

RECLAMATION


Managing Water in the West

FONSI No. 2019-01

Project No. 2017-75

Northeast Colorado Walker Recharge Project Central Colorado Water Conservancy District

Finding of No Significant Impact

Approved:  Date: April 5, 2019
Area Manager



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Great Plains Region
Eastern Colorado Area Office

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR Part 1500-1508), the Bureau of Reclamation has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for a WaterSMART grant and long-term license agreement (License) to partially fund and construct the first phase of Central Colorado Water Conservancy District's (Central) Northern Colorado Walker Recharge Project (Walker Recharge Project). The EA analyzes a No Action and Proposed Action alternatives. Based on the following, Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action will not result in a significant impact on the human environment.

Background

Central's Walker Recharge Project is located along the South Platte River in eastern Morgan County and western Weld County in the northeast part of Colorado. It is near the small rural agricultural community of Orchard, Colorado. Central's boundaries include roughly 750 square miles of Adams, Weld, and Morgan Counties. The area includes the northeastern Denver metropolitan area, numerous smaller rural communities, and approximately 210,000 acres of irrigated lands supplied by surface diversions and groundwater pumping.

Central has two subdistricts that operate court-decreed plans for augmentation to replace depletions caused by pumping of 1,400 alluvial groundwater wells within Central's district boundaries (Case No. 02CW335 and 03CW99). The subdistricts currently have contracts to deliver up to 80,000 acre-feet per year as augmentation supply to replace depletions caused by alluvial well pumping. The alluvial wells are the primary source of water and supplement irrigation supplies when yield from surface water right is insufficient.

Purpose and Need

The primary purpose of the Walker Recharge Project is to help Central conjunctively manage its surface and groundwater supplies to increase the reliability of irrigation water supplied to agricultural producers in northeast Colorado. Conjunctive use is the practice of storing surface water in a groundwater basin in wet years and withdrawing it in dry years. Recharge operations are an effective method way to efficiently manage water supplies to match irrigation demands using alluvial aquifers for temporary storage to re-time water availability from periods of surplus supply to periods of reduced supply.

Project Alternatives

Proposed Action

Reclamation would award a \$750,000.00 federal grant funds under the WaterSMART Drought Response Program for design and construction of Phase I of the Walker Recharge Project as discussed in the EA. Reclamation would also issue a License for construction and operation of a portion of a pipeline across Reclamation lands. Phase I construction includes:

- Diverting up to 5 cubic feet per second (cfs) of surface flow from the existing Weldon Valley Ditch diversion located on the north bank of the South Platte River to a newly constructed 5-acre recharge pond or ponds northeast of the South Platte River (North Pond). A RiverScreen™ pump or similar system will be used to pump water from the Weldon Valley Ditch. More information on RiverScreen™ system can be found at <https://www.riverscreen.com>.
- Construction and operation of the 5-acre North Pond.
- Construction and operation of a 700-foot long pipeline (North Pipeline) connecting the surface diversion to the North Pond.
- Construction and operation between 4 and 6 new alluvial wells (South Wellfield) and construction and operation of a 1.5-mile pipeline (South Pipeline) on the south bank of the South Platte River. The South Pipeline would cross a tract of Reclamation lands, known as the Kinnaman Tract, purchased for Reclamation's Narrows Unit of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program. As part of the Proposed Action, Reclamation would issue up to a 25-year License to Central for construction and operation of the pipeline crossing the Kinnaman Tract.
- Construction and operation of a 10-acre recharge pond or ponds located southeast of the South Platte River (South Pond) connected to the alluvial wells.
- Construction and operation of a control building on Central's property to house electrical control systems for the South Wellfield.

The Walker Recharge Project would operate subject to the water rights and augmentation plans as filed in Colorado Water Court (Case No. 16CW3202) and is subject to a water right trial scheduled for July 2019. Phase I will divert up to 15,000 acre-feet per year from the South Platte River at rates of up to 50 cfs as described above. The total estimated costs of Phase I of the Walker Recharge Project are approximately \$7 million.

Summary of Environmental Impacts

During the environmental review process, potential effects resulting from the Proposed Action were identified, either by the public, other agencies, or Reclamation. Reclamation used potential effects to help focus the environmental review process, to structure the EA, and to identify opportunities for mitigating or avoiding adverse effects of the Proposed Action, as appropriate.

In the attached EA, Reclamation evaluated the environmental consequences associated with implementing the No Action or Proposed Action alternatives.

This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the following:

- Up to 15,000 ac-ft of water annually would be provided to help Central conjunctively manage its surface and groundwater supplies. Recharge operations would temporarily store and re-time water from periods of surplus to periods of reduced supply.
- South Platte River Compact calls could increase in frequency from 1 to 29 days per year based on 2012-2017 hydrology under the Proposed Action assuming similar hydrology

and water demands of senior water rights. With future phases (II and III) and pumping rates up to 100 cfs, South Platte River Compacts calls could increase between 1 and 31 days under similar conditions.

