



REGION 6

DALLAS, TX 75270

January 13, 2025

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

TO ALL INTERESTED GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND PUBLIC GROUPS

In accordance with the environmental review guidelines and with the use of the implementing environmental review procedures of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found at 40 CFR Part 6 entitled "Procedures for Implementing the Requirements of the Council on Environmental Quality on the National Environmental Policy Act " as guidance, EPA has performed an environmental review of the following proposed action:

Donna Wastewater Treatment Phase II Project
Proposed by the North American Development Bank
Located Donna, Texas

Estimated EPA Share: \$3,200,000

Estimated Local Share: \$1,000,000

Source of Local/Other Funding (if applicable): \$4,000,000

North Alamo Water Supply Corporation (NAWSC) located in Donna, Hidalgo County, Texas, intends to provide first-time sewer service to nine low-income subdivisions in its service area that were not included as part of the original phase of a project that brought first-time sewer service to an unincorporated area north of the City of Donna. The original project provided first time service to 401 connections within six colonias. Under the proposed action, NAWSC will service nine additional colonias and provide first time service to an additional 419 connections. To service the 419 connections, the project includes construction of a collection system and the expansion of the existing Donna Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) from its current capacity of 0.5 million gallons per day (MGD) to 0.99 MGD. This includes the design and construction to expand and improve the existing wastewater treatment plant by constructing a new aeration basin, onsite a plant lift station, two small backup drying beds, and making some small improvements to the existing chlorine contact basin to provide an additional two minutes of contact time. It will also include all the related piping, valves, electrical, instrumentation, and

other miscellaneous work for a complete functional project as well as the design and construction of a collection and conveyance system to transport wastewater from the nine targeted colonias to the wastewater treatment plant including the construction of five lift stations, 24,530 load force (LF) of force mains, and 25,548 LF of gravity lines.

EPA Region 6 has performed an environmental review and assessment on the Environmental Information Document (EID), and other supporting data, prepared for the proposed project. The environmental review and assessment process did not identify any potentially significant adverse environmental impacts associated with the proposed action. The project individually, cumulatively over time, or in conjunction with other actions will not have a significant adverse effect on the quality of the environment. Accordingly, EPA Region 6 has made a preliminary determination that the proposed project is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, and that preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) is not warranted.

Comments regarding this preliminary decision not to prepare an EIS and issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) may be submitted to Tanisha Hinton, the project review lead, at hinton.tanisha@epa.gov. All comments will be taken into consideration. No administrative action will be taken on this decision during the 30-day comment period. This preliminary decision, and the FNSI, will become final after the 30-day comment period expires if no new information is provided to alter this finding.

Sincerely,

Robert Houston
Branch Manager
Environmental Justice, Community Engagement and
Environmental Review Division

Enclosure

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
for the
CITY of DONNA WASTEWATER TREATMENT PHASE II PROJECT
DONNA, TEXAS

1.0 GENERAL PROJECT INFORMATION

1.1 Purpose and Need for Proposed Action

The North Alamo Water Supply Corporation (NAWSC) intends to provide first-time sewer service to nine low-income subdivisions in its service area that were not included as part of the original phase of a project that brought first-time sewer service to an unincorporated area north of the City of Donna, Texas. The Hidalgo County Health and Human Services Department has declared that a public health nuisance exists in the subdivisions caused by the existing septic tank systems overflowing during wet weather events because they were installed in substandard lots in areas with a high-water table.

1.2 Proposed Action

The proposed project will provide first-time sewer service to nine subdivisions with approximately 419 connections and an estimated population of 1,634. The proposed project includes the construction of a collection system and expansion of the Donna regional wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) from its current capacity of 0.5 million gallons per day (MGD) to 0.99 MGD to service the additional connections.

The proposed WWTP expansion project consists of constructing a new aeration basin, onsite plant lift station, and two small backup drying beds, and improving the existing chlorine contact basin to provide an additional two minutes of contact time. The proposed project will also include related piping, valves, electrical, instrumentation, and other miscellaneous work for a complete functional project.

The proposed first-time sewer service project consists of constructing a collection and conveyance system to transport wastewater from the nine subdivisions to the City of Donna. WWTP, including the construction of five lift stations, approximately 24,530 linear feet of force mains, 25,548 linear feet of gravity sewer lines, and 88 manholes.

