

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

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

PROPOSED TRANSFER OF 1,481 ACRE-FEET OF CENTRAL ARIZONA PROJECT
WATER FROM FLOWING WELLS IRRIGATION DISTRICT TO TOWN OF MARANA
UTILITY DEPARTMENT
PIMA COUNTY, ARIZONA

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
August 2009



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FONSI No. PXAO-09-4

The Bureau of Reclamation has issued an Environmental Assessment (EA) to disclose potential environmental impacts resulting from the proposed transfer of 1,481 acre-feet annually (AFA) of Central Arizona Project (CAP) water for municipal and industrial uses (WestLand Resources, Inc. 2009). Under the proposed action, Reclamation would transfer 1,481 AFA of Flowing Wells Irrigation District's (FWID) annual CAP water entitlement to the Town of Marana Utilities Department (TMUD). FWID's existing CAP water service subcontract would be amended to reduce its CAP entitlement from 4,354 AFA to 2,873 AFA. TMUD's existing CAP water service subcontract would be amended to increase its annual allocation from 47 AFA to 1,528 AFA. FWID would continue to rely on its existing groundwater supply system to serve its water service area for the foreseeable future. TMUD would recharge the additional 1,481 AFA at the Lower Santa Cruz Recharge Project (LSCR) and accrue recharge credits; these would be used to offset groundwater pumping. No new construction or other land-disturbing activities would be needed to recharge the transferred 1,481 AFA of CAP entitlement.

Reclamation has determined the proposed CAP water entitlement, and amendment to the CAP water service subcontracts for FWID and TMUD, will not result in significant environmental impacts to either water service area or to communities in the general vicinity, which would merit preparation of an environmental impact statement.

BACKGROUND

FWID entered into a CAP water service subcontract in 1985 for 4,335 AFA but has never taken delivery of any of its CAP water entitlement. FWID has determined 1,500 AFA is excess to its future water needs. If 1,481 AF of its annual CAP water entitlement is transferred to TMUD, FWID's CAP water service subcontract would be amended, and its CAP water entitlement would be reduced to 2,873 AFA. An additional 19 AFA has been recommended by the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) to be transferred to Tucson Water; however, a request from Tucson Water for this 19 AFA has not been submitted. FWID will continue to rely upon groundwater for its potable water supply for the foreseeable future. At some point, FWID will either recharge its CAP entitlement to obtain recharge credits and/or participate in a regional treatment and direct delivery system.

The Town of Marana acquired Cortaro-Marana Irrigation District's (CMID) municipal water utility assets in 1997, and CMID's water service area was incorporated into TMUD's. Associated with this action was the assignment of CMID's CAP entitlement of 47 AFA to TMUD for which a categorical exclusion checklist was prepared (Reclamation 1999). TMUD has recharged this water in the LSCR since 2000.

The EA for this proposal describes the existing conditions in the water service areas of the two water service providers and the environmental impacts that are anticipated to result from Reclamation's approval of the water transfer. FWID's water service area is essentially totally developed. TMUD is a member of the Central Arizona Groundwater Recharge District (CAGR). Under either the Proposed Action or the No Action alternative, membership in CAGR will enable TMUD to utilize CAGR to fulfill any groundwater replenishment obligations that cannot be covered by TMUD's own water resources portfolio.

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Based upon the EA, Reclamation has determined that transfer of 1,481 AFA of CAP water from FWID to TMUD will not significantly impact the environment. Preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required. This decision is based upon the following considerations.

(1) No significant adverse impacts will occur as a result of the Proposed Action. No land-disturbing activities will be needed in order for TMUD to take and use the additional 1,481 AFA of CAP entitlement. Therefore, there will be no direct adverse impacts resulting from the proposed action. Indirect and cumulative impacts from the Proposed Action, mostly related to urbanization of non-developed land, will be identical to the No Action alternative. Under the Proposed Action, the transferred water will be recharged at the LSCRCP which is within the area of hydrological impact of Marana's pumping. There could be some minor localized hydrological benefit from the Proposed Action if, under No Action, replenishment water were to be recharged by the CAGR D outside the area of hydrological impact of Marana's pumping.

