In identifying specific stakeholders, it will be important to evaluate and respond to anticipated issues and gauge the appropriate level of outreach for each stakeholder. Issues anticipated to generate the most attention within this Plan-EA process are listed in the Feasibility Report.

Talking points and frequently asked questions for the agency and public scoping meetings will be developed prior to the Project scoping meetings.

Figure 1: Timeline

Upper Turtle River Dam Site #10 Public Participation Timeline					
Public Participation Plan Milestone	Anticipated Timeframe	Tasks	Interdisciplinary (NRCS, GFSCD, & GFWRD)	Agency Officials	Public
Initiate Planning	Fall 2020	NRCS & GFWRD Sign cooperative agreement	X		
Continue Planning	Fall 2021	GFSCD agreed to co-sponsor the project with GFWRD.	X		
Interagency Scoping Meeting	Winter 2022	Receive feedback from interagency officials regarding potential issues regarding typical watershed study implementation features		X	
Public Scoping Meeting	Winter 2022	NRCS present watershed background information related to data collected, prior studies, and historically implemented watershed features. Document public comments related to resource concerns in the watershed, potential alternatives, and public concern regarding these alternatives. This scoping would like to generate feedback related to functions of watershed projects, notably water resources related to flood control and irrigation, as well as recreation opportunities.			X
Preliminary Alternatives	Summer 2022	NRCS presents preliminary alternatives developed and solicits public and agency official's input.		X	X
Decide Final Alternatives	Summer 2022	NRCS and co-sponsors make decision on the final alternatives for detailed consideration.	X		
Draft Plan/EA Presentation	Winter 2022/2023	NRCS presents Draft Plan/EA with field tour.	X	X	X
Final Consultation	Spring 2023	NRCS completes final consultation with agency officials and THPOs. Meeting may not be required.		X	
Publish Final Plan/EA	Fall 2023	NRCS publishes Plan/EA to Federal Register and responds to public comments. No meeting required.			X