Grand Valley Salinity Studies Stepped Up

Advance planning for Stage Two of the Grand Valley Unit of the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Project is commencing as Stage One is nearing completion, according to Clifford I. Barrett, director of the Bureau of Reclamation's Upper Colorado Region.

The Grand Valley Unit is one of four units authorized for construction by the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act of June 27, 1974. That act provides for a basinwide program to enhance and protect the quality of water available in the Colorado River for use in the United States and the Republic of Mexico. The purpose of the Grand Valley Unit is to substantially reduce the estimated 780,000 tons of salts that enter the river each year as it flows through the valley. The salt from the valley is believed to result from percolating irrigation waters and canal seepage flowing over the saline Mancos shale that underlies the valley.

The salt reduction is to be accomplished in two separate but coordinated programs. The Bureau of Reclamation of the Department of the Interior is conducting a water systems improvement program to reduce canal and lateral seepage. The Soil Conservation Service of the Department of Agriculture is conducting a program designed to reduce deep percolation by upgrading on-farm irrigation systems and irrigation management techniques.

Soon after the unit planning began it was determined that the water systems improvement program should be accomplished in two stages. This would allow
Reclamation to begin construction in an area where the impacts and results could be assessed while investigations and planning continued on the rest of the unit. It would also provide an opportunity to evaluate the plans and procedures before continuing further.

Stage One, involving canal lining and lateral piping on approximately 10 percent of the Grand Valley irrigated area is now nearing completion. About 6.8 miles of the Government Highline Canal has been lined and construction of associated cross-drainage structures is complete. A contract has been awarded to place all of the laterals from the lined canal section in pipe. This construction is being administered by Reclamation's Montrose Projects Office.

A monitoring program is underway to determine the effectiveness of the Stage One measures. The data obtained from this monitoring will be used in developing plans for Stage Two.

Planning for Stage Two will be accomplished by the Grand Junction Projects Office. The Grand Valley Salinity Coordinating Committee, organized in 1972 to correlate and advise the agencies involved in salinity studies and composed of representatives of several interested Federal, State, and local agencies and water user organizations will assist Reclamation in the studies. The committee will obtain public input for the studies.

A public meeting will be held late in 1982 to provide interested parties an opportunity to evaluate alternatives and scope environmental issues.

Stage Two studies will re-evaluate various alternatives, including measures other than canal lining. The schedule calls for the selection of a recommended plan early in 1983. Preparation of designs and estimates will follow, and the final definite plan report is to be completed in mid-1985.

J. F. Rinckel, Projects Manager of the Grand Junction Projects Office, pointed out that the Grand Valley Unit should not be confused with the Grand Valley Project.
The Grand Valley Unit involves the entire irrigated area in the valley, under both Federal and private systems. The Grand Valley Project on the other hand is the Federal Reclamation project constructed in the early part of this century and only involves the lands under the Government Highline and Orchard Mesa Canals.