

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Finding of No Significant Impact

Arvin-Edison Water Storage District and Metropolitan Water District 10-year Water Transfer/Exchange Program

FONSI-13-026

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Date: 3-19-14

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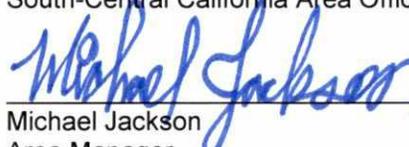
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Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) 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 Arvin-Edison Water Storage District (AEWSD) and Metropolitan Water District (MWD) 10-year Water Transfer/Exchange Program. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA)13-026, *Arvin-Edison Water Storage District and Metropolitan Water District 10-year Water Transfer/Exchange Program*, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

Reclamation provided the public with an opportunity to comment on the Draft FONSI and Draft EA between November 21, 2013 and December 21, 2013. This timeframe superseded the original 15-day comment period due to concerns expressed by some Federal contractors within the Friant Division. Comments received and responses are included in Appendix C of the EA.

Background

In December 1997, AEWSD entered into a long-term Water Management Program (Program) with MWD. Under the Program, a portion of MWD's State Water Project (SWP) supply (up to 388,889 acre-feet [AF], which equates to approximately 350,000 AF after a 10 percent loss factor is applied) could be banked within AEWSD's groundwater bank at any one time. Upon request, AEWSD would return MWD's banked SWP water. This has resulted in an effective and efficient water management program benefiting both districts.

Proposed Action

There are three components to the Proposed Action. All exchange components are dependent upon SWRCB issuance of an appropriate Change of Place of Use (CPOU).

Groundwater Banking

MWD stores a portion of its SWP supply in CVP contractor AEWSD's groundwater banking facilities, depending on annual allocations. AEWSD is then obligated to return the banked SWP water to MWD on request on a one-for-one basis. Under the Proposed Action, AEWSD would be allowed the option and flexibility to return water to MWD through an exchange of its available CVP Delta/San Luis Reservoir, or Friant surface supplies (CVP water). CVP water supplied to MWD by AEWSD in lieu of extraction to recover previously stored SWP water would result in a balanced exchange or one-for-one reduction of MWD's groundwater banking account with AEWSD.

Regulation Program

Additionally, the approval of the Proposed Action and the CPOU would allow AEWSD to deliver CVP water supplies to MWD when they are available, and then receive back SWP water supplies in exchange, at a later time. This program better facilitates the use of AEWSD CVP water supplies that have a limited opportunity for use under current CVP operations. The ability

to regulate water in this manner reduces the need to store the water by way of direct recharge and subsequent extraction. This portion of the Proposed Action would be on a one-for-one basis.

Fall/Winter Supplies Exchange

In the event that hydrologic conditions permit, and AEWSD believes that there may be limited ability to carry over CVP supplies in CVP reservoirs, AEWSD CVP water supplies would be delivered to MWD to reduce risk of spill and subsequent potential forfeiture of CVP water supplies. The CVP water would be delivered to MWD by exchange in San Luis Reservoir or directly into the California Aqueduct via the Friant Kern Canal and AEWSD facilities, including the Cross Valley Canal. MWD would later return a lesser amount (returning 2 acre-feet for every 3 acre-feet) to AEWSD. The unbalanced nature of the exchange reflects the compensation to MWD for its water management services.

The proposed exchanges under all three components would total up to 100,000 acre-feet (AF) per year of CVP water supplies. CVP Delta supplies would be provided as described above. Friant Division CVP water would be provided directly via delivery from the Friant-Kern Canal and AEWSD's distribution system, including its connections to the California Aqueduct at Milepost 227 (Reach 14C) or via its capacity in the Cross Valley Canal to the California Aqueduct at Tupman/Milepost 238 (Reach 12E).

Reclamation proposes to approve AEWSD's request to exchange/transfer a portion of its CVP water supply for MWD's SWP supply (including previously banked supplies). This could include the following CVP water types:

- Class 1 ("firm supply");
- Class 2 ("supplemental supply, nondependable");
- SJRRP Recovered Water Account Article 16(b);
- Recaptured SJRRP Interim Flows (including those supplies made available through transfers/exchanges as analyzed in the 2010, 2011 and 2012 EA for recirculation of recaptured interim flows as well as subsequent/future SJRRP environmental documentation);
- Section 215 water supplies, to the extent Section 215 water declared by Reclamation is available to AEWSD.

The Proposed Action is contingent upon approval of the CPOU by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), and would only be permitted during the timeframe for which the CPOU is in effect. As described in Section 1.3, the SWRCB has already approved a CPOU from July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014 for this Proposed Action as well as other programs.

Environmental Commitments

The Proposed Action would include the commitments outlined in Table 1:

Table 1 Environmental Commitments

Resource	Environmental Commitment
Biological Resources	The Proposed Action may not involve the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more years. The Proposed Action may not change the land use patterns of cultivated or fallowed fields that potentially have some value to listed species or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
Biological Resources	These transfers/exchanges involving CVP water cannot alter the flow regime of natural water bodies such as rivers, streams, creeks, ponds, pools, wetlands, etc., so as to not have a detrimental effect on fish or wildlife, or their habitats.
Water Resources	In continuance of commitments from the Program, existing Aqueduct Pump-in Facilitation Group guidelines would be followed by both AEWSD and Kern County Water Agency (KCWA) when introducing water into the Aqueduct to insure that water quality would not be adversely impacted.
Land Use/ Biological Resources	No new construction or modification of existing facilities would be allowed under this action.
Water Resources	Exchanges involving CVP and SWP facilities, and the Cross Valley Canal (CVC) would be required to schedule accordingly with Reclamation, Department of Water Resources (DWR) and the Kern County Water Agency (KCWA), respectively, so as not to hinder their respective obligations to deliver water to contractors, participants, wildlife refuges, and to meet regulatory requirements.
General	Comply with all environmental commitments imposed by existing environmental documents, including applicable Biological Opinions.

