

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

MID-PACIFIC REGION

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Meridian Farms Water Company Integrated Regional Water
Management Program – Groundwater Production Element Project**

FONSI 11-12-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 *Meridian Farms Water Company's Integrated Regional Water Management Program - Groundwater Production Element Project*, dated September 2011.

Under the Sacramento Valley Integrated Regional Water Management Program (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 Meridian Farms Water Company (MFWC) for SVIRWMP revision and implementation. MFWC's Groundwater Production Element Project (Proposed Project) includes the installation of one groundwater well to supplement existing surface water and groundwater supplies. The Proposed Project would improve the flexibility and reliability of MFWC's water supply, particularly during dry and critically dry water years.

FINDINGS

In accordance with NEPA, as amended, the Mid-Pacific Regional Office of Reclamation has found that the Proposed Project 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

Construction - Effects on surface water quality could occur during the construction phase of the Proposed Project because of stockpile erosion and spoil piles. Prior to construction activities, the contractor would develop and implement an SWPPP to reduce sediment discharged from the site. Implementing the SWPPP, in conjunction with the use of best management practices, would reduce potential impacts on surface water quality, thus resulting in no significant impacts to surface water resources from construction activities.

Operation - Peak streamflow reductions represent less than 0.5 percent of the total streamflow measured in the Sacramento River, thus the Proposed Project would have no significant impacts to surface water flows within the project area.

2. Groundwater Resources

Construction - No impacts on local groundwater levels are anticipated as part of the well drilling and installation process.

Operation - The Proposed Project would involve annual groundwater production from April 1 through October 31, with an assumed total project volume of approximately 3,300 acre-feet/year. The magnitude and distribution of forecast incremental drawdown in the shallow and regional aquifers would not impact groundwater levels such that yields of pre-existing nearby wells would decrease to a rate that would not support existing land uses. Additionally, groundwater elevations would return to pre-project levels because Sutter Subbasin would refill each spring, with the possible exception of during multi-year droughts. Given the forecast minimal drawdown effects, no inelastic land subsidence is anticipated to occur. The Proposed Project would not result in regional changes in groundwater flow patterns in the Sacramento Valley Groundwater Basin (SVGB), so it is not anticipated that operation of the project well would alter the pre-existing distribution of poor-quality groundwater in the SVGB.

3. Land Use/Agricultural Resources

Construction - There would be no impacts on land use resulting from the construction of the Proposed Project. The proposed well location is unoccupied and currently in use for agricultural purposes. No other projects are anticipated at this location within the near future, so construction would not hinder the existing or planned use of the site.

Operation - Operation of the Proposed Project would have no impacts on land use. The Proposed Project would be implemented to maintain existing agricultural land uses, resulting in minor beneficial effects on existing agricultural land uses within the MFWC service area.

4. Biological Resources

Construction - Adherence to the proposed avoidance and minimization measures included in the EA would protect nesting bird species that could be impacted by the Proposed Project and would reduce the effect such that no adverse impact would occur on nesting birds. No other biological resources would be impacted by the Proposed Project.

Operation - There would be no impacts on biological resources as a result of operational activities associated with this Proposed Project.

5. Cultural Resources

The Proposed Project is the type of activity that has the potential to affect historic properties. A records search, a cultural resources survey, and Tribal consultation identified historic properties within the Area of Potential Effect. All project activities would not adversely affect historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.5(b). Constructing the proposed well and connecting the discharge pipeline to the MFWC Railroad Ditch would not diminish its structural integrity and would not adversely impact the characteristics that make the ditch eligible for listing on the NRHP. The

function of the ditch would not change. Since no historic properties would be adversely affected, no cultural resources would be impacted as a result of implementing the Proposed Project. Concurrence from the SHPO to conclude the Section 106 compliance process is pending.

6. Indian Trust Assets

There would be no impacts on Indian Trust Assets (ITAs) because there are none in the Proposed Project area.

7. Environmental Justice

Construction - Construction activities associated with the Proposed Project would require a local or regional contractor, who would likely employ local or regional workers. If workers were temporarily relocated into the area during the construction phase, the construction effort would likely result in local revenue for lodging, food, and construction-related materials and equipment. Construction-related environmental justice effects are expected to be positive; no significant impacts would occur.

Operation - Implementing the Proposed Project would increase water supply reliability resulting in beneficial effects on agricultural production-related employment. Project-related environmental justice effects are expected to be positive; no significant impacts would occur.

8. Air Quality

Construction - The short-term increase in emissions during construction would not have a significant impact on air quality, because construction would generate minimal emissions, and incremental emissions would be less than federal and state standards.

Operation - The proposed well would be electrically operated. Therefore, there would be no impacts on air quality as a result of operational activities associated with the Proposed Project.

9. Climate Change

Construction - Construction of the Proposed Project would result in a minor, short-term increase in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (total of approximately 32 metric tons of CO₂). There would be no significant long-term impacts to climate change as a result of the Proposed Project.

Operation - Operation of the production well is not expected to generate additional indirect GHGs, associated with the electricity used to operate the pump, to the extent that they would cause an adverse impact. Emissions from electricity use are considered indirect emissions; the Proposed Action would not include a direct GHG emissions source, such as an onsite stationary source. Therefore, indirect emissions from the electricity use for operation of the MFWC production well would be less 25,000 metric tons of CO₂ and would not have an environmental impact.

10. Cumulative Impacts

No cumulative impacts are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Project.