
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) is authorized by the Wellton-Mohawk Transfer Act of June 2000 (P.L. 106-221, Appendix A) to transfer title to the facilities of the Wellton-Mohawk Division (Division) of the Gila Project and lands in or adjacent to the Gila Project to the Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District (District). This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) has been prepared by the Department of the Interior (DOI), Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to evaluate the potential impacts of the proposed title transfer.

The Division, located in Yuma County, Arizona is currently owned by the United States, administered by Reclamation, and operated by the District. The Gila Project was originally authorized under a finding of feasibility approved by the President on June 21, 1937. The project was reauthorized by the Gila Project Act of July 30, 1947 (P.L. 272) for the purpose of reclaiming and irrigating lands in the State of Arizona and other beneficial uses.

Reclamation is an agency of the DOI established by Congress in 1902, whose mission is to manage, develop, and protect water resources in 17 western states in the interest of the American public. Reclamation is responsible for administration of the Gila Project for the United States and for management of federal lands in Yuma County that were acquired or withdrawn from the public domain for purposes of the Gila Project.

The Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District is a political subdivision of the State of Arizona constituted to own lands and facilities and to contract with Reclamation for diversion of Colorado River water for delivery to its landowners. Created in 1951 by action of the state legislature, the District begins approximately 12 miles east of the City of Yuma and extends upstream along the Gila River corridor for approximately 45 miles, as shown on Map 1-1.

Reclamation and the District signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in July 1998, amended May 11, 2001, regarding the title transfer process (Appendix A). The MOA defines the method and principles by which title to the Division works, facilities, and certain federally owned lands would be transferred from the United States to the District.

This Environmental Impact Statement, when final, will serve as NEPA compliance to allow the Secretary to execute a quit claim deed for the facilities and lands proposed in this title transfer. It is anticipated that at the conclusion of the NEPA process, the Secretary will prepare a Record of Decision (ROD) and execute the quit claim deed pursuant to that ROD.

1 **1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

2 As part of the second phase of the National Performance Review (REGO II), Reclamation is
3 undertaking a program to transfer title of facilities that could be efficiently and effectively
4 managed by nonfederal entities and that are not identified as having national importance.
5 This effort recognizes Reclamation's commitment to a federal government that works better
6 and costs less, in concert with the goals of the REGO II. The transfer of title will divest
7 Reclamation of the responsibility for the operation, maintenance, management, regulation
8 of, and liability for the project facilities and appurtenant lands to an entity that has
9 demonstrated its ability to best manage the project.

10 Under REGO II, Reclamation intends to transfer title and responsibility for certain facilities
11 to entities that are currently operating and maintaining the facilities and managing the lands.
12 The transfer of title would consolidate management responsibility with the District, and
13 thereby allow the District to have greater authority in the management of growth in the
14 Wellton-Mohawk Valley, protect against encroachment on agriculture, and consolidate
15 ownership of lands, facilities, and the Gila River Flood Channel. This consolidation of
16 management obligations with the District is consistent with the intent of REGO II, and
17 achieves the purposes of the federal action by transferring title to an entity suited to
18 accepting such responsibilities (DOI, 1996).

19 **2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES**

20 Two alternatives are evaluated in this EIS: (1) the No Action Alternative, under which
21 facilities of the Wellton-Mohawk Division of the Gila Project and lands within or adjacent
22 to the Gila Project would remain in federal ownership, and (2) the Proposed
23 Action/Preferred Alternative under which Reclamation would transfer title to the facilities of
24 the Wellton-Mohawk Division of the Gila Project and lands within or adjacent to the Gila
25 Project to the District. Several alternatives were considered during the public scoping
26 process in addition to those included in the draft EIS, but were eliminated from further
27 detailed analysis as described in Section 2.3.

28 **2.1.1 No Action Alternative**

29 Under the No Action Alternative, federal lands owned by Reclamation would not be
30 transferred to or purchased by the District, with the possible exception of a 120-acre federal
31 parcel being considered as the future site of a natural gas-fired electric generating facility
32 (see Section 1.6.5). The facility rights-of-way would remain in federal ownership and
33 continue to be managed in conjunction with the operation and maintenance of the irrigation
34 and drainage systems, the Gila River Flood Channel and adjacent mitigation areas, and other
35 features of the Division. Other federal lands considered under the Proposed Action/Preferred
36 Alternative would continue to be administered by Reclamation for an undefined period.

1 During this period, Reclamation may make available a minor amount of land for public
2 purposes such as parks, schools, and governmental administrative areas.

3 **2.1.2 Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative**

4 The Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative involves transfer of ownership of the federal
5 facilities and lands of the Division. The facilities to be transferred consist of the following:

- 6 ~~///~~ Irrigation canals and laterals extending throughout the District
- 7 ~~///~~ The Wellton-Mohawk Conveyance Channel (main drain) and various small drains
- 8 ~~///~~ Protective dikes that prevent damage to canals from overland runoff
- 9 ~~///~~ Floodways that convey overland runoff to the Gila River channel
- 10 ~~///~~ The Gila River Flood Channel and related mitigation areas
- 11 ~~///~~ Various buildings used for the operation and maintenance of the Division

12 The lands included in the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative consist of rights-of-way
13 and other federal lands in and adjacent to the District aggregating to approximately 57,418
14 acres, of which approximately half are rights-of-way and easements. The lands would either
15 be transferred to the District at no additional cost or purchased by the District at fair market
16 value, depending on their ownership history. The lands are divided into the following
17 categories.

