

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

Five-Year Warren Act Contracts for Conveyance of Groundwater in the Tehama-Colusa and Corning Canals – Contract Years 2013 through 2017 (March 1, 2013, through February 28, 2018)

FONSI 13-03-NCAO

Recommended by:

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Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the Northern California Area Office (NCAO) of the Bureau of Reclamation has determined that an environmental impact statement is not required to implement five-year Warren Act Contracts for conveyance of groundwater in the Tehama-Colusa and Corning Canals – Contract Years 2013 through 2017 (March 1, 2013 – February 28, 2018). This FONSI is supported by Reclamation’s Environmental Assessment (EA) Number EA-13-03-NCAO, Five-Year Warren Act Contracts for Conveyance of Groundwater in the Tehama-Colusa and Corning Canals – Contract Years 2013 through 2017 (March 1, 2013, though February 28, 2018), which is hereby incorporated by reference.

Background

Seven water districts (WDs) within the Sacramento Canals Unit (SCU) of the Central Valley Project (CVP) have requested five-year Warren Act Contracts (WACs) to pump groundwater into the Tehama-Colusa and Corning Canals (Canals) to supplement their supply to avoid shortages and potential loss of permanent crops. In addition, other WDs served by the Canals could request WACs if drought-like conditions occur.

The Warren Act (Act of February 21, 1911, CH. 141, (36 STAT. 925), authorizes Reclamation to negotiate agreements to store or convey Non-Project Water when excess capacity is available in federal facilities. Section 14 of the Reclamation Project Act of 1939 allows for contracts for exchange or replacement of water. Water rights Section 3408(c) of P.L. 102-575, Title 34, Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) allows for the exchange, impoundment, storage, carriage, and delivery of CVP and Non-Project Water for domestic, municipal and industrial (M&I), fish and wildlife, and any other beneficial purpose.

Proposed Action

Reclamation proposes to issue WACs to 7 or more of the 17 CVP water service contractors (WDs) served by the SCU for up to a five-year period beginning with water contract year 2013. WD-specific quantities of groundwater that would be authorized to be conveyed in Reclamation facilities have been identified for CCWD, Corning WD, Cortina WD, Davis WD, Glenn Valley WD, Orland-Artois WD, and Westside WD (Table 2-1). Additionally, one or more of the remaining WDs served by the Canals could request WACs for use of the Canals; these WDs would be limited to a combined total of not more than 900 acre-feet (af). Combined, the quantity of groundwater that could be pumped in any one year could be up to 44,000 af (Table 2-1). Water considered for transport in Federal facilities, would be limited to groundwater pumped from existing wells and discharged to and removed from the Canals through existing facilities or through facilities reviewed and permitted on an individual basis. In addition, conveyance of groundwater in CVP facilities would be subject to available capacity and suitable quality and the environmental commitments identified below.

Table 0-1 WDs that could potentially request WACs for conveyance of groundwater in the Canals

WD	Service Canal	Water Quantity (AF)
Colusa County WD ^a	TCC	22,000
Corning WD	CC	500
Cortina WD	TCC	1,000
Davis WD	TCC	3,500
Glenn Valley WD	TCC	300
Orland-Artois WD	TCC	10,800
Westside WD	TCC	5,000
All other WDs combined	TCC/CC	900
Total	--	44,000

a - A WAC for conveying up to 4,500 af of Non-Project groundwater in the TCC in support of the CCWD remains valid through contract water year 2014 (Reclamation 2005). The volume identified here does not include the existing WAC amount.

Environmental Commitments

Participating WDs shall also implement the following environmental commitments to reduce environmental consequences:

- Each participating WD would be required to confirm that the proposed pumping of groundwater would be compatible with local groundwater management plans. Each WD would be limited to pumping a quantity below the “safe yield” as established in their groundwater management plan or county-specific requirements, as applicable, in order to prevent groundwater overdraft and avoid adverse impacts.
- Water quality and monitoring requirements are established by Reclamation. Each contracted WD would be responsible for accurate water measurement and associated costs as well as assuring the Non-Project groundwater meets all Federal and California water quality standards and the Reclamation standards for acceptance of Non-Project groundwater prior to entering the Canals (See Appendix A). These standards ensure that water imported into the Canals does not impair existing uses, including downstream users, or negatively impact existing water quality conditions.
- The water would be used for irrigation and/or M&I purposes on established lands. There would be no new construction or excavation occurring as part of the Proposed Action. Pumping and conveyance would occur within existing wells, meters, pipes, water diversion, and field delivery facilities. No native or untilled land (fallow for 3 years or more) may be cultivated with the water involved with these actions.
- Each participating WD would comply with applicable Federal, state, or local air pollution laws and regulations.