1.3 Project Funding

To address these issues, the NAWSC applied to the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) for financing through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) Program for planning, acquisition, design, and construction. On April 11, 2022, the TWDB committed \$15,340,000 for the proposed project. The NAWSC is anticipated to close on the financing on September 1, 2022. Some of the planning funds were used to assess the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project and prepare an Environmental Information Document (EID). Preparation of the EID involved consultation with state and federal regulatory agencies and additional public participation.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES

The no-action alternative would incur no cost for easement acquisition, design, or construction, but the existing onsite septic systems would fail to address the need to improve wastewater collection and treatment in the subdivisions. Wastewater would continue to overflow into yards and homes during wet weather and flooding events, and the public health and environmental problems would continue to exist. A hybrid septic tank effluent pumping (STEP)/septic tank effluent gravity (STEG) collection system, in which septic effluent is collected and directed to a conventional or a proposed conventional collection system, was evaluated. Fine bubble aeration and slow speed mechanical aeration systems were evaluated for treatment strategies. A hybrid STEP/STEG system would require a new septic tank at each dwelling served by this type of system. Various studies have shown that the tank must be adequately sized and leak-proof so that proper detention is maintained. Further, the efficiency of this approach is based on a clarified effluent, free of solids. Leaking tanks tend to blend the tank contents and destroy the traditional scum, clarified center, and sludge stratified layers. Given the density of the subdivisions, the cost of installing septic tanks at each dwelling and the ongoing cost for maintenance of the septic tanks with pumps, the conventional gravity wastewater collection system that directs effluent to the Donna WWTP with expanded wastewater treatment capacity seems to be the most appropriate method of wastewater collection and treatment for this area.

3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Consistent with the requirements of the federally funded CWSRF Program, the NAWSC defined the social and environmental contexts of the proposed project and assessed its potential impact. This information was presented in an EID made available to the community, regulatory agencies, and other interested parties.

Adverse effects on societal and natural resources fall under the authority of various agencies. These regulatory agencies and participating area residents had the opportunity to address potential issues concerning construction practices, possible adverse effects within the proposed project area, and the mitigative measures to be implemented during construction. The staff of the TWDB reviewed the EID comments and other data and prepared the present Environmental Assessment (EA).

4.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCE (ENVIRONMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS)

4.1 Land Use

The proposed project is northwest of the City of Donna in the southeastern portion of Hidalgo County. The proposed project is within the existing Donna WWTP site and existing subdivisions that do not have centralized sanitary sewer collection. The proposed project will expand centralized sanitary sewer collection service to existing subdivisions. Land use around the area where the sewer lines and lift stations will be constructed is mainly open with some lines being constructed adjacent to residential subdivisions. Portions of the

proposed project will be constructed in farm-to-market roads and state highways, which will require Texas Department of Transportation permits and the NAWSC will need to secure easements from private landowners. The proposed project is not expected to require land use conversion. The proposed project will have a permanent positive impact on the nine subdivisions.

4.2 Soils

The proposed project is within the Gulf Coast Plains Physiographic Province of Texas and Gulf Coastal Plains Ecological Region. The proposed project area is generally flat, gently sloping from southwest to northeast. Natural ground elevations in the proposed project area range from approximately 75 to 102 feet above mean sea level with interruptions of grade from manmade facilities, such as irrigation canals, railroads, and highways. There is a small insignificant scattering of mounds or depressions throughout the proposed project area. Otherwise, there are no notable topographical features present within the proposed project area. The proposed project is over the Beaumont Formation, predominantly clay; Beaumont Formation, predominantly sand; and Dune Sand Sheet Deposits. The deposits associated with the Beaumont Formation, predominantly clay, are from the Pleistocene epoch (Quaternary Period). The deposits consist of light- to dark-gray and bluish- to greenish-gray clay and silt, intermixed and interbedded. It contains beds and lenses of fine sand, decayed organic matter, and many buried organic-rich zones that contain calcareous and ferruginous nodules.

The deposits associated with the Beaumont Formation, predominantly sand, are from the late Pleistocene epoch (Quaternary Period). The deposits consist of yellowish- to brownish gray, locally reddish orange, very fine to fine quartz sand, silt, and minor fine gravel, intermixed and interbedded. Dune Sand Sheet Deposits are of the Holocene geological epoch (part of the Quaternary Period) and are moderately to highly permeable stabilized sand dune deposits. There are no relevant topographical or geological features in the proposed project area. The proposed WWTP project is on a site that is previously converted, and the proposed sanitary sewer lines project will be a corridor subsurface project. Therefore, the proposed project is not expected to directly impact prime or important farmland. Soil contamination is not present in the proposed project area; soils will not be moved offsite and will not be contaminated because of the proposed project.

