BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

Unmeasured Flow Study, Arizona

YAO-FONSI 24-01

Lower Colorado River Region 8 – Yuma Area Office

Lower Colorado River Floodplain

U.S. Department of the Interior

November 2023

Mission Statements

The U.S. Department of the Interior protects and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provides scientific and other information about those resources; honors its trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated Island Communities.

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.

Introduction and Proposed Action

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and based on a thorough analysis of the potential environmental impacts presented in the Environmental Assessment (EA), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has determined that implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in a significant impact on the quality of the human and natural environment within or adjacent to the project area, therefore an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

The Proposed Action consists of establishing nine linear transects covering area on both sides of the Colorado River (River), each including 12 groundwater wells, a single stilling well for flow rate measurement, and a monitoring well between each transect to monitor salinity levels. Accordingly, this FONSI is submitted to document environmental review and evaluation of the Proposed Action Alternative.

Data collection from these nine transects will help to effectively respond to the salinity changes before reaching the Northern International Boundary (NIB) where water is delivered in compliance with the 1944 Water Treaty with Mexico. Water salinity levels are required have an annual average salinity of no more than 115 parts per million (ppm) plus or minus 30 ppm (salinity differential) as measured by the U.S. over the annual salinity of water arriving at Imperial Dam. Current salinity and flow measurements are monitored at Imperial Dam as well as the NIB however, water is conveyed into the river channel between Imperial Dam and the NIB from drainage pumping. Drainage pumping in the Yuma, Gila, and Wellton areas are necessary to maintain groundwater levels that are compatible with farming and urban infrastructure including homes, businesses, streets, septic tanks, and underground utilities such as sewer and water facilities and power lines. The additional drainage water tends to have higher salinity content, which occasionally must be redirected from reaching the river channel to prevent non-compliance with the Mexico Water Treaty.

Previously water with higher salinity content was managed with excess flows resulting in more water within the River, than over the last 20 years. Furthermore, completion of Reclamation's Brock (storage) Reservoir in 2010 provided the ability to better manage excess flows by increasing temporary storage capacity to accommodate discrepancies between water orders and actual deliveries to irrigation districts in the United States. In effect limiting the drainage input allowed towards Mexico water deliveries. Increasing the ability to measure between Imperial Dam and the NIB will give Reclamation a better capability to manage the groundwater levels and the input effects on the River.

Resource Analysis

The analysis presented in the EA focused on the resource areas identified as potentially affected by the alternatives considered, including the No Action alternative. Reclamation determined that the potential effects on Energy Policy, Fire Management, Public Health and Safety, and Travel Management were negligible and did not conduct further analysis on these topics. Reclamation assessed the potential effects on land use, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, Indian trust assets, environmental justice and socioeconomic conditions, hazardous materials or

solid waste, noise, water resources, geology and soils, visual resources, floodplains, recreation, and cumulative impacts. When applicable, the potential for impacts was reduced by considering the effect of mitigation measures and best management practices (BMPs). Reclamation identified several measures and BMPs to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects that may result from the implementation of the Proposed Action. A summary of the environmental commitments and practices Reclamation has pledged to follow are listed below:

Land Use

- Reclamation will coordinate with landowners prior to construction to ensure notifications and/or appropriate access agreements are in place.

Air Quality

- Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be followed to limit dust and PM10 emissions, including at a minimum:
- Vehicle and equipment traffic will be limited to paved or graveled roads as much as possible.
- Where equipment traffic, excavation, or demolition is required outside of paved or graveled roads, water or soil binders will be applied to exposed surfaces.
- Equipment will be properly maintained to minimize exhaust emissions, and equipment idling would be limited.
- Ground disturbing activities will cease temporarily when wind speeds at the site exceed 20 miles per hour.

Biological Resources

- Project construction activities will avoid and minimize impacts to vegetation and wildlife to the extent practical. By largely avoiding and minimizing direct impacts to wetland, riparian, and riverine habitats, impacts to listed species will be beneficial, insignificant, or discountable.
- Project activities within the Yuma East Wetlands will be conducted during the months of October through February, which is outside the migratory and breeding seasons for listed bird species.
- Access to Transect location will utilize existing roads. Some access roads will require upgrades consisting of trimming back vegetation to reestablish full access.
- Drill mud dispersed on site will target areas devoid of vegetation and/or areas with salt cedar vegetation.
- Construction vehicles will be washed before working at the site to prevent the spread of invasive species.
- Trash and food materials will be properly contained within vehicles or closed refuse bins while on site and will be regularly removed from the construction site for proper disposal.
- Vegetation, particularly woody riparian species, will be avoided to the extent practical.

Cultural Resources

- If during any activities of the Proposed Action any sites, buildings, structures, or objects not addressed in this assessment are discovered, activities will cease in the vicinity of the resource. Reclamation's Environmental Group Manager and project archaeologist will be notified immediately. Reclamation shall ensure that the stipulations of 36 CFR Part 800.11 are satisfied before activities near the previously unidentified property resume.

Indian Trust Assets

- Reclamation will coordinate with Tribes prior to project implementation to ensure awareness of project activities and to avoid impacting any ongoing Tribal restoration activities occurring within and/or adjacent to proposed Transect areas.

Hazardous Material or Solid Waste

- A site-specific contingency spill plan will be developed and implemented. The plan should consist of reporting guidelines in the event of a spill, good housekeeping techniques, and employee training in the use of required equipment and proper handling of potentially hazardous materials.
- Hazardous materials used for this project will be contained within vessels engineered for safe storage.
- Areas for refueling of equipment will be chosen to prevent any accidental fuel leakage from contaminating surface water, groundwater, or soils.
- Drill mud and other drill cuttings will not be dispersed on Tribal lands.

Water Resources

- During construction, no refueling of equipment should be permitted within 100 feet of the Colorado River, or any other surface water conveyance system.
- Clean Water Act Section 404 and 401 permits will be obtained for the placement of stilling well PVC pipe along the banks of the river prior to project commencing.
- Construction General Permits for stormwater, if necessary due to acreage disturbance, will be obtained prior to project commencing.

Recreation

- Reclamation is committed to working with the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area and Tribes to ensure public use areas are not impacted during construction.

Approved: MICHAEL NORRIS Digitally signed by MICHAEL NORRIS Date: 2023.11.09 09:48:35 -07'00' Date: 11/9/23

Michael Norris
Area Manager, Yuma Field Office