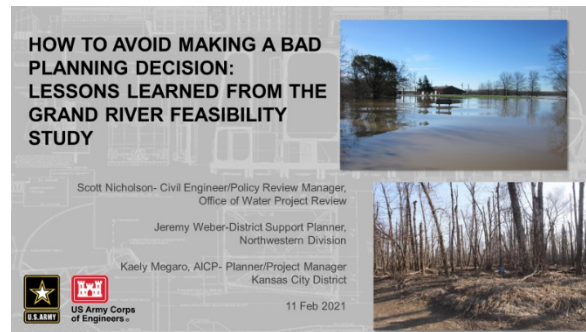


Lessons Learned from the NWK Grand River Feasibility Study

February 11, 2021

Q&A Session

This webinar provided an overview of how a justified need for additional time and study cost to inform more complete and defensible planning decisions informs the 3x3 policy exemption process. Presented by Kaely Megaro (Kansas City District), Scott Nicholson (Office of Water Project Review), and Jeremy Weber (Northwestern Division), the presentation highlighted lessons learned from the Grand River Ecosystem Restoration Study, with an emphasis on the value of scoping and reaching vertical team alignment on an exemption early in the study process.



This summary of the Question / Answer session of the webinar is not a transcription; questions and responses have been edited and reordered for clarity.

If there is significant uncertainty in the TSP and a reasonable expectation it may change, should study teams instead wait on releasing a draft report?

There is frequently some tension and uncertainty in the decision to release a draft report – between determining that the TSP is not substantially “cooked” and delaying the draft report and exemption request, or that there is enough certainty in the TSP at the time it is selected to inform the public, stakeholders, and resource agencies by releasing the draft report. Generally speaking, the vertical team may align on delaying the release of the draft report if doing so won’t delay the Chief’s Report. For example, if the technical work done to develop a defensible TSP will allow study teams to accelerate their progress towards the end of the study process, the risk of delaying the draft report release is low. Study teams should hold frequent discussions with their vertical teams (i.e., during in-progress reviews between milestone meetings) to determine when delaying to allow for additional information gathering will lead to a more sound decision, and when delaying will not add any value.

Should study teams only consider the risks relevant to the feasibility phase, or should they address risks throughout the entire project life cycle? How did the team weigh risk impacts across project phases to make the determination to pursue a 3x3x3 exemption?

There are two parts to this question that are independent. One is managing the risks of developing and completing the investigation phase of project development. During this phase, the team is managing the risks to completing the feasibility study including cost, schedule, and quality. Second, in the final phase of the feasibility investigation, the policy requires a description of the risks and uncertainty in subsequent phases of project development that includes the management of risks during preconstruction engineering and design (PED), Construction, and Operations. For example, you would consider risks to project implementation including what will drive implementation costs and schedule during PED. After the risks of subsequent phases of project development have been considered and documented, study teams should, in coordination with their vertical team, focus their efforts on reducing as much uncertainty as possible related to those implementation risks during the feasibility phase to assure project performance and benefits, as well as identify the risks that will be carried forward. An exemption request should fully identify how those risks would be mitigated (or uncertainty reduced) or how they would be transferred to the next phase of project development.

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Study teams should note that senior leadership, including the DCG-CEO, are particularly interested in this lifecycle approach to ensuring implementation risks are identified during feasibility – with an emphasis on preventing the realization of risks in the PED or construction phases that could have been prevented with additional engineering or environmental analysis during feasibility.

Has there been an increase in schedule and/or cost exemption requests due to COVID-19 and impacts to partners or USACE staff (e.g., max telework)?

NWD is not generally seeing an increase in exemption requests due to the public health emergency, apart from some Tribal Partnership Program (TPP) studies and other activities with Tribal sponsors. Some study schedules have been significantly impacted due to the long-term closure of Tribal Nation partner technical offices and Tribal council meeting cancellations over the past year. NWD is also seeing an increase in planting plan costs for a Port-sponsored Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) Section 1135 project resulting from local nurseries not having stock because they anticipated the pandemic decreasing demand, and subsequently found that the opposite was true.