

**DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR THE GEOLOGIC DRILLING & AGGREGATE SAMPLING PROGRAM,
UPPER SAN JOAQUIN RIVER BASIN STORAGE INVESTIGATION,
FRESNO AND MADERA COUNTIES, CALIFORNIA**

Recommended:

Natural Resources Specialist Date
South-Central California Area Office

Concur:

Chief, Resources Management Division Date
South-Central California Area Office

Approved:

Area Manager Date
South-Central California Area Office

FONSI No. 06-54

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**GEOLOGIC DRILLING & AGGREGATE SAMPLING PROGRAM,
UPPER SAN JOAQUIN RIVER BASIN STORAGE INVESTIGATION,
FRESNO AND MADERA COUNTIES, CALIFORNIA**

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 U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the proposed geologic drilling and aggregate sampling program at two potential dam sites on the Upper San Joaquin River is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment; therefore an environmental impact statement is not required. This Finding of No Significant Impact is supported by Reclamation's Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) Number EA-06-54, *Geologic Drilling & Aggregate Sampling Program, Upper San Joaquin River Basin Storage Investigation, Fresno and Madera Counties, California* and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Background

Reclamation is proposing to conduct feasibility-level geologic drilling and aggregate sampling investigations (program) at two potential dam sites on the Upper San Joaquin River. The program would be conducted as part of the Upper San Joaquin River Basin Storage Investigation Project (USJRBSI), which is investigating the feasibility of implementing various alternatives to provide additional water storage capacity for the San Joaquin River watershed. The two potential dam sites are located upstream of Friant Dam on Millerton Lake about 25 miles northeast of Fresno, California, and are referred to by river mile (RM) as RM 274 and RM 279.

Findings

1. Geology & Soils – Minor disturbances to soils and geologic features would occur including 16 drill holes, up to 25 cubic yards of granite removed from the area and some minor trail improvements. These impacts are considered minor due to the small scale of impact and temporary nature of the proposed action therefore the proposed action would not result in any significant impacts to geology or soils.
2. Water Quality – Increased levels of suspended sediments and elevated turbidity could occur in the vicinity of water-based drilling operations but, due to the small area of impact and temporary nature of the activity, the impacts would be minimal. Reclamation will not finalize this FONSI prior to the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board issuing a Water Quality Certification for the activities that would be carried out under the proposed action that could impact water quality. Therefore, there would be no significant affect as a result of the proposed action.

3. Air Quality - Impacts to air quality resulting from the use of equipment would be below established *de minimus* thresholds, localized and short term in nature. Therefore, there would be no significant effect to air quality.

4. Aquatic Resources - Minor impacts to aquatic habitat would occur as a result of temporary water quality impacts. Use of the barge and boats to access the work areas would cause disturbances similar to recreational boating that takes place within Millerton Lake. A Spill Prevention and Countermeasure Plan has been developed to minimize the risk of a spill and lay out a contingency plan in case of equipment leaks. The proposed action includes work in a Water of the United States and would be completed in compliance with the requirements of a non-reporting U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permit #6 under Section 404. Therefore, the proposed action would not result in any significant impacts to aquatic resources.

5. Biological Resources including Threatened and Endangered Species - Some wildlife may be disturbed by or could temporarily move to avoid work areas. Impacts associated with the work would be similar to boat traffic which is common within the lake and other human disturbance associated with use of the recreation area. Equipment noise and the presence of people in the area could cause eagles to avoid the immediate areas where work is being performed. Avoidance measures would be implemented to prevent disturbance of valley elderberry plants and associated valley elderberry longhorn beetles that could be present on the plants. Reclamation will not finalize this FONSI prior to receiving a letter of concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with Reclamation's determination that the proposed action may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle and the valley elderberry longhorn beetle. The loss of a single grey pine is considered minimal since the grey pine is common and abundant in the area. Therefore, there would be no significant effect to biological resources.

6. Recreation – Temporary displacement impacts to recreational boaters, fishermen and hikers would occur from temporary trail closures and from the presence of the barge and drilling operations. These impacts would not be significant since the areas that would be impacted are small, the impacts would be temporary and other recreational areas for boating and hiking exist in the area.

7. Noise - Some homes could be affected by the short duration fly-overs that are anticipated. Noise from the helicopter, drilling, blasting associated with the aggregate sampling and other associated work would temporarily drive wildlife to other areas. These impacts would be temporary and occur during daytime hours only. Therefore no significant impacts from noise would occur.

8. Cultural Resources - No historic properties or cultural resources were identified during a survey conducted by Reclamation of the area. However, Reclamation sought consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act with the State Historic Preservation Office. Reclamation will not finalize this FONSI prior to the completion of the Section 106 consultation process.

9. Indian Trust Assets - There are no tribes possessing legal property interests held in trust by the United States in the areas involved with this action, therefore Indian trust assets are not affected by this action.

10. Environmental Justice – No human health impacts would occur. The work proposed would take place on existing federal lands that are for the most part managed for recreational uses. The temporary impacts expected to occur would not disproportionately affect any minority or disadvantaged populations within the project area therefore no environmental justice related impacts would occur.

11. Socio-economic Resources - Carrying out the program would create an increase in the amount of work and jobs in the immediate area which could have a slight positive impact on the local economy. No other socio-economic impacts would occur therefore no significant impact to socio-economic resources are anticipated.

12. Cumulative Effects – All impacts associated with the proposed action are short-term and the temporary nature of the impacts associated with this project, therefore there are no cumulative impacts associated with this project. Approval would not have highly controversial or uncertain environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks. One potential outcome from the information gathered through carrying out the activities of the program could lead to a recommendation to Congress to implement the construction of a new dam. The future cumulative affects of any possible future construction activities and their impacts would be analyzed in future environmental analyses and, at present, are speculative and beyond the scope of this Federal action.