

# RECLAMATION

*Managing Water in the West*

**DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

## **Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District Turnipseed Southern Expansion Project**

**FONSI-10-063**

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 South-Central California Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval to partially fund Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District's (DEID) Turnipseed Southern Expansion Project (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 Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Draft Environmental Assessment (EA)/Initial Study (IS) number EA/IS-10-063, *Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District Turnipseed Southern Expansion Project*, and is hereby incorporated by reference. The Draft EA/IS is being jointly prepared by Reclamation, as the lead Federal agency, and DEID, as the lead State agency, to satisfy the requirements of both NEPA and the California Environmental Quality Act, respectively.

Reclamation intends to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on the Draft EA/IS and Draft FONSI during a 30-day public comment period.

## Background

In 1993, DEID purchased and developed an 80-acre parcel specifically used as a groundwater recharge basin, known as the Turnipseed Recharge Basin. In 2010, DEID converted the Turnipseed Recharge Basin into a banking facility by installing extraction wells so the district could pump banked water at a later date to supplement surface water irrigation supplies. DEID now desires to increase its capacity to bank and regulate surface water by developing an 80-acre parcel to the south of the existing Turnipseed Recharge Basin into four 20-acre recharge cells. Levees and berms would be constructed around the existing and proposed expansion area, and pipelines would be installed to interconnect all the recharge cells.

DEID applied for and was selected as a potential recipient for Federal grant funding assistance to develop the expansion area south of the existing Turnipseed Recharge Basin (Proposed Action). As weather allows, construction for the Proposed Action would start as soon as permitted, take 4-6 weeks, and completed by late summer 2011.

## Findings

### Water Resources

The Proposed Action will not generate a new supply of water; rather, it will improve the reliability of DEID water supplies by using available surplus surface water to recharge the underlying groundwater subbasin for later use. The Proposed Action does not include additional groundwater pumping; rather, it will help to reduce the water-level impacts associated with existing groundwater pumping. Groundwater extraction will not exceed the total amount of water that is recharged, as to not deplete any additional groundwater supplies. 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. Therefore, the Proposed Action will have slight beneficial impacts to DEID's water resources.

## **Land Use**

The Proposed Action will not involve the development of new agriculture lands since the district is almost fully developed to agriculture. There are no residences adjacent to the basin boundaries, and construction of the Proposed Action will not develop new sources of water that will support any new housing or new permanent population growth that will exceed official regional or local population projections in the DEID service area. The purpose of the Proposed Action is to improve DEID's water supply reliability in order to meet existing irrigation demands during dry hydrological years; therefore, no impacts to land use will occur.

## **Biological Resources**

Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action is not likely to adversely affect the San Joaquin kit fox and burrowing owls, and concurrence for this determination is still being sought from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Pre-construction surveys will be conducted before any ground-disturbing activities are to begin. If the USFWS concurs with Reclamation's determination for San Joaquin kit fox and burrowing owls, and pre-construction surveys find no individuals or evidence of either species within the Proposed Action area, then construction could begin. If the pre-construction surveys detect the presence of these species then the Proposed Action will be paused while Reclamation revisits the Endangered Species Act and Migratory Bird Treaty Act determination, and completes any consultation with the USFWS that might be necessary. As a result, the Proposed Action is anticipated to have no significant impacts on biological resources.

## **Cultural Resources**

Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action impacts comprise a no adverse effect to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.5(b). In the unlikely event that project implementation revealed previously unidentified cultural resources, then procedures outlined at 36 CFR Part 800.13(B) will be followed and will insure that significant impacts are avoided.

## **Indian Trust Assets (ITA)**

There are no tribes possessing legal property interests held in trust by the U.S. in the lands involved with the Proposed Action. In addition, there are no ITA, Indian Reservations, or Public Domain Allotments found within DEID; therefore, no impacts to ITA will occur.

## **Indian Sacred Sites**

Since no known Indian sacred sites have been identified, the Proposed Action will not impact known Indian sacred sites and/or prohibit access to and ceremonial use of this resource.

## **Socioeconomic Resources**

The Proposed Action will facilitate an increase in the reliability of DEID's surface water supply. This will subsequently help to maintain the economic viability of irrigated agriculture within the district, which presently includes a large percentage of permanent crops. There is greater economic output associated with permanent crops, which includes a year-round demand for farm labor (as compared to annual crops). As a result, there will be slight beneficial impacts to socioeconomic resources.

## **Environmental Justice**

To the extent that water supply reliability is improved in DEID, it will serve to support the continued viability of the agricultural economy that has developed in reliance (in whole or in part) upon it, which provides jobs to the residents of disadvantaged populations. As a result, there will be beneficial impacts to environmental justice from the implementation of the Proposed Action.

## **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. Comparison of the estimated Proposed Action emissions with the thresholds for Federal conformity determinations indicates that project emissions will be below these thresholds.

The Proposed Action also involves the continued operation of electrically-driven pumps and motors; accordingly, there will not be any direct emissions from the operation of project facilities/equipment. The air quality emissions from electrical power have already been considered in environmental documentation for the generating power plant; therefore, a conformity determination is not required. Accordingly, project construction and operations under the Proposed Action will not result significant impacts to air quality.

## **Global Climate**

The Proposed Action will involve short-term impacts consisting of emissions during construction and long-term impacts are attributable to ongoing operations, and will involve the generation of electrical energy to power associated electric motor pump drivers. These emissions will vary annually, but have been estimated to be well below the Environmental Protection Agency's *de minimis* threshold for annually reporting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Accordingly, construction and operations under the Proposed Action will result in no significant impacts to the global climate.

## **Cumulative Impacts**

The Proposed Action, when taken into consideration with other similar past, existing, and future proposed projects, will ultimately improve water resources management in DEID. There will be a cumulative positive impact on groundwater levels and quality, owing to the long-term, increased groundwater recharging capability during times of surface water supply availability. The Proposed Action will also have a slight beneficial contribution to cumulative impacts associated with environmental justice and socioeconomic resources since it will help support and maintain farm-related jobs that low-income and disadvantaged populations rely upon.

The Proposed Action will not result in any impacts to land use, cultural resources, ITA, and Indian sacred sites; therefore, will not contribute to cumulative impacts to these resources. The Proposed Action will not contribute to cumulative impacts to air quality, since construction activities are short-term and operations will not result in significant impacts to air quality beyond Federal thresholds.

Impacts to biological resources from implementation of the Proposed Action will occur primarily during construction activities. On-going effects will not affect listed species, or in the case of

San Joaquin kit fox, are considered insignificant and will not likely adversely affect this species. Measures to avoid take of burrowing owls after construction will be implemented for on-going operation of the recharge basin. The Proposed Action, when added to other similar past, existing, and future proposed actions, will not contribute to adverse cumulative impacts to wildlife resources since construction activities are short-term.

GHG impacts are considered to be cumulative impacts. The Proposed Action, when added to other similar past, existing, and future proposed actions, will not contribute to significant cumulative impacts to global climate change owing to the *de minimis* threshold.

The Proposed Action, when added to other similar past, existing, and future proposed projects, do not contribute to significant increases or decreases in environmental conditions. Overall, there will be no significant cumulative impacts caused by the Proposed Action.