4.3 Groundwater Resources

The proposed project is in the Nueces-Rio Grande River basin. The water supply in the service area comes from the Rio Grande and Gulf Coast Aquifer. Temporary impacts from erosion and runoff during construction will be managed with the use of stormwater best management practices. The proposed project will permanently improve surface and groundwater quality.

4.4 Floodplains

The proposed project is partially in the 100-year floodplain; therefore, a floodplain development permit must be acquired from the local floodplain administrator prior to construction in the 100-year floodplain.

Consistent with correspondence from the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) dated May 2, 2022, the USACE reviewed the proposed project as an approved jurisdictional determination (AJD), limited to the areas where the proposed project crosses or otherwise may impact aquatic resources. According to the July 1, 2022, AJD (Project No. SWG-2011-01167), the USACE determined that the review areas consist of multiple sites along an existing canal system in Hidalgo County, Texas, and do not exhibit waters of the United States, subject to jurisdiction pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

4.5 Wetlands

Specifically, the review areas are comprised of non-tidal drainage and irrigation ditches excavated on dry land and are not considered waters of the United States, as per the preamble of 1986 for 33 CFR 328.3(a). The AJD is valid for five years from the date on the letter unless new information warrants a revision of the determination prior to the expiration date. No impacts to waters of the United States, including wetlands, are anticipated because of the proposed project. If the design plan is altered in a way that could impact potential waters of the United States, the NAWSC will consult with the USACE prior to construction.

4.6 Wildlife

The proposed project is in the Western Gulf Coastal Plains Ecoregion. Intensive farming of the land in the proposed project area has restricted the availability of natural habitat. As a result, wildlife species adapted to croplands and rural suburban areas dominate the proposed project area. The natural wildlife species remaining in the proposed project area are mainly limited to ditches and canals, which provide corridors for wildlife movement. The proposed project is in existing facilities, built-out subdivisions, and roadway rights-of way; therefore, impacts to state- or federally listed threatened or endangered species or critical habitats are not expected. Similarly, the proposed project is not expected to impact bird species. No parks, recreational areas, forests, preserves, grassland preserves, wildlife refuges, wild or scenic rivers, karst faunal regions or zones, or nature preserves are present in the proposed project area.

4.7 Cultural, Historical, and Archeological Resources

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) reviewed the proposed project (THC Tracking No. 202205198) in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and stated that no historic properties, archeological sites, or other cultural resources are present or affected by the project as proposed.

4.8 Hazardous Materials

A Phase I Environmental Site Assessment has not been conducted in the proposed project area. No superfund sites are known to be in the proposed project area or in areas associated with the proposed work. The TWDB does not fund the testing, remediation, removal, disposal, or related work for contaminated or potentially contaminated materials.

4.9 Environmental Justice (Social Implications and Environmental Justice)

The proposed project was evaluated for environmental justice (EJ) impacts using the Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool (EJSCREEN), a mapping tool designed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that allows users to create maps and generate reports on factors that may affect public and environmental health. Data include population, percentage of minority residents, per capita income, and so forth, for comparison with data for the county and state. The EJ analysis was performed in November 2021 for the proposed project area, within a 0.5-mile area around the proposed project area. The results are listed below with data from the United States Census Bureau for the state and county included for comparison.

Area	Population	Percent Minority	Percent Below Poverty Level	Per Capita Income
State	28,995,881	58.8	13.6	\$31,277
Hidalgo County	868,707	94.1	26.9	\$17,175
Project Area (0.5-mile buffer)	29,891	72.3		\$14,424

According to the EJSCREEN analysis, the percent minority in a 0.5-mile buffer around the proposed project area (72.3 percent) is similar to the percent minority in Hidalgo County (94.1 percent), but each is almost twice as much as the percent minority in the state (58.8 percent).

The percent below the poverty level in the 0.5-mile buffer around the proposed project area (26.9 percent) is almost three times greater than the percent below the poverty level in Hidalgo County (13.6 percent) and approximately five times greater than in the state (26.9 percent). The per capita income in the 0.5-mile buffer around the proposed project area (\$14,424) is similar to the per capita income in Hidalgo County (\$17,175), but each is approximately half of the per capita income in the state (\$31,277).

