

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

**National Environmental Policy Act
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

No. 11-SCAO-015-FONSI

Chino Desalter Phase 3 Expansion
Inland Empire Utilities Agency
San Bernardino County, California

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) is providing funds to the Inland Empire Utilities Agency to drill and equip six wells in the Chino Creek Area to allow for increased collection of brackish groundwater along with four pump stations, three pipelines, and treatment capacity expansion at the existing Chino I & Chino II Desalters. The project will increase desalter groundwater pumping from the lower Chino Basin to 40,000 acre-feet per year (AFY) in accordance with the Optimum Basin Management Plan.

Based on our review of an Initial Study for the *Chino Desalter Phase 3 Expansion* certified pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), we have determined that the proposed financial assistance does not constitute a major Federal action which would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Accordingly, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.

Prepared By: _____ /s/ _____ Date: 9/16/2011
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Recommended: _____ /s/ _____ Date: 9/28/2011
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Reviewed By: _____ /s/ _____ Date: 9/28/2011
Dennis Wolfe, Area Engineer

Approved: _____ /s/ _____ Date: 9/28/2011
William J. Steele, Area Manager



**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Lower Colorado Region
Southern California Area Office
Temecula, California**

The Chino Basin Desalter Authority (CDA) is a joint powers authority responsible for salt removal from the Chino Groundwater Basin in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, California. CDA is comprised of eight local agencies, including the Inland Empire Utility Agency. CDA plans to expand its desalter capacity and prepared an initial study for the *Chino Desalter Phase 3 Expansion* pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Cooperative Agreement No. R10AC35306 provides Federal funds to the Inland Empire Utilities Agency for *Wells 1, 2, and 3 -- Chino Creek Wellfield*. The Agreement covers the activities and costs necessary to design and construct wells 1, 2, and 3 of the Chino Creek Wellfield. The wells are components of the *Chino Desalter Phase 3 Expansion*.

Other components of the *Chino Desalter Phase 3 Expansion* may be funded by Reclamation with future appropriations by the Congress. Reclamation approved a feasibility study for the Lower Chino Dairy Area Desalination Demonstration and Reclamation Project on November 28, 2006.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Parts of the Chino Basin contain groundwater that is contaminated with high salinity and high nitrate concentrations resulting from past agricultural activities. Brackish groundwater in the southern portion of Chino Basin surfaces and overflows into the Santa Ana River, creating substantial water quality problems downstream. The Santa Ana Regional Quality Control Board ordered elimination of this overflow. The Basin is also under a court order to address water quality caused by agricultural practices.

The *Chino Desalter Phase 3 Expansion* will provide operational flexibility, increase efficiency, and allow the agency to increase the available water supply. The project will help the CDA achieve hydraulic control of the Chino Basin to reduce or eliminate migration of brackish groundwater from the southern section of the Basin into the Santa Ana River. The project will also address salinity issues that could limit future use of recycled water in the Chino Basin.

AUTHORITY

Title IX, Subtitle B, Section 9113 of Public Law 111-11 (Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009), amended the Reclamation Wastewater and Groundwater Study and Facilities Act (Title XVI of Public Law 102-575) by adding section 1653: Lower Chino Dairy Area Desalination Demonstration And Reclamation Project. The Secretary, in cooperation with the Chino Basin Watermaster, the Inland Empire Utilities Agency, and the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority and acting under Federal reclamation laws, shall participate in the design, planning, and construction of the Lower Chino Dairy Area desalination demonstration and reclamation project. This authority has been delegated to Reclamation.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The *Chino Desalter Phase 3 Expansion* will increase groundwater extraction and treatment in the south portion of Chino Basin from an existing 27,000 acre-feet per year (AFY) to 40,000 AFY. The project will install the following equipment and components: up to six new wells; new pipelines to deliver raw water to the Chino I and II Desalters; new treatment facilities at the Chino II Desalter to increase capacity; a possible concentrate reduction facility at the Chino II Desalter; up to four pump stations to transfer product water to potable water suppliers; and new pipelines to deliver the product (treated) water to water suppliers. Once installed, this expanded Desalter system will require electricity to operate wells, pump stations and expanded desalter facilities. A small quantity of reject water may be disposed of through the Santa Ana Regional Interceptor line for treatment in Orange County.

