

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

North Kern Water Storage District Lerdo/Calloway Canal Intertie Project

FONSI-09-107

Recommended by:

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Introduction

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 U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval to partially fund North Kern Water District's (NKWSD) Lerdo/Calloway Canal Intertie Project is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an environmental impact statement is not required. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Final Environmental Assessment (EA) number EA-09-107, *North Kern Water Storage District Lerdo/Calloway Canal Intertie*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Background

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act) of 2009 is a bill signed into law by President Barack Obama on February 17, 2009 in an effort to jumpstart the nation's economy, create and/or save jobs, and foster unprecedented levels of accountability and transparency in government spending. The Department of the Interior has been tasked with managing \$3 billion in investments as part of the Recovery Act, of which Reclamation will devote \$260 million for projects in the State of California to expand water supplies, repair aging water infrastructure, and mitigate the effects of a devastating drought that the State is currently experiencing. Through a Challenge Grant, Reclamation provides 50/50 cost-share using Recovery Act funds for approved projects focused on water conservation, efficiency, and marketing.

NKWSD applied for and was selected as a potential recipient to receive a Recovery Act-funded Challenge Grant to help with the construction of their Lerdo/Calloway Canal Intertie Project (Proposed Action). The Proposed Action consists of enhancements to the district's 8-1 lateral and construction of a new pumping plant that would allow water to be conveyed bilaterally (back and forth) between NKWSD's Calloway Canal and Lerdo Canal, and Reclamation's Friant-Kern Canal (FKC). Currently, water can only move from the Lerdo Canal to the Calloway Canal and FKC via gravity. In addition to irrigation demand, the Lerdo Canal serves groundwater recharge spreading ponds that have unused capacity.

Findings

Water Resources

The Proposed Action will not generate a new supply of water; rather, it will improve the reliability of NKWSD water supplies by recharging available surplus surface water for later use when groundwater pumping is necessary. The Proposed Action does not include additional groundwater pumping; rather, it would help to mitigate the water-level impacts of associated with groundwater pumping. In particular, the increased ability to recharge available surface water supplies will help to mitigate the projected long-term decline in groundwater levels. Also, since the surface water supply has a lower salinity level than the existing groundwater, the long-term infiltration of these surface water supplies will serve to maintain and enhance the generally good quality of groundwater underlying the district area. Also, the additional recharge of the groundwater basin would help reduce any further impacts to ground subsidence. Therefore, the Proposed Action will have slight beneficial impacts to water resources.

Land Use

The Proposed Action will replace a section of the 8-1 Lateral with a buried pipeline, which will eliminate the impediment that the existing open canal presents to north-south travel. The other section of the 8-1 Lateral will be improved, but would otherwise remain in use. Finally, the Proposed Action will not support development of additional lands to irrigated agriculture, since lands in the area are essentially fully developed to irrigated agriculture. Accordingly, the main purpose of the Proposed Action will be to deliver water to spreading ponds for recharge purposes; therefore, there will be no significant impacts to land use.

Biological Resources

Under the Proposed Action, the potential for impacts to wildlife and special-status species will be limited, insofar as the proposed project will be largely constructed within the existing, disturbed rights-of-way for NKWSD's 8-1 Lateral, with the exception of temporary construction easement on actively cultivated land which is located immediately adjacent. There is the possibility that Western burrowing owl and the San Joaquin kit fox could utilize the project area for foraging or burrowing.

The Proposed Action would implement Environmental Protection Measures to avoid or minimize effects to special-status species. Prior to construction, a pre-activity survey would be conducted by a qualified biologist to ensure that the construction areas remain unoccupied by sensitive species and, during construction, standard avoidance and minimization protocols would be followed to avoid impacts. Therefore, the Proposed Action is expected to have no significant impacts to either the San Joaquin kit fox or Western burrowing owl.

Cultural Resources

Under the Proposed Action, construction would disturb existing canal rights-of-way and immediately adjacent farmland. Given the age of the 8-1 Lateral and the fact that about one mile of it will be replaced with installation of an underground pipeline, it was determined that consultation with State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) is required. Subject to consultation with SHPO and confirmation of the conclusion that the 8-1 Lateral is not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places or California Register of Historic Places, it could be concluded that the Proposed Action will not result in significant impacts to cultural resources.