The proposed WWTP expansion project is on land that is owned by the NAWSC and is already used as a WWTP. The proposed first-time sewer service project is mainly within roadway rights-of-way. The NAWSC will need to secure easements from private and owners, but land acquisition is not required for the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project will not require the use of eminent domain, and neither people nor businesses will be relocated because of the proposed project. The NAWSC is conducting a rate study and anticipates a monthly rate increase for residential sewer service. Currently, the average monthly sewer bill is

§23. An anticipated monthly increase of \$7 may be required, depending on the outcome of the rate study, and the increase is expected to be for all wastewater customers; an increase in taxes is not required to finance the debt.

The proposed project will not disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations in a negative way. The entire population of the proposed project will be the recipients of the benefits derived from centralized sanitary sewer collection.

5.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation is required to inform the public of potential social, economic or environmental impacts of the proposed project. The applicant must notify the public of the meeting by advertisement in a newspaper of general circulation within the project area at least thirty (30) days prior to the date of the meeting. The 30-day period may count either the day of the advertisement or the day of the meeting, but not both.

Public participation conducted during facilities planning included a public meeting held on February 16, 2022, which was advertised in The Monitor, a newspaper of general circulation in the service area. The notice was published on January 7, 2022, and contained information regarding the availability of planning documents, including the EID, for public review at the NAWSC's main office at 420 South Doolittle Road, Edinburg, Texas during normal business hours (9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.).

The public meeting was held at 6:00 p.m. on February 16, 2022, at the Milton Kersten Training Center, 420 South Doolittle Road, Edinburg, Texas. A total of three people attended the meeting, all of whom were from the project team. No concerns or adverse comments were voiced at the public meeting or received during the 30-day public review period.

During the process of conducting the environmental review and preparing this EA for the project, coordination has been conducted with all required resource protection agencies and offices to solicit and incorporate their initial review and comments. Copies of this EA will be provided to those agencies and offices for their final review and comments. Other interested parties may request a copy of the EA and/or EID by contacting Tanisha Hinton via telephone at (214) 665-6466 or electronically at hinton.tanisha@epa.gov.

6.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

An environmental review of the proposed project consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has been completed following the guidelines provided in 31 TAC § 375.64. Mitigation measures were defined through the agency coordination process and public participation and are listed below as applicable environmental conditions. These conditions will pertain to the project throughout construction and beyond as warranted. Based on information provided by the NAWSC, the proposed Regional WWTP Phase 2 Project is considered environmentally sound with the following environmental conditions:

- As per an agreement with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Project No. 47785, to ensure compliance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Code, Chapter 64, vegetation clearing must be excluded during the general bird nesting season, March 15 through September 15; or if clearing at these times is unavoidable, the area proposed for disturbance should be surveyed, during the nesting period, to identify occupied nests. If occupied nests are found, the 150-foot buffer area around each nest should remain undisturbed until the eggs have hatched, and the young have fledged. State and federal regulations as currently interpreted do not permit incidental take.
- As per an agreement with the TPWD Project No. 47785, to ensure compliance with Texas Parks and Wildlife Code, Chapters 67 and 68 pertaining to state-listed endangered or threatened animals, the NAWSC will implement measures to protect state-listed species in the project area:
 - Sediment control fencing will be used to exclude wildlife from the construction areas.
 - Trenches for pipe installation will not be left open overnight. If trenches cannot be covered overnight, escape ramps fashioned from soil or boards should be installed in excavated areas at an angle of less than 45 degrees (1:1) that will allow trapped wildlife to climb out on their own. Prior to beginning work each day, open trenches and excavation areas will be checked to ensure no wildlife species have been trapped.
 - If state-listed species are encountered, the animals must be allowed to leave the area safely. State-listed species may be handled only by persons with authorization obtained through the TPWD.
 - Disturbed areas will be reseeded with native grasses by hydro mulching, hydroseeding, or seed broadcasting techniques. If erosion control blankets or mats are used, the NAWSC will avoid the use of plastic mesh matting or netting, which poses an entanglement threat to wildlife.
 - Best management practices to protect water quality and aquatic species, such as erosion control and placing staging areas away from aquatic resources, will be used.

7.0 RECOMMENDATION

Based upon completion of this Environmental Assessment, and a detailed review of the EID for the project, it has been determined that construction activities are considered to be environmentally sound. Therefore, it is recommended a Finding of No Significant Impact be issued.

8.0 LIST OF AGENCIES CONTACTED

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture (NRCS)
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Texas State Historic Preservation Office
Texas parks and Wildlife