

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

San Xavier Cooperative Farm Extension

San Xavier District, Tohono O'odham Nation

Project Information and Opportunity to
Comment



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Phoenix Area Office
Phoenix, Arizona

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Introduction

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), in cooperation with the San Xavier District (SXD) of the Tohono O’odham Nation and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed extension of the existing San Xavier Cooperative Farm (Co-Op or farm) to incorporate approximately 1,094 acres of land proposed for agricultural use. The project area is located south and east of the existing Co-Op within the northeastern portion of SXD, in Pima County, Arizona, on undeveloped and uninhabited Indian trust allotted land. (Figure 1).

The purpose of this scoping notice is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposed action and to solicit comments on the potential impacts of the proposal.

Background

The Southern Arizona Water Rights Settlement Act (SAWRSA, P.L. 97-293) of 1982 provided Federal funds to rehabilitate the original Co-Op and build a pipeline to deliver Central Arizona Project (CAP) water to agricultural fields within the farm. In 2000, a 5.6-mile-long pipeline (CAP Link Pipeline) linking the CAP Canal and the Co-Op’s original water distribution system was completed. That same year, the Tohono O’odham Legislative Council approved a request by the SXD and San Xavier Cooperative Association (SXCA) that asked for Reclamation to proceed with the design and construction of the farm rehabilitation and extension. At that time a planning group, consisting of the SXD, SXCA and its Board of Directors, the Co-Op and Reclamation, began developing a strategy that would best suit the needs of the community, conserve water, and provide efficient delivery of CAP water to existing agricultural fields for irrigation. Rehabilitation of the Co-Op was completed in 2007.

The Arizona Water Settlement Act of 2004 (AWSA, P.L. 108-451) directed the Secretary of Interior (Secretary), through Reclamation, to design and construct an extension of the irrigation system to deliver CAP water to additional lands for the Co-Op, resulting in a system that will serve up to 2,300 net irrigable acres on the San Xavier Reservation. Following the completion of the farm rehabilitation, the SXCA and the Co-Op held two community planning meetings with existing and proposed allottees in 2010 for the lease renewal on the existing Co-Op and to introduce a proposal for the extension.¹ A farm planning and economic analysis report was also prepared to evaluate the current practices of the existing Co-Op and to analyze the potential agricultural production associated with the proposed farm extension.² In September 2015, SXCA asked Reclamation to proceed with plans to extend the Co-Op.

¹ In accordance with BIA’s leasing and permitting procedures, scoping meetings were conducted by SXCA Board of Directors and the Farm Manager on June 19, 2010 and July 17, 2010 to introduce the proposed extension to the affected allottees and the community. In 2010, the SXCA envisioned that the farm extension would occur in phases. Thus, the scoping meetings only included 350 acres out of the 1,094 acres currently proposed.

² Reclamation contracted with George Cairo Engineering, Inc. to produce the San Xavier Cooperative Farm, Farm Planning & Economic Analysis Report – January 8, 2016.

Proposed Action

Reclamation would construct a water delivery system to the additional 1,094 acres of land proposed for agricultural use. The additional land is adjacent to the existing, 900 acre farm that was rehabilitated in 2007. SXCA and Reclamation have agreed that 1,994 acres (a combined total of 1,094 acres for the farm extension and the existing 900 acre farm) will constitute the final acreage for the Co-Op farm authorized by AWSA.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for the proposed action is to meet the Secretary's legal requirement under Section 304(c)(2) of AWSA to design and construct an extension to the irrigation system for the Co-Op to serve 1,094 acres of additional land proposed for agricultural use. The additional land will be considered in the land lease and the granting of right-of-way for the Co-Op.

In order to design and construct the irrigation system, Reclamation must consider the overall farming strategy of the SXCA. The SXCA's farming strategy is to "provide a reasonable financial return to the land owners (lessees) through the sustainable, efficient, and profitable use of its resources."