Indian Trust Assets

There are no tribes possessing legal property interests held in trust by the United States in the lands involved with the Proposed Action; therefore, this action will have no significant impacts on Indian Trust Assets (ITA). The nearest ITA is the Tule River Reservation approximately 40 miles northeast of the project location.

Socioeconomic Resources

Over the long term, it is intended that the Proposed Action will facilitate an increase in the reliability of the NKWSD's water supply, which will help to maintain the economic viability of irrigated agriculture (mainly permanent crops) within the district. There is greater economic output associated with permanent crops, which includes a year-round demand for farm labor (as compared to annual crops). In the short term, the Proposed Action will provide a temporary

increase in construction-related jobs. As a result, there will be minor beneficial impacts to socioeconomic resources.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action will improve water supply reliability in NKWSD. Given that the economically-disadvantaged communities near the project area rely exclusively on pumped groundwater for their water supplies and share the same basin, they will benefit from the groundwater recharge. Also, to the extent that water supply reliability is improved in NKWSD, it will help support the continued viability of the agricultural economy which provides jobs to the residents of these communities. As a result, the Proposed Action will have slight beneficial impacts to environmental justice.

Air Quality

Short-term air quality impacts will be associated with construction, and will generally arise from dust generation (fugitive dust) and operation of construction equipment. Fugitive dust results from land clearing, grading, excavation, concrete work, and vehicle traffic on paved and unpaved roads. The Proposed Action will include Environmental Protection Measures to reduce the amount of fugitive dust released from these construction activities.

Comparison of the estimated Proposed Action emissions with the thresholds for Federal conformity determinations indicate that project emissions are estimated to be below these thresholds. Therefore, there will be no significant impacts to air quality.

Global Climate Change

The Proposed Action will involve short-term impacts consisting of emissions during construction, which have been estimated at about 393 metric tons of CO₂. Long-term impacts are attributable to project operations and would involve the generation of electrical energy to power the electric motor pump drivers. These emissions would vary annually, but have been estimated to average about 159 metric tons/year of CO₂, which is negligible compared to the threshold for annually reporting GHG emissions (25,000 metric tons/yea). Accordingly, project construction and operations under the Proposed Action will result in *de minimis* impacts to global climate change; therefore, there will be no significant impacts.

Cumulative Impacts

As in the past, hydrological conditions and other factors are likely to result in fluctuating water supplies. When added to other factors that may affect a district's water supplies such as those listed in the Purpose and Need, the desire to maximize any available water supplies are the driving force for actions like the Proposed Action. Water districts aim to provide water to their customers based on available water supplies and timing, all while attempting to minimize costs. Farmers irrigate and grow crops based on these conditions and factors, and a myriad of water-related actions are approved and executed each year to facilitate water needs. Each water-related action involving Reclamation undergoes environmental review prior to approval; however, Reclamation does not have approval authority over other water-related actions such as those involving the SWP and groundwater pumping. The Proposed Action will improve water resources management in NKWSD, and when taken into consideration with other similar existing or proposed projects, there will be a cumulative positive impact on groundwater levels

and quality due to the long-term, increased groundwater recharging capability during times of surface water supply availability.

In recent years, land use changes to the south of NKWSD have involved the urbanization of agricultural lands. These types of changes are typically driven by economic pressures and they are as likely to occur without the Proposed Action as with it. Accordingly, no cumulative impacts to land use are anticipated.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) impacts are considered to be cumulative impacts. The Proposed Action, when added to other existing and proposed actions, will not contribute to cumulative impacts to global climate change owing to the *de minimis* magnitude of annual GHG emissions.

The Proposed Action, when added to other existing and proposed actions, will not contribute to cumulative impacts to air quality, inasmuch as construction activities are short-term and operations will not result in adverse impacts to air quality beyond Federal thresholds.

The Proposed Action, when added to other similar existing and proposed actions, will have a slight beneficial contribution to cumulative impacts associated with environmental justice and socioeconomic resources. The Proposed Action will help support and maintain farm-related jobs that low-income and disadvantaged populations rely upon. In addition, some of these communities rely on groundwater as their main source of water supply so the long-term application of groundwater recharge will provide some replenishment to this source.