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

NEPA requires review of a proposed Federal action to determine its impact on the human environment. Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations direct Federal agencies to cooperate with State and local agencies to the fullest extent possible to reduce duplication between NEPA and State and local requirements (40 CFR 1506.2). Department of Interior regulations for implementing NEPA encourage tiering of environmental documents and provide for adoption of existing environmental documents if, upon evaluation by a responsible official, it is found to comply with relevant provisions of the CEQ regulations.

Reclamation staff reviewed the Initial Study for the *Chino Desalter Phase 3 Expansion* (California State Clearinghouse No. 2010101061) and concluded that the document adequately identifies and discloses the reasonably foreseeable environmental effects of the proposed action. We adopt the document in accordance with regulations for implementing NEPA promulgated by the CEQ at 40 CFR 1506.3 and by the Department of the Interior at 43 CFR 46.320(a).

FINDINGS

The CEQA evaluation determined that either no impact or less than significant impacts would be associated with the issues of agriculture, land use and planning, mineral resources, population and housing, recreation and utilities and services. The issues of air quality, biology, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, noise, public services and transportation and traffic require the implementation of mitigation measures to reduce impacts to a less than significant level. Based on the information in the project Initial Study, the CDA adopted a Mitigated Negative Declaration. No environmental impact report was required.

Clean Air Act

The South Coast Air Basin is a designated non-attainment area for ozone, PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}. Project construction must comply with regional fugitive dust reduction practices required by South Coast Air Quality Management District Rule 403. The South Coast Air Basin is designated as an attainment area with a maintenance plan for carbon monoxide (CO) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). Estimated air emissions will not exceed the Clean Air Act conformity applicability *de minimis* thresholds [40 CFR 93.153 (b)] and will not be regionally significant. No conformity determination is required.

Water Resources

The project could increase the local water supply. The project will also provide hydraulic control, a requirement of the Regional Water Quality Control Board Basin Plan for the Chino Basin intended to protect water quality downstream of the Basin.

The project is expected to result in a decline in groundwater level of about 30 feet relative to the current groundwater levels. For the local water producer in the vicinity of the new Chino Creek Wellfield where the new CDA wells will be installed, an adverse impact may occur. Mitigation will be provided to the estimated eight (8) private well owners/operators within the Chino Creek Wellfield area when the well owner/operator cannot produce enough groundwater to meet their needs and the cause of reduced production can be demonstrated to be the expansion of the desalter program. The mitigation will restore the lost production capacity to ensure that the well owner/operator can produce enough groundwater to meet the owner's needs or provide an alternate source of water to replace the lost production capacity.

Operation of the Desalter Phase 3 Expansion project could mobilize existing contaminated groundwater plumes within the Chino Basin. Mitigation was included to ensure that potential adverse impact to existing contaminated plumes can be controlled to a less than significant impact level.

Land Use

Phase 3 Desalter Expansion will not affect any existing land use designations. Implementation has no potential to alter the physical arrangements of existing communities in the project area.

Indian Trust Assets

No known Indian Trust Assets will be affected.

Socioeconomic Resources

Adverse socioeconomic impacts are not expected. The project will provide drought year reliability, improve local water supplies, sustain municipal water demands, and support economic vitality in the area. The project will not induce population growth. No housing or people will be displaced. No communities will be divided. No effects to public health and safety were identified. Economic or social effects are not intended by themselves to require preparation of an EIS (40 CFR 1508.14).

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action will not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. No impacts relevant to Environmental Justice are anticipated.

