

**United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation  
Lower Colorado Region  
Phoenix Area Office**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**SAN CARLOS IRRIGATION PROJECT  
PHASE 2 REHABILITATION  
REACHES 1-3**

**PINAL COUNTY, ARIZONA**

Approved: *Leslie Meyers*

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## BACKGROUND

The San Carlos Irrigation and Drainage District (SCIDD) proposes to implement Phase 2 Rehabilitation, Reaches 1–3, of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) San Carlos Irrigation Project (SCIP) Joint Works and SCIDD District Works facilities along the Florence-Casa Grande Canal (FCG Canal) and the Florence Canal, from Ashurst-Hayden Diversion Dam to Picacho Reservoir, Pinal County, Arizona. As described in the final Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project, the Proposed Action will include rehabilitation and concrete lining of the upper segments of the FCG Canal and the entire alignment of the Florence Canal to serve as the new main canal system, establishment of a dedicated drainage channel along most of the remaining FCG Canal, replacement of the existing China Wash Flume, construction of segments of new canal, construction of a new regulating reservoir, and rehabilitation of the Picacho Reservoir inlet structure. Phase 2 rehabilitation, Reaches 1–3, will be implemented in accordance with the Gila River Indian Community Water Rights Settlement Agreement (Amended and Restated, Final Version, October 1, 2005) and Title II of the Arizona Water Settlements Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-451). Funding for the project will be provided by the Bureau of Reclamation pursuant to Section 403(f)(2) of the Colorado River Basin Project Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-537, as amended).

The environmental process for SCIP Phase 2 rehabilitation was initiated in 2010 as an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for SCIP Reaches 1–4, which extended beyond the current EA limits to Interstate 10. The conceptual design information available at that time indicated project-related environmental impacts had the potential to be significant.

The Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS and notice of the public scoping meeting was published in the Federal Register on August 31, 2010. Reclamation distributed a scoping notice to potentially interested individuals, organizations, Indian tribes, and agencies on that same date, posted it on Reclamation's Phoenix Area Office website, and submitted a news release to 12 news media outlets on August 25, 2010. A scoping meeting was held on September 18, 2010. Three individuals attended the meeting. In addition, SCIDD hosted a project open house on May 17, 2012.

In response to the scoping notice, Reclamation received written comments from eight agencies. These comments, which were considered during preparation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document, and Reclamation's responses, are included in Appendix B of the Final EA.

By 2016, notable changes had been made to the design and limits of the Proposed Action. Based on the reduction in scope and construction footprint, potential impacts, and the lack of substantive comments received during public scoping, Reclamation concluded that an EA would be appropriate for the redesigned Proposed Action. A Notice of Cancellation to Prepare a Draft EIS was published in the Federal Register on September 14, 2016.

The EA was prepared in compliance with NEPA, Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] §§ 1500–1508), and

U.S. Department of the Interior NEPA regulations (43 CFR § 46). The Draft EA was made available for public review during a formal public comment period from May 18 through June 2, 2017.

A Notice of Availability of the Draft EA and public meeting was mailed on May 15, 2017, to 44 agencies and entities, and 92 adjacent landowners. A public notice was published in local newspapers on May 17 and May 18, 2017, and the Draft EA was posted on Reclamation's Phoenix Area Office website. Paper copies of the DEA were available for public review, and inspection and paper copies and CDs of the Draft EA were available upon request. The public meeting on the Draft EA was held during the formal public comment period on Wednesday, May 24, 2017. No guests attended the meeting.

Written responses on the Draft EA were received from one landowner and two agencies. A summary of these comments and Reclamation's responses are included in Appendix C of the Final EA.

## **MAJOR CONSIDERATIONS**

The following issues were addressed in the EA and have been taken into consideration in Reclamation's deliberation whether a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is appropriate, or whether an EIS should be prepared.

