

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Accelerated Water Transfer Program for Friant Division and Cross Valley Central Valley Project Contractors, 2011-2015

FONSI-10-052

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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 Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval of a five-year accelerated water transfer program (AWTP) for Friant Division and Cross Valley (CV) Central Valley Project (CVP) contractors 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) number EA-10-052, *Accelerated Water Transfer Program for Friant Division and Cross Valley Central Valley Project Contractors, 2011-2015*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

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

Background

Reclamation has historically acknowledged water transfers and/or exchanges between CVP contractors geographically situated within the same region, who possess interim or long-term water service contracts, or repayment contracts, and are provided water service through the same CVP facilities under an AWTP. The most recent AWTP for Friant Division and CV CVP contractors was analyzed under Environmental Assessment (EA) number EA-05-92, which analyzed a five-year AWTP from 2006 through 2010. The 2006-2010 ATWP will soon expire, so Friant Division and CV CVP contractors need another AWTP in place to relocate or shift CVP water supplies from areas of low demand (at the time of request) to areas of greater demand.

Another five-year AWTP will provide a streamlined process for annual transfers and/or exchanges of Friant Division CVP water between eligible Friant Division and CV contractors for Contract Years 2011-2015 (March 1, 2011 through February 29, 2016). The AWTP directs the CVP contractor to provide advance notice to Reclamation and then receive Reclamation's written acknowledgement rather than written approval. The AWTP will utilize existing Friant Division facilities including Millerton Lake, Friant Dam, Madera Canal, and the Friant-Kern Canal (FKC). The AWTP will allow up to 255,000 acre-feet for transfers and/or exchanges between Friant Division contractors and transfers from Friant Division contractors to CV contractors per Contract Year.

Findings

Water Resources

The Proposed Action will not increase or decrease the amount of CVP water each participating district receives under contract with Reclamation, respectively. Transfers will help supplement any surface water shortage that a particular water district, or districts, could be experiencing at that current time and exchanges under the AWTP will be "bucket-for-bucket". There will be no significant impacts to participating districts and their respective Friant Division CVP water supplies.

Due to variations in weather and hydrological conditions, agricultural water needs are time sensitive, and usually arise on short-notice. The AWTP will allow Friant Division and CV CVP contractors to efficiently shift CVP water supplies from areas of low demand (at the time of approval) to areas of greater demand. The Proposed Action will help alleviate the need of some landowners to pump groundwater since surface water supplies will be more available to districts in need of supplemental supplies. There will be beneficial impacts to groundwater resources.

The AWTP requires that the CVP contractor provide Reclamation with advance notice of any proposed transfer and/or exchange so that Reclamation can coordinate with the Friant Water Authority to make sure that excess capacity exists within Friant Division facilities. In addition, coordination will ensure that Reclamation's obligations to deliver water to other CVP contractors, wildlife refuges, and other requirements will not be hindered by the Proposed Action. There will be no significant impacts to Friant Division facilities.

Land Use

The Proposed Action will utilize existing facilities to convey waters allowed under the AWTP and will not require construction of new facilities or modifications to existing facilities that will result in ground disturbance. Exchanges will be "bucket for bucket" so participating districts will not experience a net gain or loss in water supply that can impact agricultural production. Transfers will help supplement any shortage of surface water supplies that will be used to irrigate and maintain existing agricultural production. Waters involved with the Proposed Action will be used on existing farmland and will not be used to put new land into production. There will be no significant impacts to land use.

Biological Resources

The Proposed Action will be identical to conditions for biological resources under the No Action Alternative. The Proposed Action will not alter CVP operations, water storage or release patterns from CVP facilities, or the maximum volume of water delivered to the contractors as compared to the No Action Alternative. The transfers and exchanges are water management actions to support existing uses and conditions. No native lands will be cultivated as a result of the Proposed Action. Lands fallowed for three or more years will require surveys for wildlife species including threatened and endangered species prior to application of this water. Therefore, the Proposed Action will have no significant impacts on federally listed species, critical habitat, or candidate species.

