

December 2024



## **Geological Field Work Continues to Provide Valuable Information**

Geotechnical work continued this year at the proposed Wild Horse Reservoir site to help the project team better understand the site's geology and guide design efforts. TetraTech, Aurora Water's geotechnical engineering firm, spent 13 weeks completing 33 boreholes and approximately 2,500 feet of drilling. Rock and soil samples were collected from the boreholes and analyzed at a laboratory.

The geotechnical work also included gathering approximately 4,000 feet of additional seismic tomography and survey data to create 3D images of the Earth's subsurface needed to support engineering designs. The information will be used to advance the project to the 60% design stage. Winter weather has paused the fieldwork for this season, with additional investigations planned for next spring/summer.



## Permitting Update: What is NEPA and its Role in the Proposed Wild Horse Reservoir?

Aurora Water has been planning for the proposed Wild Horse Reservoir for over a decade. Understandably, one of the most frequent questions we get is when we will start construction. This is a challenging question to respond to. Large projects like this require federal, state, and local permits. Identifying the permit needs, and what studies and reports will help support the process starts with a large federal effort called the NEPA process.

The **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)** is a foundational U.S. environmental law that started in 1970 and requires federal agencies to assess the environmental impacts of proposed projects before making decisions. NEPA applies to a broad spectrum of projects involving water infrastructure that require federal permits or oversight. The law ensures that the proposed action's environmental,

social, and economic effects are considered in project planning and decision-making, thus protecting ecosystems, water quality, wildlife, historical sites, and public health.

For the proposed Wild Horse Reservoir project, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the lead federal agency for the NEPA study. BLM will lead the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that evaluates several factors, including potential impacts to the environmental, cultural and historic resources, land use and socioeconomics, wildlife, and public health. Additionally, alternatives that may meet a project's purpose and need are examined.

Prior to 2020, it could take years from the time the NEPA process formally began, which is known as the Notice of Intent (NOI), until a formal decision was made on how to proceed with a project, which is known as the Record of Decision (ROD). This lengthy process was primarily due to the extensive efforts required in developing the EIS. This includes gathering information about the baseline conditions of the proposed project site and alternate sites. Efforts include scoping and preliminary environmental assessments, data collection, and baseline studies on ecology, hydrology, and cultural resources to establish existing conditions. This information, along with further analysis, is then used to assess potential project impacts.

The NEPA process also includes opportunities for public involvement, known as public scoping, which requires planning and coordination to ensure that stakeholders have an adequate opportunity to understand and weigh in on the impacts of a proposed project and project alternatives. Public involvement takes shape in the form of notices, opportunities for comment, and public hearings.

In 2020, NEPA regulations changed to streamline the agency review process and reduce project timelines. Among other changes, agencies were directed to complete an EIS within two years of the NOI. This shortened timeline means that all the information needed to inform the EIS must now be gathered before the formal study

starts. Early consultations with key stakeholders and cooperating agencies may take place ahead of the NOI. However, all public involvement required for public scoping must also occur within the two-year timeframe.

Currently, activities for the Wild Horse Reservoir are in this pre-permitting stage. BLM will not announce the NOI and public scoping until all preliminary information needed to inform the EIS is prepared. These preparatory steps ensure that the NEPA study is comprehensive, allowing for a more efficient and effective assessment once it officially begins.

Hopefully, this helps you understand what is still ahead before Aurora can start construction. We will continue to keep everyone up to date as we navigate the permitting process.

### **For More Information:**

**Updates:** [WildHorseReservoir.org](https://www.wildhorsereservoir.org)

**Questions:** [WildHorseReservoir@AuroraGov.org](mailto:WildHorseReservoir@AuroraGov.org)

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