Project Location

The project area is located within the northeastern portion of the SXD of the Tohono O'odham Nation, south and east of the existing Co-Op (Figure 1). The project area includes two parcels of land that will be irrigated; the northern parcel is 298 acres, and the southern parcel is 796 acres. Additionally, there are six potential locations for pipelines that will connect the CAP Link Pipeline to the farm extension lands. The southern-most distribution alignment is 3,892 feet (ft) long and has a 100-ft wide construction right-of-way (8.9 acres). The alignment to the north of the last described alignment is 1,298-ft long and has a 100-ft wide construction right-of-way (3 acres). The next alignment is 407-ft long and has a 100-ft wide construction right-of-way (0.9 acres). The alignment north of the last one is 340-ft long and has a 100-ft wide construction right-of-way (0.8 acres). Finally, the two northern-most alignments have the same dimensions (123-ft long with a 100-ft construction right-of-way or 0.3 acres each). The pipeline that will occupy the chosen right-of-ways will be 36 inches in diameter.

Alternative Actions

A no action alternative must be considered in addition to the proposed action in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process. The no action alternative also provides the baseline for comparison for environmental effects as they relate to the proposed project. Other action alternatives that meet the purpose and need will also be considered during the NEPA process. Different farm methods under consideration include 1) all-natural production, 2) all-conventional production, 3) a combination of natural and conventional production, 4) organic farming practices/certification, and 5) a combination of crop production and raising livestock.

Irrigation practices that will be considered include level basin and center pivot irrigation systems. Crops under consideration include a composition of both alfalfa, as the primary cash crop, and traditional/vegetable crops. The preferred alternative is an all-natural/organic production using a center pivot irrigation system.

Preliminary Issues

The first step in determining the scope of the EA is identifying the key issues related to the effect of the proposed action on the existing natural, social, and economic environment. Public input during this initial scoping process will help us focus the EA on important issues. The following issues will be addressed in the EA: 1) biological resources (including threatened and endangered species), 2) cultural resources, 3) water resources (including ground water and surface water), 4) land use, 5) soils, 6) air quality, 7) Indian Trust Assets, and 8) socioeconomic factors.

Cooperating Agencies

Reclamation is the lead Federal agency responsible for preparing the EA. The cooperating agencies are SXD, as the project proponent, and BIA, which has responsibility for Indian Trust Assets and issuing permits. BIA will be the approving party to the land appraisals, lease agreements and granting of temporary or permanent easements for right-of-way associated with the Co-Op. The proposed EA will serve as the NEPA review for BIA's actions as well.

Decision Process

The responsible official for Reclamation (Area Manager of the Phoenix Area Office) must make a determination regarding the environmental effects associated with each alternative, including the no action alternative. If the EA demonstrates that there are no significant environmental effects, the Area Manager would record this determination in a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). BIA would follow the same decision making process.

How to Comment

You are encouraged to offer comments on the scope of the upcoming EA, including potential issues, concerns, and alternatives to the proposed project. Reclamation will accept comments up to September 29, 2016. Please include your full name and address and the project title (San Xavier Cooperative Farm Extension) with your comments. Comments should be submitted to Ms. Nichole Olsker, Bureau of Reclamation, 6150 West Thunderbird Road, Glendale, Arizona 85306. Hand-delivered written comments may be submitted to the above address, Monday through Friday, between 7:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Facsimiles may be sent to Ms. Nichole Olsker at 623-773-6486. Electronic (e-mail) comments may be submitted to nolsker@usbr.gov. Please include your full name and address with your e-mail.

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By law, the names and addresses of those providing comments are available for public review through Reclamation. However, individuals may request that their name and/or address be withheld from the record. These requests will be honored to the extent allowable by law. If you wish to have your name and/or address withheld, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment letter. All comments from organizations or businesses will be available in their entirety for inspection. For additional information concerning the proposed project, please contact Ms. Nichole Olsker at the above referenced address, telephone number, or e-mail.

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Figure 1. Project Location Map.