1. The EA demonstrates that there will be no significant adverse, or beneficial impacts on the quality of the human environment including water, air, noise, land use and ownership, soils and geology, riparian and wetland areas, cultural resources, and biological resources. Effects of the Proposed Action on these resources will be primarily localized.
2. The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on public health or safety. The EA addresses the minor effect on public health and safety. The new canal's steeper sides and concrete lining would increase the risk of human injuries and drowning; however, only 1 percent of the new main canal would be near residential development. Appropriate hazardous materials management and waste disposal associated with construction will minimize any potential risks to public health, safety, and the environment.
3. The project area is not unique within its geographical setting, and is similar to many other areas of federal and private land in the region. There are no wild and scenic rivers, wilderness areas, refuges, park lands, national natural landmarks, national monuments, sole or principal drinking water aquifers, or other unique or rare characteristics of the land, and aquatic environs that will be significantly affected. Impacts to riparian and wetland vegetation would be localized and minor along the canals to be lined, and localized and moderate at Picacho Reservoir from potentially reduced inflows. The Proposed Action supports agriculture and represents only 0.1 percent of the 95,546 acres available for agricultural production in the SCIP service area and is not considered significant.
4. There are no known scientific or environmental controversies over the effects of the Proposed Action on the human environment.

5. There are no known effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. Rehabilitation of SCIP Phase 2, Reaches 1–3, will involve standard construction methods. Operation of the rehabilitated canal system and the regulating reservoir will use conventional engineering technologies.
6. The Proposed Action involves repair and improvement of existing infrastructure and will not establish a precedent for future actions.
7. Cumulative effects of the Proposed Action were considered in the EA. There are no known incremental effects of the action that become significant when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future actions that have affected, or will affect the project area.
8. The proposed action will not cause the loss of significant cultural resource nor significantly affect districts, sites, objects, or structures listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. A Class III survey identified 31 cultural resources that are eligible or potentially eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Effects to these sites will be mitigated through implementation of two Memorandums of Agreement: one for China Wash Flume, a feature of the FCG Canal; and another for all other eligible or potentially eligible cultural resources. Mitigation measures agreed upon in these documents include avoidance when possible, archival research, data recovery, and monitoring. Reclamation has consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office and Indian Tribes that have possible cultural affinities or other interests in the project area.
9. The EA demonstrates that no federally listed threatened or endangered species will be significantly affected by the Proposed Action. Reclamation submitted a Biological Evaluation to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with a determination that the Proposed Action “may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the endangered lesser long-nosed bat, the endangered Southwestern willow flycatcher, the threatened yellow-billed cuckoo, the endangered Yuma Ridgway’s rail, the endangered spikedace, and the endangered loach minnow. All single-stem saguaros will be transplanted to minimize effects to potential foraging habitat of the lesser long-nosed bat. The USFWS concurred with the determination of the Biological Evaluation on August 9, 2017. The Proposed Action will not adversely affect proposed or designated critical habitat.
10. The Proposed Action will not violate any Federal, State, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment
11. There will be no disproportionate high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations, as defined in Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice).
12. The Proposed Action will improve operational efficiencies, increase reliability of water deliveries, reduce operational and maintenance costs, and reduce water losses. This effect constitutes an improvement to the delivery infrastructure responsible for transporting the Gila River Indian Community’s water right allocation.

13. The Proposed Action will not limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners, or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007).
14. The Proposed Action will not contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area, and will not promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and EO 13112). To prevent the spread of invasive plant species, all construction equipment will be washed at the contractor's storage facility prior to entering the construction site. In addition, the contractor will inspect construction equipment and remove all attached plant debris prior to leaving the construction site to prevent the spread of invasive plant species to off-site locations.
15. The mitigation requirements identified in the EA will be implemented by SCIDD and Reclamation.

#### **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based upon a review of public comments and consideration of the effects analyzed in the Final EA, San Carlos Irrigation Project Facilities, Phase 2 Rehabilitation, Reaches 1–3, dated August 2017, Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action will not significantly impact the human environment, and that preparation of an environmental impact statement is not warranted.