Cultural Resources

The Proposed Action involves the transfer and/or exchange of water through existing facilities, which will not result in modifications, new construction, or changes in land use. Because the Proposed Action will result in no physical alterations of existing facilities and no ground disturbance as stipulated in Section 2.2 of the EA, Reclamation concludes that the Proposed Action has no potential to cause effect to historic properties pursuant to the regulations at 36 CFR Part 800.3(a)(1), and will result in no significant impacts to cultural resources.

Indian Trust Assets (ITA)

Approval of the AWTP will not involve any construction on lands or impact water, hunting, and fishing rights associated with the nearest ITA listed in the affected environment. Therefore, the Proposed Action does not have a potential to significantly impact ITA.

Indian Sacred Sites

The Proposed Action involves conveying and storing water utilizing existing conveyance facilities. No construction or ground disturbing activities will be required that will impact known or unknown Indian sacred sites and/or prohibit access to and ceremonial use of this resource. There will be no significant impacts to Indian sacred sites.

Socioeconomic Resources

Agricultural practices within the affected environment will be within historical conditions and will not be adversely impacted by the implementing the Proposed Action. Participating districts will not have to continue paying for redundant approval and environmental review associated with individual transfer and/or exchange actions. The availability of supplemental surface water supplies will allow landowners to maintain their crop production. The Proposed Action will have slight beneficial impacts on socioeconomics.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action will not cause dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease within the affected environment. The Proposed Action will not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. The AWTP is intended to allow for the expeditious delivery of available supplemental surface water supplies to requesting districts in lieu of groundwater it otherwise will have extracted and used to irrigate crops. Farmlands will be able to maintain their crop production and continue to provide employment opportunities for minority or disadvantaged populations. There will be no significant impacts on minority or disadvantaged populations.

Global Climate

Greenhouse gases (GHG) generated by the Proposed Action is expected to be extremely small compared to sources contributing to potential climate change since the exchange of water will be conveyed mostly via gravity and little, if any, additional pumping from electric motors will be required. While any increase in GHG emissions will add to the global inventory of gases that will contribute to global climate change, the Proposed Action will result in potentially minimal to no increases in GHG emissions and a net increase in GHG emissions among the pool of GHG will not be detectable. There will be no significant impacts on global climate.

Cumulative Impacts

Impacts analyzed in Section 3 of the EA are considered part of the cumulative impacts analysis since the AWTP itself is a program which streamlines the pre-approval process for several transfer and/or exchange actions. In addition, Reclamation has and is reasonably assumed to continue approving other transfers, exchanges, and/or Warren Act contracts – all of which are actions outside the scope of this EA but could still potentially contribute to cumulative impacts on the affected environment. These will be referred to as similar past, existing, and reasonably foreseeable actions.

The Proposed Action, when taken into consideration similar past, existing, and reasonably foreseeable actions will have beneficial impacts to groundwater resources since landowners will not have to rely on groundwater pumping to irrigate their crops. There will be no significant cumulative impacts to Friant Division facilities since coordination with Reclamation and the Friant Water Authority is required to make sure that excess capacity exists within Friant Division facilities. In addition, coordination will ensure that Reclamation's obligations to deliver water to other CVP contractors, wildlife refuges, and other requirements will not be significantly impacted or indirectly impact third parties. Most transfers, exchanges, and/or Warren Act contracts that receive Reclamation approval within the affected environment is intended to help supplement a particular district's, or districts', water supply in order to irrigate and maintain existing agriculture. Cumulative projects will not increase or decrease the amount of CVP water each district receives under contract with Reclamation, respectively. Transfers and/or exchanges will be between willing participants; therefore, the Proposed Action will not contribute to cumulative significant impacts to water resources.

When taken into consideration with other similar past, existing, and reasonably foreseeable actions, the Proposed Action will have slight beneficial impacts to socioeconomics; however, the impacts will be short-term and within historical variations.

The Proposed Action is found to not have any impacts on land use, biological resources, ITA, Indian sacred sites, and environmental justice; therefore, will not contribute to cumulative significant impacts to these resources when taken into consideration other similar past, existing, and reasonably foreseeable actions. GHG impacts are considered to be cumulative impacts. The Proposed Action, when added to other existing and future actions, will not contribute to cumulative significant impacts to global climate change owing to the Environmental Protection Agency's threshold (25,000 tons/year) magnitude of GHG emissions requirement for reporting.