- The increased water supply would be used to replace depletions caused by pumping from 1,400 groundwater wells within Central's district boundaries. Alluvial groundwater wells are the primary source of water and provide supplemental irrigation supplies when yield from surface water rights is insufficient.
- Minor temporary effects to water quality may occur during construction. However, Central would implement best management practices to minimize stormwater runoff.
- Construction of the North and South pipelines and installation of a box culvert would cross and temporarily affect Waters of the United States. Complying with the condition under United States Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permit (NWP) No. 12 for Utility Line Activities would minimize disturbance. NWP No. 12 limits discharges only to those that result in losses less than 1/10th acre.
- The Walker Recharge Project would have no effect to Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed species in Colorado.
- Reclamation formally consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on depletion effects to ESA listed species in the Platte River in Nebraska. The Service concluded that Proposed Action including future phases of the Walker Recharge Project (up to 30,000 acre-feet per year) is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the endangered and threaten species or critical habitat.
- Local wildlife may temporarily avoid the project area during construction activities.
- Construction activities during a severe winter could affect wintering concentrations of local wildlife including mule deer, whitetail deer and wildlife turkey.
- Up to 15 acres of shallow open water habitat (North and South Ponds) would be created under the Proposed Action and benefit waterfowl and other water dependent wildlife.
- The Proposed Action would have no effect to National Register of Historic Places-eligible properties.
- No known Indian trust assets would be affected by the Proposed Action.
- The Proposed Action will not result in disproportionate adverse effects to minority or low-income populations, or Indian Tribes.
- The Proposed Action will temporarily affect about 5 acres of soils types classified by the Natural Resource Conservation Service as prime farmland if irrigated and 2.5 acres as farmland of Statewide and local importance. None of these lands are or have historically been irrigated.
- The Proposed Action will permanently affect about 5 acres of soils types classified by the Natural Resource Conservation Service as prime farmland if irrigated and 5.0 acres classified as farmland of Statewide and local importance. None of these lands have been historically irrigated and will be used for the North and South Ponds.
- The Proposed Action will make up to 15,000 acre-feet of additional water supply available to Central which will primarily be used to augment supplies to replace depletions caused by existing alluvial well pumping including augmentation that supports existing irrigated farmland.

Environmental Commitments

The following environmental commitments will be implemented by Central:

1. Central must transport, store, and release all water in accordance with State of Colorado water law.
2. Central shall comply with all sections of the Clean Water Act, including NWP No. 12 conditions for construction of Walker Recharge Project Facilities. More information can be found at: <https://usace.contentdm.oclc.org/utis/getfile/collection/p16021coll7/id/6725>.
3. Central shall obtain a stormwater construction permit for the State of Colorado for all construction activities. The permit is required for disturbance of one acre or more of land or is part of a larger common plan. More information can be found at: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/wq-construction-general-permits>.
4. Central shall continue to participate in the South Platte Water-Related Action Plan and remain in good standing to rely on the provisions of the Platte Recovery Implementation Program to provide ESA compliance for federally-listed Platte River species and critical habitat.
5. In the unlikely event that federally threatened or endangered species are encountered during construction or operation of the Walker Recharge Project, Central shall halt all construction activities and notify Reclamation. Reclamation will consult with the Service to comply with ESA. Construction activities may resume once the consultation is complete and any required protection measures have been implemented.
6. In the event of a severe winter during construction, construction activities should be limited unless Colorado Parks and Wildlife has determined that proposed activities will have negligible impacts to concentrations of local winter wildlife (including mule and whitetail deer, wild turkey, etc.).
7. In the event that an active raptor nest is identified within a ¼ mile of the Project Area during construction, Central shall review Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife recommended buffer zones and seasonal restrictions for Colorado Raptors available at: <https://cpw.state.co.us/Documents/WildlifeSpecies/LivingWithWildlife/RaptorBufferGuidelines2008.pdf> to comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
8. Central shall comply with all provision and conditions of the license agreement for piping crossing Reclamation's Kinnaman Tract. Conditions include, but may not be limited to:
 - All activities on Kinnaman tract will be restricted to a 100-foot wide temporary construction footprint and a 50-foot width maintenance corridor along the pipeline alignment.
 - Central is required to pay crop damage for crop loss to Reclamation agricultural permittee once construction is completed. Reclamation's Grant Officer's Technical Representative will conduct on-site inspection and measurement to determine the amount of and cost of crop damage.
 - The pipeline must be buried at least 36 inches deep to allow Reclamation's permittee to plow the soil for preparation of the seed bed and to harvest any crops.
 - During construction activities, the top 12 inches of topsoil should be carefully removed and set aside, before completion of the rest of the trenching. Once the piping is laid in the trench, the layer of topsoil must be replaced and smoothed out sufficiently to plant a crop.

- Any drain tiles encountered during construction must be repair and/or replaced before the soil and/or pipe is laid on top of the drain tile. If drain tiles are encountered during construction, Reclamation inspect any repair before being buried.
 - All other surface disturbances must be repaired.
9. Central shall seed and restore all private lands disturbed during construction consistent with negotiated easements and agreements.
 10. Central or its contractor shall control noxious weeds within the 100-foot construction pipeline footprint and all other disturbed lands for three years following construction.
 11. In the unlikely event historic properties are encountered during construction activities, Central shall halt all construction and notify Reclamation, and Reclamation will complete its Section 106 obligation under the National Historic Preservation Act. Construction may resume once Reclamation's consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office and tribes is completed and any appropriate protective measures have been implemented.
 12. Any changes in the scope of Phase I (i.e. change in pipeline alignment) will require notification to Reclamation and potential additional National Environmental Policy Act compliance.