

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Arvin-Edison Water Storage District and Metropolitan Water District 12-Month Water Exchange Project

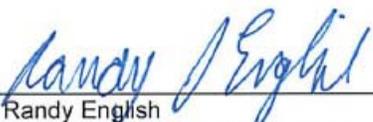
FONSI-11-085

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 Arvin-Edison Water Storage District (AEWSD) and Metropolitan Water District (MWD) 12-Month Water Exchange Project is not a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an environmental impact statement is not required. This Finding of No Significant Impact is supported by Reclamation’s Environmental Assessment (EA) 11-085. Draft EA 11-085 was circulated for public and agency comment between February 22, 2012 and March 22, 2012. All comments and Reclamation’s responses to those comments are available in Final EA 11-085.

A vertical line in the left margin identifies changes to this document since the draft document was circulated.

Background

In December 1997, AEWSD entered into a long-term Water Management Program (Program) with MWD. Under the Program, up to 350,000 AF, after a 10 percent loss is applied, of MWD’s State Water Project (SWP) supply could be banked within AEWSD’s groundwater bank at any one time. Upon request, AEWSD would return MWD’s previously banked SWP water. This would typically occur during certain dry hydrological periods when MWD needs to supplement its water supply.

Proposed Action

The Districts are proposing an action that would:

- Deliver AEWSD’s Central Valley Project (CVP) water to MWD in exchange for previously banked MWD SWP water (note: MWD delivers to AEWSD first);
- Deliver AEWSD’s CVP water to MWD during times of abundant AEWSD supplies after which MWD would return a like amount of SWP water, metered at the California Aqueduct (Aqueduct) to AEWSD later in the 12-month period.

This action required approval of a temporary change to the Reclamation’s Consolidated Place of Use (CPOU) provisions and Friant Division Place of Use provisions through a petition to the State Water Resources Control Board. The order approving the petitions for temporary change was approved on April 2, 2012. The proposed exchange will occur in accordance with the terms and conditions of the State Water Resources Control Board order in effect through April 1, 2013.

Resource	Environmental Commitment
Biological Resources	The Proposed Action may not involve the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more years. The Proposed Action may not change the land use patterns of cultivated or fallowed fields that potentially have some value to listed species or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
Biological Resources	Exchange involving CVP and SWP water cannot alter the flow regime of natural water bodies such as rivers, streams, creeks, ponds, pools, wetlands, etc., so as to not have a detrimental effect on fish or wildlife, or their habitats.
Water Resources	In continuance of commitments from the Program, existing Aqueduct Pump-in Facilitation Group guidelines would be followed by both AEWSD and Kern County Water Agency (KCWA) when introducing water into the Aqueduct to insure that water quality would not be adversely impacted.

Resource	Environmental Commitment
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No new construction or modification of existing facilities would be required; • Exchange involving CVP and SWP facilities, and the Cross Valley Canal (CVC) would be required to obtain the applicable approval/permission so as not to hinder the respective normal operations and maintenance of the facilities; • Exchange involving CVP and SWP facilities, and the CVC would be required to schedule accordingly with Reclamation, DWR and the KCWA, respectively, so as not to hinder their respective obligations to deliver water to contractors, participants, wildlife refuges, and to meet regulatory requirements.

Reclamation’s finding that implementation of the Proposed Action will result in no significant impact to the quality of the human environment is supported by the following findings:

Findings

Water Resources

Both AEWS and MWD would not experience a net gain or loss in their respective water supplies under the Proposed Action since the exchange would be “bucket for bucket”. AEWS would still have sufficient water resources to provide to their landowners for agricultural purposes and MWD would use the exchanged CVP water to supplement their reduced SWP supplies in order to meet its customers’ demand for municipal and industrial use. The Proposed Action could improve the timing in delivery and improve water quality for MWD.

The Proposed Action would not increase groundwater pumping from what has historically occurred within the Kern County Subbasin by AEWS. The Proposed Action has the potential to reduce groundwater pumping because surface water imported into the district is used to recharge the groundwater through AEWS’s spreading works if not used immediately for agricultural irrigation purposes.

The CVC, CVP and SWP facilities would not be adversely impacted as the Proposed Action must be scheduled and approved by the KCWA, Reclamation and DWR, respectively. If a canal capacity prorate is required during the period this water is moving through the Friant-Kern Canal (FKC), the prorate priority shall be pursuant to the tiers defined in Section VII of the Operational Guidelines for Water Service, Friant Division CVP, dated March 18, 2005. Additionally, the exchange must be conducted in a manner that would not harm other CVP contractors, other CVP contractual or environmental obligations, or SWP contractors. In continuance of commitments from the Program, existing Aqueduct Pump-in Facilitation Group guidelines would followed by both AEWS and KCWA when introducing water into the Aqueduct to insure that water quality would not be adversely impacted.

No adverse cumulative impacts to water resources are expected as the Proposed Action would likely have similar results as the No Action Alternative as surface water would be delivered to the same general area for irrigation and recharge.