Findings

The attached Environmental Assessment (EA) describes the existing environmental resources in the Proposed Action area and evaluates the effects of the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives on the resources. Effects on several environmental resources were examined and found to be absent or minor. This analysis is provided in the attached EA, and the analysis in the EA is hereby incorporated by reference.

This FONSI is based on the following:

Water Resources

The Proposed Action would allow groundwater to be conveyed in CVP facilities when excess capacity is available. During years of reduced-CVP supply, this excess capacity would afford opportunities to meet agricultural demand in areas of WDs that may otherwise not have available water to support their crops. The water would be used for irrigation and/or M&I purposes on established lands. Pumping and conveyance would be limited to use of existing wells, meters, pipes, water diversion, and field delivery facilities and no new construction or excavation would occur. Additionally, no native or untilled land (fallow for 3 years or more) may be cultivated with the water involved with these actions. In doing so, implementing the Proposed Action avoids any adverse effects on unique geological features such as wetlands, wild or scenic rivers, refuges, floodplains, rivers placed on the Nationwide River Inventory, or prime or unique farmlands.

Additionally, several other environmental commitments associated with the Proposed Action alleviate other potential environmental concerns. These include the provision that water in each well must meet water quality standards prior to approval for conveyance (See Appendix A of the EA for greater detail). This provision ensures that water imported into the Canals does not impair existing uses, including downstream users, or negatively impact existing water quality condition. In addition, each participating WD would be limited to pumping a quantity below the “safe yield” as established in any groundwater management plan or any county-specific requirement, as applicable, in order to prevent groundwater overdraft and avoid adverse impacts.

Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action, and attendant environmental commitments, would not result in any adverse direct, indirect or cumulative impacts to the water resources within the Canals or the WDs they serve.

Biological Resources

There would be no impacts to biological resources as a result of the proposed project. The Proposed Action would not involve the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more years. There would be no change in land use patterns of cultivated or fallowed fields that do have some value to listed species or to birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Groundwater that would be moved into the Canals would use existing facilities and would be limited by its quality (as identified in Appendix A). Maintaining high-water quality as a condition of conveyance assures there would be no direct or indirect impacts to listed species or their critical habitat. Additionally, since water conveyed as part this action does not flow into any natural waterways within the range of protected fish species, there would be no potential effect to listed fish species.

There would be no significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to biological resources as a result of implementing the Proposed Action.

Socioeconomic Resources

Under the Proposed Action, participating WDs could convey Non-Project Water in CVP facilities to other portions of their district to supplement their CVP water supply. The WACs would allow the Non-Project Water of suitable water quality to be distributed to sustain permanent crops that may otherwise not receive adequate supply in the No Action Alternative. There would be no adverse cumulative impacts to socioeconomic resources. The Proposed Action would help maintain beneficial effects to the economy during the program timeframe.

Cultural Resources

There would be no impacts to cultural resources as a result of implementing the Proposed Action or No Action Alternative. The Proposed Action would facilitate the flow of groundwater through existing facilities to existing users. No new construction or ground disturbing activities would occur as part of the Proposed Action. The pumping, conveyance, and storage of water would be confined to existing wells, pumps, and CVP facilities. Reclamation has determined that these activities have no potential to cause effects to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.3(a)(1).

Indian Sacred Sites

No impact to Indian sacred sites would occur under the No Action Alternative as conditions would remain the same as existing conditions. The Proposed Action would not limit access to and ceremonial uses of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners, or adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites. There would be no impacts to Indian sacred sites as a result of the Proposed Action.

Indian Trust Assets (ITA)

No impact to ITA would occur under the No Action Alternative as conditions would remain the same as existing conditions. Reclamation determined that the Proposed Action would not impact ITA as there are none in the Proposed Action area.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action would be consistent with Department of the Interior environmental justice guidelines. Warren Act Contracts would allow the WDs to use Non-Project groundwater for irrigation that would help maintain agricultural production and farm worker employment in drier years. Therefore, implementing the Proposed Action would not cause any harm to minority or disadvantaged populations.

Air Quality

Reclamation has determined that air quality would not be significantly altered by implementing the Proposed Action. Under the Proposed Action, delivery of this water would occur in existing facilities and no new construction would be permitted. Pumps used to pump groundwater could be used in the No Action or Proposed Action Alternatives and only the place of use would potentially differ between the alternatives. Therefore, potential emissions from the Proposed

Action are not likely to be significantly different from the No Action Alternative. Furthermore, details on where, when, and how the electricity is generated and used are not known at this time.

Global Climate

Neither the Proposed Action nor the No Action alternative would involve physical changes to the environment that could impact global climate change. Generating power plants that produce electricity to operate the electric pumps, representing the only likely contributor to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, produce carbon dioxide that could potentially contribute to GHG emissions; however, the groundwater that could be pumped could be the same under either alternative and only the place of use is subject to change.