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:

Water Resources

The banking exchange and water regulation portions of the Proposed Action would allow AEWSD to deliver their CVP supplies to MWD in exchange for MWD’s SWP water (including previously banked SWP). Allowing AEWSD to temporarily send CVP water to MWD for later return would allow AEWSD to better manage supply that is already available to AEWSD but for which there isn’t any instantaneous grower demands and/or available recharge/storage capacity within the District. This allows AEWSD to better regulate the supply to reduce or eliminate groundwater extractions to meet intermittent deficiencies in supply.

Under the third portion of the Proposed Action, AEWSD would make available water to MWD that is temporarily surplus to AEWSD’s current operational needs and is at risk of spill. AEWSD would benefit by sending this water to MWD which would be returned for AEWSD’s in-district use in the same or a following contract year. Although MWD would receive a net increase on the total amount of AEWSD CVP water delivered to them under this component of the Proposed Action, this would only occur because this water is surplus to AEWSD’s current operational needs and is at risk of spill due to insufficient CVP storage.

The Proposed Action would not increase groundwater pumping from what has historically occurred within the Kern County Sub-basin by AEWSD. Rather the Proposed Action has the potential to reduce groundwater pumping by providing additional options for balancing surface supplies with needs.

AEWSD's benefit would be a reduced risk of forfeiting their CVP water supplies by making use of MWD's demands and storage system for otherwise uncontrollable flows. MWD would benefit by receiving higher-quality CVP water, and could also obtain additional water supplies by virtue of the imbalanced exchange component (3 for 2) of the Program. The supplemental water would be used to satisfy current customers' needs.

Everyday operations of the CVC, CVP and SWP facilities would not be impacted, as water movement considered under the Proposed Action must be scheduled and approved by KCWA, Reclamation and DWR, respectively. In continuance of commitments from the Program, existing Aqueduct Pump-in Facilitation Group guidelines would be followed by both AEWSD and KCWA when introducing water into the Aqueduct to insure that water quality would not be adversely impacted.

The Proposed Action would, among other things, serve to offset the impacts to AEWSD of the San Joaquin River Restoration Program, by increasing AEWSD's ability to more effectively regulate its remaining water supplies.

Cumulative Impacts

No adverse cumulative impacts to water resources are expected, as the water to be exchanged to MWD would only be water which AEWSD is unable to otherwise use or store. The water exchanged to MWD would likely be returned to AEWSD as part of the Fall/Winter Supplies Exchange component of the Proposed Action. Water exchanges would be scheduled to ensure that there are no capacity conflicts in the affected conveyance facilities.

Land Use

The Proposed Action would utilize existing facilities to convey waters involved and would not require the need to construct new facilities or modifications to existing facilities that would result in ground disturbance.

The proposed water exchanges would not be used to support changes in land use, either by encouraging new development or allowing cultivation of native or fallowed land (left untilled/fallowed for three or more years). MWD intends to use the exchanged CVP water to supplement its water supplies for existing municipal and industrial purposes within its service area, replenish reserves, and would not contribute to any potential expansion within the area. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not have any impacts on existing land use.

Biological Resources

The effects of the Proposed Action are similar to the No Action alternative. A large portion of the Action Area in AEWSD consists of active farmland that no longer provides suitable habitat for federally protected species. Approximately 10% of MWD is urbanized, and the remainder of the district consists of undeveloped desert and mountain areas that are rich in natural resources. Fallowed lands that have been untilled for three or more consecutive years would not be converted as a result of the Proposed Action. The land use patterns of cultivated and fallowed fields that might provide suitable habitat for listed species or birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act would not be changed as a result of the Proposed Action. No natural stream courses would be altered and no additional pumping would be conducted to carry out the Proposed Action, so there would be no effects to federally protected fish species. These transfers/exchanges would only occur in wet years when there is already sufficient water in the

San Joaquin River to meet existing commitments. These transfers/exchanges would neither increase nor decrease the amount of water flowing into the Kern River. No critical habitat occurs within the AEWSD, so none would be affected by the proposed action. Although designated critical habitat for multiple federally listed species occurs within MWD, the proposed action would not cause alteration of natural stream courses, or construction activities, therefore no critical habitat would be affected. With the implementation of the provided avoidance measures, Reclamation has determined that there would be *No Effect* to listed species or designated critical habitat under the ESA (16 U.S.C. §1531 et. seq.) resulting from the approval of the Proposed Action.

Cumulative Impacts

Existing loss of habitat from urbanization and the expansion of agricultural lands, that cumulatively impacts listed species and their habitats, is expected to occur regardless of whether or not the Proposed Action is implemented. The exchange, or transfer, of CVP and SWP water between MWD and AEWSD is not expected to contribute to cumulative habitat loss because the water would be used in a way that is consistent with current practices. There would be no adverse cumulative impacts to biological resources as a result of the Proposed Action.

Resources Eliminated from Further Analysis

The following resources were also considered, but were eliminated from further analysis due to limited potential for impacts:

- Cultural Resources
- Indian Sacred Sites
- Indian Trust Assets
- Environmental Justice
- Socioeconomic Resources
- Air Quality
- Energy Use and Global Climate