Endangered Species Act

Direct project impacts will occur on land that has been previously developed or disturbed by human activity for agricultural, residential, commercial or industrial uses. At three locations with limited biological resource values, mitigation was identified to reduce impacts before construction begins. The Initial Study found no evidence that the project would affect wildlife resources. No significant indirect effect on riparian habitat in the Prado Basin is expected.

Cultural Resources

No historic properties were identified within the Area of Potential Effect. No buildings will be affected.

Wetlands and Floodplain

Chino 1 Well C area contains a weedy wetland and the site is adjacent to wetland habitat. Santa Ana River North Staging Area is assumed to be located in the denuded lot adjacent to a horse stable area and to sensitive habitat. Santa Ana River South Staging area is probably located on upper terrace of Santa Ana River where minimal biological values exist. Avoidance of nesting season and other measures have been taken to minimize effects. Phase 3 Desalter Expansion facilities will be outside the 100 year floodplain identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The pipeline in Hamner Avenue would be bored and jacked under the Santa Ana River. Hamner Avenue is located within Zone A, which is within the 100-year flood zone, from north of citrus to the south end of the proposed pipeline just south of the River. The Santa Ana River is also within Zone A. The pipeline would be placed within the roadway and under the River and would not change the interface with flood waters.

Clean Water Act

Implementation of the proposed project will improve groundwater quality in the Basin by removing contaminated groundwater. The project will treat and dispose of contaminants through the SARI brine line or through creation of concentrate pellets. The quality of product water and contamination level of brine discharged to the SARI line will comply with regulatory standards.

A Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will be prepared to identify Best Management Practices that prevent construction pollutants from contacting stormwater. The SWPPP will be developed with the goal of controlling all pollutants and their sources, including sediment and nonstormwater discharges both during and following construction. The SWPPP and the monitoring program for construction will be consistent with the California General Construction Activity Storm Water Permit and the Santa Ana Region Areawide Urban Storm Water Runoff NPDES Permit.

Geology

A potential concern was identified regarding strong seismic groundshaking and related failure, and some concern about soil erosion. A qualified geotechnical engineer or geologist will evaluate subsurface soils during initial phases of project construction.

Hazardous Waste Sites

No underground storage tanks, hazardous waste generators, landfills, or other potentially hazardous materials sources were identified within the limits of the proposed project. Hazardous materials are used routinely in support of treatment operations and some project activities may generate hazardous wastes. Use and disposal of hazardous or toxic materials will be managed in accordance with existing laws and regulations. Appropriate engineering controls will be implemented to minimize emissions from the facility and to minimize the potential for an accidental release.

Prime and Unique Agriculture

There will be no conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use and no impacts to agricultural resources.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

No creeks will be directly disturbed. No Wild and Scenic Rivers are designated in the project area.

Coastal Zone

The project is entirely outside the California Coastal Zone boundary.

Cumulative Effects

No cumulatively considerable adverse impacts were identified.

AGENCY CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Fish and Wildlife Service

The proposed action will not affect listed species or critical habitat. No consultation with Fish and Wildlife is required under interagency cooperation regulations for the Endangered Species Act, 50 CFR Part 402.

California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)

SHPO consultation is required under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Regional Archaeologist staff made a finding of No Historic Properties Affected and prepared a submittal letter to the California SHPO.

Natural Resources Conservation Service

No farmlands will be converted. Consultation under the Farmland Protection Policy Act is not required.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS

Cultural Resources

1. Consultation with the California SHPO is required in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
2. Should cultural resources be discovered during project construction, all ground disturbing activities in the area of the archeological resource will stop and the Regional Archeologist, Patricia Hicks, will be contacted at 702-293-8075. Construction will not resume in the area of the discovery until all mitigative measures developed in consultation with the SHPO have been completed.

REFERENCE:

Tom Dodson & Associates, Initial Study for *Chino Desalter Phase 3 Expansion*, October 2010.