
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The Phase 2 study included preliminary identification of all project alternatives that provided 100-year flood protection, and the selection of the most feasible alternatives for more detailed study. Of the sixty separate project packages that were developed, nine were identified as most feasible based on specific elimination criteria. The preferred packages selected by the interagency Staff Working Group included:

- Corps Alternative 3 (65-yr) Project and New Small San Benito Dam
- Corps Alternative 3 (65-yr) Project and Open Earthen Bypass Channel
- Corps Alternative 1 (30-yr) Project and New San Benito Dam
- Corps Alternative 1 (30-yr) Project, New San Benito Dam, and New Pacheco Dam.

Since the Soap Lake Floodplain Preservation project was necessary to maintain the 100-year flow design value, this project was included with each of the packages.

Based on additional flow monitoring during record floods in 1998, the Corps is considering the reduction of the 100-year peak flow rates at Chittenden from 44,400 cfs to 40,100 cfs. This peak flow reduction will allow the Corps Alternative 3 to provide downstream flood protection in a 100-year flood event. This project would cost less than the four favored alternative packages, since it would not require implementation of Phase 2 alternative projects. However, the Corps has not changed the peak flow rate at Chittenden, or made a final selection of the project and level of flood protection. If the Corps selects a project that does not protect the surrounding communities and land from flooding in the 100-year event, the packages developed in Phase 2 of the Pajaro River Watershed Study, or some variation of them, would be able to provide that protection. If the Corps Lower Pajaro River project with 100-year flood protection is selected, the increase in project cost with the addition of Phase 2 alternatives could be considered with any multiple use benefits. A decision tree based upon Corps of Engineers actions and decisions is presented on Figure 5-1.

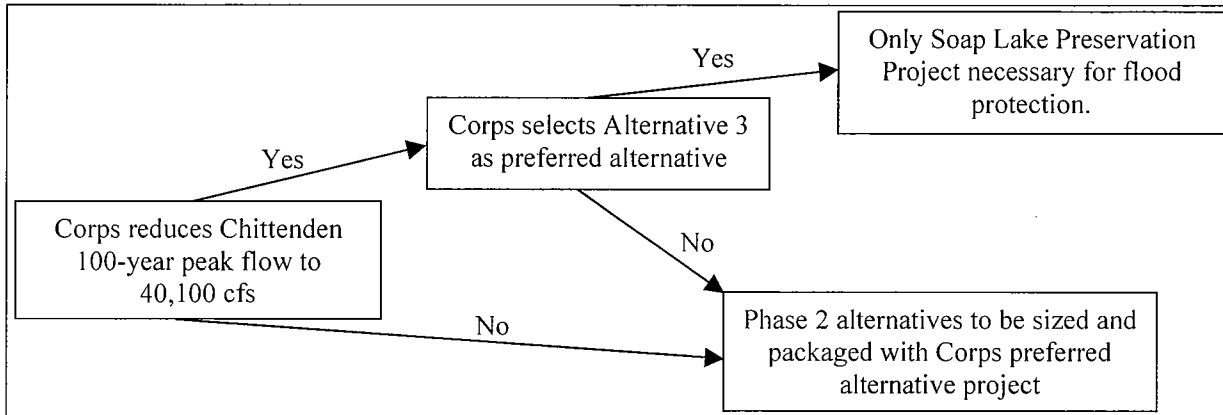


Figure 5-1: Decision Tree for Phase 3 Actions

Phase 3 will include Soap Lake Preservation Plan alternative to verify peak flow reduction characteristics. In development of flood protection alternatives, the Soap Lake Preservation Project was identified as a necessary component of the Corps project with 100-year event flood protection. This project will verify the floodplain attenuation characteristics of the Soap Lake area and identify preservation plans necessary to maintain the existing flood attenuation properties. The project will not be affected by the Corps actions regarding the adjustment of flows, or with their decision regarding the preferred Lower Pajaro River project, therefore it is recommended to be included in Phase 3. Phase 3 of the Pajaro River Watershed Study will focus on understanding the functionality of Soap Lake and the flood peak attenuation benefits it provides locally and downstream of Chittenden Pass.

Certain issues and items of concern need to be resolved or addressed in Phase 3 of the study. These include stakeholder consensus, coordination with other studies, and environmental matters. At this point in the study, a strong foundation has been laid for most of these matters. For the others, being aware of the concerns and complying with any laws or regulations is the best preparation. Below is a brief description of some of these issues, why they are important, and any work that should be done in the next phase of the study to resolve or address the issues.

Stakeholder Consensus

One of the keystones of a successful program is being sure that people agree on its value and believe that the best possible projects have been developed. Consensus within two groups is important for this study. One is consensus within the Authority and the second is consensus within the public.

Agency representatives meet at least once a month to discuss progress on the study and answer any questions that arise. With all eight agencies discussing issues of concern and working together, it is possible to arrive at a solution that is both technically feasible and politically friendly. The representatives of the eight agencies have all agreed with the recommendations of the Phase 2 study.

The other aspect of consensus is the public opinion. Through outreach efforts, it is possible to both educate the public and obtain their input for the study. It is important to learn what matters to the stakeholders since they are the ones who will be directly impacted by any projects or conclusions that come out of the study. During Phase 2, the opportunities to inform and educate the public on the progress of the study were through presentations at the Authority Board meetings and the progress reports at the Lower Pajaro River stakeholder meetings. In Phase 3 of the study, public outreach efforts will be increased to ensure stakeholder issues are identified and addressed in the Soap Lake Preservation Project.

Coordination With Other Studies

Coordination with past, current, and future projects affecting the Pajaro River watershed is crucial to the success of the study. Past projects have identified areas of concern for the local residents and collected a great deal of data for the watershed. Future studies should be able to dovetail with ongoing efforts for this study. Current relevant projects and studies include:

- Corps Lower Pajaro River Flood Protection Project
- San Luis Reservoir Low Point Improvement Project
- Various Sediment Projects with the Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency Water Supply Project
- Llagas Creek Flood Protection Project

It is critical that Phase 3 efforts are closely coordinated with the Lower Pajaro River Project and that progress on both projects is communicated in a unified, consistent message.

Environmental Issues

Impacts to the environment are very important considerations when planning any project or developing an area. Threatened and endangered species such as the steelhead trout, the California red-legged frog, the tidewater goby, and the western pond turtle must be protected and their habitats preserved. The Pajaro River Watershed Study will, at a minimum, be in compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). However, a project like the Soap Lake Preservation Project could go beyond simply complying by providing environmental enhancement opportunities, which would then maximize funding opportunities.

In addition to the ESA and biological environmental impacts, the Clean Water Act must be adhered to as well. For example, the Pajaro River was listed on the 303(d) list as a high priority site for nutrients and Llagas Creek is listed for both nutrients at a high priority and sedimentation at a medium priority. San Benito River was listed on the 1998 list as a medium priority for sedimentation and Hernandez Reservoir was a medium priority for mercury. Again, the Soap Lake Preservation Project, with careful planning and consideration, could provide the necessary flood protection benefits as well as the needed water quality improvements.

The scope for Phase 3 of the study has been developed to ensure the Soap Lake Preservation Project is developed in a manner that maintains the flood attenuation benefits, protects and enhances the environment, and maximizes funding opportunities.