(2) The Proposed Action will not result in any effects to public health or safety. CAP water has been recharged at the LSCRCP since June 2000; no detrimental effect on water quality has been identified within the town of Marana water service area down-gradient of the LSCRCP. TMUD potable water consistently meets or exceeds Federal and State drinking water standards.

(3) The FWID water service area is essentially built-out; no direct impacts will occur from the proposed project to unique characteristics of the geographic area such as historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. Over 75 percent of the TMUD project area consists of agricultural fields and vacant and/or undeveloped land. Some of the agricultural land within both the FWID and TMUD service areas are classified as prime and unique. These lands will not be directly affected by the proposed action; however, they will continue to be developed based upon the demand for residential and commercial development, as well as other market conditions. Development patterns are expected to be the same under either the No Action or Proposed Action. Land development will be required to be consistent with both the Marana Habitat Conservation Plan (to protect sensitive species) and Land Development Code Title 20 (which establishes guidelines and procedures for documenting and protecting archaeological resources).

(4) Effects on the quality of the human environment will be essentially the same under either the Proposed Action or the No Action alternative, as development within the service area is guided by Marana's General Plan and Strategic Plan.

(5) Highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks affecting the human environment are not anticipated to occur as a result of this Proposed Action. There will be no land-disturbing activities associated with the Proposed Action, and no new or unique treatment of resources will occur.

(6) The proposed action will not establish a precedent for future actions and will not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. It will merely continue existing recharge activities, albeit with a larger quantity of CAP water. ADWR's permit for the LSCRCP easily accommodates the amount of water proposed to be recharged by the proposed project: The

LSCRCP's currently permitted capacity is 50,000 AFA, with a total storage capacity of 600,000 acre-feet (AF). The annual amount of CAP water stored at this facility over the past several years has been about 42,000 AF, and the total amount of water stored at the LSCRCP at the end of the 2007 reporting year was 236,674 AF. TMUD's current water storage permit from ADWR allows TMUD to store up to 30,000 AFA at the LSCRCP; since 2000, TMUD has recharged between 1,047 and 2,547 AF of CAP water each year, averaging about 1,860 AFA (CAP 2009).

(7) Cumulatively significant impacts are not anticipated to occur as a result of the proposed action. The Proposed Action and No Action alternative are essentially identical with the possible exception of where the CAGR would fulfill TMUD's replenishment obligation under the No Action alternative. Under the Proposed Action, groundwater withdrawal will be replenished by TMUD within the area of hydrologic impact.

(8) No land-disturbing activities are required; therefore, the Proposed Action will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

(9) No federally protected species or areas designated as critical habitat will be affected by the proposed action, since the transfer will not directly cause additional development and subsequent loss of habitat. New development within the TMUD water service area will need to be consistent with the Marana Habitat Conservation Plan, once a Section 10 permit is issued by the Fish and Wildlife Service. As stated earlier, the FWID water service area is essentially totally developed.

(10) The proposed action does not threaten to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Documents related to this action are identified below.

CAP (Central Arizona Project). 2009. Operations/Water Deliveries. Available at <http://www.cap-az.com/deliveries>. Last accessed on August 2, 2009.

Reclamation. 1999. Categorical Exclusion Checklist PXAO-99-34. New Central Arizona Project Water Subcontract for the Town of Marana, and Assignment of CAP Municipal and Industrial Water from the Cortaro-Marana Irrigation District to the Town of Marana. Phoenix, Arizona. August 2.

WestLand Resources, Inc. 2009. Central Arizona Project Water Transfer from Flowing Wells Irrigation District to the Town of Marana Utility Department-Environmental Assessment. Tucson, AZ. July.