



EPA issues permit for Taos wastewater plant

By Matthew van Buren

The Taos News, 8/2/2012

Representatives from Amigos Bravos said they are satisfied with a newly issued discharge permit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the Taos Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Taos nonprofit Amigos Bravos, which aims to improve water quality throughout the state, solicited comments from its supporters and submitted comments of its own, as well as requesting an extension of the comment period.

Amigos Bravos was in favor of more frequent monitoring for E. coli and ammonia. The group also called for Taos Pueblo water standards to be taken into account, and for requirements to fall in line with the more-stringent standards, whether they come from the Pueblo or the state.

Though the final permit does not call for more frequent monitoring, Conn wrote, "Overall this is a much stronger, more protective permit than the draft that was issued last year."

"The permit incorporates federal, state and Taos Pueblo water quality standards to protect water quality in the Rio Pueblo de Taos watershed, which is an essential source of water for recreation, irrigation and wildlife," EPA spokesman Dave Bary wrote in an email to

Amigos Bravos Projects Director Rachel Conn said the EPA responded to the several dozen comments with changes in the final permit. "I commend the Taos community for following this issue, for commenting on this issue and holding our regulators accountable," she said.

The final permit lists several "substantial changes" from the draft, including establishing effluent monitoring, limitations and compliance schedules for total mercury and ammonia and establishing monitoring requirements for potential contaminants including uranium, total nitrogen and phosphorus.

EPA environmental scientist Scott Stine, who was involved in writing the permit, said the EPA received more comments than is typical for a facility the size of Taos'.

"There were some comments that led to changes to the permit," he said. "It led to the inclusion of additional permit limits." Conn said Amigos Bravos is also pleased that the final permit recognizes an unnamed arroyo that runs from the plant to the Rio Pueblo. Conn said Amigos Bravos continues to be concerned about algae levels in the arroyo and Rio Pueblo, as they could lead to "serious dissolved oxygen issues." She said algae can cause dips in oxygen levels at night that harm fish and other aquatic life.

Conn and Amigos Bravos Executive Director Brian Shields said Amigos Bravos and others will continue to conduct monitoring activities in the Rio Pueblo de Taos and elsewhere in an effort to pinpoint problems. The group also intends to work with the town of Taos to improve hydrologic conditions in the arroyo below the plant.

Conn said she has toured the newly completed facility and was impressed; she said Amigos Bravos has been “very encouraged by the town’s response” to community concerns, as well. Taos Public Utilities Director Amos Torres said the final discharge permit did not hold many surprises. “It’s pretty much what we expected,” he said. “I don’t really see any concerns.”

Torres said the town is glad to have the permit in hand and shares Amigos Bravos’ goal of protecting the watershed.

Amigos Bravos is planning a tour of the wastewater treatment plant Aug. 15. Though space is limited, Conn suggested those interested in touring the plant contact her by email at rconn@amigosbravos.org.