

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Nine Year Annual Transfer of Settlement Contract Water to Vista Verde-Owned Lands within Westlands Water District

Draft FONSI-12-038

Recommended by:

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Introduction

Background

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the approval of a nine-year (2012 to 2021) annual transfer of settlement contract water within Westlands Water District (WWD). This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Final Environmental Assessment (EA) number EA-12-038, *Vista Verde Nine Year Annual Transfer of Settlement Contract Water to Vista Verde-Owned Lands within Westlands Water District*, which is hereby incorporated by reference. The transfer covered by this action is a continuation of an existing arrangement.

When the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) initiated construction of the Central Valley Project (CVP) to manage and control water through the central portion of California, certain San Joaquin River water rights holders were offered "Settlement Contracts". These contracts supplied water from CVP facilities to replace water lost from other sources as a result of development of the CVP. Through these Settlement Contracts, the San Joaquin River water was exchanged for water that can be pumped from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and delivered through CVP facilities.

Dudley & Indart is a settlement contractor and entitled to water rights water under Contract No. 14-06-200-4448A. The Vista Verde Farms (Vista Verde) lands are designated by the Dudley Indart parties to receive a portion of the Settlement contract water supply (Contract water) for lands which are adjacent to the Westlands Water District (WWD) northeastern boundary and south of the city of Mendota (See Figure 1-1) and the Dudley & Indart service area. Vista Verde also owns land located entirely within WWD which is more productive and is suitable for cultivation of higher-value crops. Since 2001 they have operated under agreements to transfer their Contract water from the lower-productivity land in the north to their higher-productivity property to the south.

These transfers were authorized under a series of environmental documents issued by Reclamation. The first of these was an Environmental Assessment/FONSI, issued in 2000 (FONSI #00-58) for annual transfers between 2000 and 2004. In 2005, Reclamation approved FONSI #05-36 for the annual transfer of Contract water owned by Vista Verde for the 2005 year only. In 2007, Reclamation approved FONSI #07-73 for temporary annual transfers between 2007 and 2011. Vista Verde did not transfer water under this program in 2000 or 2006.

Proposed Action

Reclamation proposes to approve a series of annual water transfers during each of the next nine years (2012 – 2020) for an annual volume up to 1,140 AF of Contract water from the Dudley & Indart Settlement Contract (Contract), under Contract Number 14-06-200-4448A to lands owned

by Vista Verde within WWD. No new infrastructure, modifications of facilities, or ground disturbing activities will be needed for movement of this water. No native or untilled land will be cultivated with water involved with these actions.

Reclamation intends to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the Draft FONSI and Draft EA between June 26, 2012 and July 11, 2012.

Findings

Reclamation's finding that implementation of the Proposed Action will result in no significant impact to the quality of the human environment is supported by the following findings:

Cultural Resources

The transfer will facilitate the flow of water through existing facilities to existing users. No new construction or ground disturbing activities will occur. The pumping, conveyance, and storage of water will be confined to existing wells, pumps, and CVP facilities. These activities have no potential to cause effects to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.3(a)(1).

Indian Sacred Sites

The Action is not of a type with the potential to affect Indian Sacred Sites. The conveyance of water through existing facilities to existing farming operations will not restrict or impair use of such Sites.

Indian Trust Assets

The Action is not of a type with the potential to affect Indian Trust Assets. There will be no new construction or ground disturbing activity, and all areas affected by the action are already developed for agriculture.

Environmental Justice

Conditions for minority and low-income residents of the area will continue as they currently exist. Areas in agricultural use will continue to be farmed, and the same economic and employment opportunities will be available. The action will not result in disproportionate adverse effects to protected communities.

Land Use

Existing land use patterns will not be affected. The properties covered by this action are in agricultural use, and will continue to be used for agriculture.

Traffic

The Action involves only a transfer of water. No alterations to regional vehicular traffic patterns are proposed or expected. Since no construction is planned, there will be no detours or traffic restrictions.

Socioeconomic Resources

The properties covered by the Action will continue to be used for agriculture. Socioeconomic conditions such as type and rate of employment in the area will continue according to existing

trends. Cost and availability of irrigation water will vary over time depending on outside influences beyond the scope of this action, such as market forces and weather trends.

Water Resources

The Action will not affect CVP operations or change existing diversion points. Up to 1,140 AF/y of the transferred water will simply be conveyed via the San Luis Canal rather than the Delta Mendota Canal. CVP obligations to deliver water to other contractors or fish and wildlife areas will be unaffected.

Biological Resources

Under the Proposed Action, no negative impacts to plants or wildlife are anticipated as no native, untilled lands will be irrigated or receive the transferred water. The water will be delivered to established croplands through existing canals. No species listed or proposed to be listed as endangered or threatened will be affected. No critical habitat for any listed species is located within the proposed action area and therefore no critical habitat will be affected.

Air Quality

Air emissions will continue according to current trends. Agricultural operations on the covered properties are expected to use approximately the same number and type of machinery as has been used in recent years, and emissions will be comparable.

Global Climate

The area covered by the Action will continue to be farmed as it has in the recent past, with similar operation of farm machinery, valves and pumps. Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions will continue according to current trends.

Cumulative Impacts

Each year, weather patterns and hydrological conditions create variations in the water supply for the region. As more or less water is available for use, transfers occur between different operators or areas to balance supply and demand. This results in a number of water service actions and approvals by Reclamation each year. This trend has been established over many years and is expected to continue into the foreseeable future. Each water service action involving Reclamation undergoes environmental review prior to approval.

The transfer of water between the two properties owned by Vista Verde would be the same as the baseline condition, as this would preserve an existing arrangement and allow current practices to continue. As there would be no impact to water diverted from the Delta, points of diversions, or CVP operations and this water would continue to be conveyed as it has been previously under the annual transfers, there would be no cumulative impacts as a result of the Proposed Action.