Land Use

As to facilitating the return of previously banked water under the Program, the Proposed Action would utilize existing facilities to convey waters involved and would not require the need to

construct new facilities or modifications to existing facilities that would result in ground disturbance.

AEWSD would not experience a decrease in water supply that would impact existing irrigated farmlands within its service area, nor would the banked or return water be used to cultivate native or fallowed land that has been in those conditions for three or more consecutive years. MWD intends to use the exchanged CVP water to supplement its water supplies for existing municipal and industrial purposes within its service area, and would not contribute to any potential expansion within the area. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not have any impacts on existing land use.

In recent years, land use changes within the San Joaquin Valley have involved the urbanization of agricultural lands. These types of changes are typically driven by economic pressures and are as likely to occur with or without the Proposed Action; therefore, no cumulative effects to land use are expected as a result of the Proposed Action.

Biological Resources

Most of the habitat types required by species protected by the Endangered Species Act (ESA) no longer occur in the Proposed Action area (Reclamation 1999). The Proposed Action would not involve the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more consecutive years. The Proposed Action also would not change the land use patterns of cultivated or fallowed fields potentially having some value to listed species or to birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Since no natural stream courses would be affected or additional pumping would occur, there would be no effects on listed fish species. No critical habitat occurs within the area affected by the Proposed Action therefore, none of the primary constituent elements of any critical habitat would be affected. Considering the above limitations, Reclamation has determined that there would be No Effect to listed species or designated critical habitat under the ESA (16 U.S.C. §1531 et. seq.) for the Proposed Action.

Existing conditions, such as loss of habitat due to urbanization and expanding agricultural lands that cumulatively impact listed species and their habitats, are expected to occur with or without the Proposed Action. The exchange of AEWSD's CVP water for MWD's SWP water is not expected to contribute cumulatively to habitat loss as this water would be used consistent with current uses. Therefore, there would be no cumulative adverse impacts to biological resources as a result of the Proposed Action.

Cultural Resources

Because the Proposed Action would result in no physical alterations of existing facilities and no ground disturbance, 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 would result in no impacts to cultural resources. No cumulative impacts would result from the Proposed Action as there is no land disturbance or direct impacts.

Indian Sacred Sites

At this time, no Indian sacred sites have been identified. In addition, the Proposed Action would not impede access to or ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites. Should any sacred sites be

identified in the future, Reclamation would comply with Executive Order 13007. This would ensure that no direct or cumulative impacts would occur that could impede access to or ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites due to the Proposed Action.

Indian Trust Assets

Approval of the exchange between AEWS D and MWD would not involve any construction on lands or impact water, hunting, and fishing rights associated with the nearest Indian Trust Asset (ITA). Therefore, the Proposed Action does not have a potential to affect ITA. There are no ITA in the action area; therefore, the Proposed Action when added to previous and reasonably foreseeable banking activities do not contribute to cumulative impacts to ITA.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action would not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. The Proposed Action, when added to other existing and proposed actions, could have a slight beneficial contribution to cumulative impacts for minority or disadvantaged populations as it would help support and maintain jobs that low-income and disadvantaged populations rely upon due to increased irrigation water supply reliability.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Proposed Action would result in less energy use with virtually no changes in flow path from what was analyzed under the Program. This would save AEWS D the energy and costs associated with otherwise pumping and returning groundwater. If AEWS D is also directly recharging water to their groundwater, it would also save AEWS D the expenses associated with operating their recharge basins. Agricultural practices within AEWS D would be within historical conditions and would not be adversely impacted by the implementing the Proposed Action.

Over the long term, the Proposed Action would benefit AEWS D by increasing groundwater levels and dry year supplies. Improved conjunctive use operations and in-lieu banking could also allow AEWS D's farmers to utilize surface supplies instead of groundwater supplies at times when MWD banks or returns water. This would subsequently help to maintain the economic viability of irrigated agriculture within the district.

Air Quality

Under the Proposed Action, AEWS D would deliver their CVP supplies to fulfill its return obligation to MWD under the Program, instead of pumping and returning banked SWP water back to MWD, and regulate AEWS D CVP supplies within a one year period. Delivery of water would require no modification of existing facilities or construction of new facilities. In addition, water would be moved either via gravity or electric motors/pumps which would not produce emissions that impact air quality. Therefore, a conformity analysis is not required and there would be no impact to air quality as a result of the Proposed Action.

There would be no cumulative impacts to air quality as there would be no emissions that impact air quality or construction activities that would produce emissions that could cumulatively impact air quality.

Global Climate

Electric pumps produce CO₂ that could potentially contribute to Greenhouse Gases (GHG). However, water under the Proposed Action is water that would be delivered from the FKC with or without the Proposed Action and is therefore part of the existing conditions. There would be no additional impacts to GHG as a result of the Proposed Action.

Impacts from GHG are considered to be cumulative impacts; however, delivery of water with or without the Proposed Action is part of the existing baseline conditions of the Central Valley and is not expected to produce additional GHG that could contribute to global climate change.