

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION**

MID-PACIFIC REGION

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Butte Water District Canal Automation – Thresher Weir Project

FONSI 11-07-MP

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RECLAMATION
Managing Water in the West

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BACKGROUND

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the *Butte Water District Canal Automation Thresher Weir Project*, dated July 2011.

Under the Sacramento Valley Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (SVIWRMP) Grants Program, Reclamation provides financial assistance to support activities that promote the preparation and revision of written regional water management/conservation plans, implement activities identified in written water management plans, demonstrate new or previously unknown water management technologies and practices, and promote improved understanding of good water use practices and principles. Reclamation is providing financial assistance to the District for SVIRWMP revision and implementation. The projects are authorized under the Reclamation Act of 1902 (32 Stat. 388), as amended and supplemented; Public Law 108-361, Section 103(d)(5), Section 9504(a).

The purpose of this Project is take a first step toward improving irrigation service and reducing water shortages by replacing the existing undersized, manually-operated structure at Thresher Weir with an enlarged weir equipped with electrically-driven, remotely-operated gates. In addition to improving irrigation service, installation of automated gates will improve regional water supply reliability by reducing spillage from the canal and laterals and will reduce tailwater now caused by the inability to adjust lateral flows to meet scheduled shutoffs of deliveries.

FINDINGS

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the Mid-Pacific Regional Office of Reclamation has found that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Consequently, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding of no significant impact is based on the following:

1. Surface Water Resources

The Proposed Action would result in more efficient use of available irrigation water supplies by reducing spillage from the Main Canal and from laterals upstream of Thresher Weir by a total of approximately 2,400 ac-ft per year. The amount of water within the canal would remain unchanged as a result of the Proposed Action. Construction of the Proposed Action would occur during the winter months when little to no water is present within the canal. Therefore, water quality would remain unchanged from the baseline condition. The Proposed Project would not have an impact on either the quality or quantity of irrigation water supply. Natural surface waters would also be unaffected by the Proposed Project.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on surface water resources.

2. Groundwater Resources

The Proposed Project does not involve lining, seepage control measures, or modification of the Main Canal or reoperation of the Main Canal; therefore, the Project's impact on groundwater resources would be negligible as would the Project's impact on regional groundwater levels influenced by seepage from the Main Canal.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on groundwater resources.

3. Biological Resources

The Main Canal is bordered by roads on both sides in the vicinity of the Proposed Project. Between the Main Canal and the roads, there is a narrow border of typical roadside weedy species of grasses and other herbaceous plants. There are deciduous orchards immediately adjacent to the roads on both sides of the canal. These orchards are open single-species tree dominated habitats with low, bushy trees and an open understory to facilitate harvest. Trees are arranged in a linear pattern, with uniform spacing between trees. The understory is managed to prevent understory growth totally or partially, but where understory growth occurs it is composed of low-growing grasses, legumes, and other herbaceous plants. There are no undisturbed habitats such as vernal pools or wetlands in the Proposed Project area that would provide habitat for rare plants or animals.

The Proposed Project does have potential to impact vegetation adjacent to the Main Canal and species associated with this habitat type such as the tricolored blackbird and giant garter snake, if suitable habitat is present at the Project site. No sensitive species have been recorded in the Project area.

Tricolored Blackbird: Since there are no documented breeding colonies in the vicinity of the Proposed Project and suitable breeding habitat is not available along the Main Canal, the Proposed Project is not expected to impact the tricolored blackbird.

Giant Garter Snake: Although the Proposed Project area does not contain suitable giant garter snake habitat, it could be a movement corridor for snakes. Potential impacts would be a disruption of migration if the Proposed Project were to be constructed during the migratory season. However, construction would occur during the non-migratory season when giant garter snakes are dormant. Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Project is not likely to adversely affect giant garter snakes and has informally consulted with USFWS. Mitigation measures as described in the EA would be implemented by BWD to further avoid and minimize any potential impacts to giant garter snakes.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on biological resources.

4. Cultural Resources

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, the existing Thresher Weir would be removed and a new automated weir would be constructed approximately 100 feet downstream from its current location in the Sutter-Butte Canal. The Sutter-Butte Canal is assumed to be eligible for NRHP inclusion; however, the removal and replacement of the weir as proposed will not adversely affect the function or overall design of the canal, nor will it alter the characteristics for which it is assumed NRHP-eligible, i.e., water conveyance, agricultural development, and economic growth in the area. The Thresher Weir was determined to be not eligible for NRHP inclusion. Overall, the Proposed Action will result in no adverse effect to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.5(b). As such, there will be no significant impacts to cultural resources from implementation of this project.

No cultural resources would be impacted as a result of the Proposed Action.

5. Indian Trust Assets

The nearest Indian Trust Asset (ITA) is Mooretown Rancheria, which is approximately 11 miles northeast of the Project location.

The proposed action does not have a potential to affect ITAs.

6. Environmental Justice

No significant changes in agricultural communities or practices would result from this Proposed Action. Accordingly, the Proposed Action would not have any impacts on low-income or minority individuals within the Project area.

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7. Climate Change

The construction period for the Proposed Project is anticipated to be two months. The equipment that will be used for the construction include: small earth moving equipment, tools required for construction of formwork, equipment needed for placement of concrete, and cranes for placing pre-assembled gates. The quantity of greenhouse gases produced during this construction period would be insignificant. The Proposed Action would not include any significant change on the composition of the atmosphere and therefore would not result in adverse impacts to climate change.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on climate change.

8. Cumulative Impacts

Reasonably foreseeable future actions include implementation of the SVIRWMP projects which include groundwater wells at Anderson-Cottonwood Irrigation District, Pelger/Sutter Mutual, and Meridian Farms. These sites are all several miles south of the Butte Water District and the Proposed Project would not contribute to any changes to groundwater conditions.

In 2005, BWD prepared an Environmental Resources Assessment to determine potential impacts of improvements along the Main Canal, including: 1) removal of bottlenecks in the Main Canal system, 2) concrete lining of the Main Canal system or part of the Main Canal, 3) installation of automated gates and weirs in all or part of the Main Canal, and 4) conjunctive management of surface and groundwater. The Proposed Action is the first of the improvements considered in the 2005 Assessment to be constructed. BWD does not anticipate removal of bottlenecks, concrete lining, or conjunctive management to be implemented any time in the foreseeable future, therefore no cumulative impacts are anticipated. However, BWD does anticipate rehabilitating other weirs along the Main Canal (projects similar to the Thresher Weir rehabilitation) at some point in the future. Rehabilitation of other weirs in the Main Canal would not result in cumulative impacts.

The Proposed Action would not result in cumulative impacts to any of those resources described within the Draft EA/FONSI.