18 ~~///~~ ***Rights-of-way and easements for facilities.*** Rights-of-way consist of lands used to
19 construct Division facilities. The rights-of-way include narrow parcels of land whose
20 alignments follow canals, dikes, and floodways, and larger tracts that underlie the
21 Gila River Flood Channel and adjacent mitigation areas. These lands and rights are
22 essential parts of the facilities and their acquisition costs were included in the
23 District's construction repayment obligation. Consequently, these lands would be
24 transferred to the District at no additional cost.

25 ~~///~~ ***Lands and rights-of-way acquired from GVPD and MMWCD.*** These are lands and
26 rights-of-way acquired from the Gila Valley Power District (GVPD) and the
27 Mohawk Municipal Water Conservation District (MMWCD) for Division purposes
28 but which have not been used for facility rights-of-way or farm unit development.
29 Their acquisition costs were included in the District's repayment obligation and,
30 therefore, would be transferred to the District without additional costs.

31 ~~///~~ ***Other lands acquired or withdrawn by Reclamation.*** These are (1) lands that
32 Reclamation had withdrawn from the public domain but not used for project
33 purposes; and (2) lands that Reclamation purchased from private landowners under

1 the authorities of the Salinity Control Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-320) and the Salt River
2 Pima-Maricopa Indian Community Water Rights Settlement Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-
3 512). The acquisition costs of these lands were not included in the District's
4 repayment obligation. Consequently, these lands would be made available for the
5 District to purchase at fair market value.

6 **3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

7 The effects of the title transfer on environmental resources are primarily related to potential
8 changes in land use that may occur after the title transfer. The geographic scope of this DEIS
9 is the Wellton-Mohawk Valley, which for purposes of this analysis is defined as the 47-mile
10 long, east-west corridor along the Gila River that encompasses the District. Table 1
11 summarizes the effects of the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action/Preferred
12 Alternative.

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TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF IMPACTS

Resource/Issue	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative
Land Resources	Reclamation lands involved in the project would not be transferred or made available for purchase by the District. The rate and distribution of future land development would be subject to local planning and zoning.	Reclamation would transfer to the District ownership of approximately 29,091 acres of rights-of-way and easements for facilities and the Gila River Flood Channel, and ownership of approximately 28,327 acres of additional land. Future land management goals would integrate the uses of the transferred land into the prevailing agricultural and open space character of the project area. Development for community or commercial purposes would follow the planning envisioned in the Yuma County 2010 Plan.
Geologic Resources	Development of sand and gravel operations would continue in the project area, as demanded by local and regional development. Any development on federal lands would require NEPA compliance, and, if located within the jurisdictional waters of the United States, a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit.	The potential for development of sand and gravel operations is the same as with the No Action Alternative. Future sand and gravel development on transfer lands outside the jurisdictional waters of the United States would no longer require compliance with NEPA. Future sand and gravel development on transfer lands inside the jurisdictional waters of the United States would still require compliance with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.
Soil Resources	Reclamation and District programs would not affect the soil resources and their use in the District for the foreseeable future.	Reclamation and District programs would not affect the soil resources and their use in the District for the foreseeable future. No loss of prime and unique farmland is expected as a result of the title transfer.
Water Resources	There would be no change from the District's current water entitlement or water supply operations.	There would be no change from the District's current water entitlement or water supply operations.
Biological Resources	Any federal action in the project area that may affect a plant or animal species listed as threatened or endangered must continue to comply with Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA.	Transferring lands out of federal ownership would remove the federal compliance requirements with Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA, except for the Gila River Flood Channel lands, to which the ESA will apply for the life of the flood channel project.
Cultural Resources	Cultural resources on federal lands would remain under federal control and subject to the federal protections provided by the NHPA, ARPA, NAGPRA, and Executive Order 13007.	Cultural resources located on the transferred lands would lose federal protection provided by the NHPA, ARPA, NAGPRA, and Executive Order 13007. The fieldwork program and management plan are contemplated for completion prior to the implementation of the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative.

Resource/Issue	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative
Socioeconomic	No changes in the amount of federal land included in PILT payment calculations would occur. The No Action Alternative would not cause a change in employment.	Given the abundance of federal land holdings in Yuma County, the reduction in federal land due to the Proposed Action would not have a significant effect on PILT payments to Yuma County. Commercial and community development on transferred land would not significantly increase the cost of county services over No Action conditions and may increase tax revenues to the county. There would be no effect on employment.
Public Health and Safety	The public health and safety of the District would remain unchanged from current conditions.	No perceived changes in operation after the transfer of title that would affect public health and safety in the District.
Air Quality	The air quality of the District would remain unchanged from current conditions.	There are no perceived changes in operation resulting from the transfer of title that would significantly affect the District's air quality from agricultural or developmental disturbances.
Transportation	Transportation routes and facilities in the District would remain unchanged from their current conditions.	The Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative does not involve any new physical modification or expansion of the service infrastructure that would generate additional traffic or otherwise influence transportation systems.
Recreation	Recreation opportunities in the District would remain unchanged from current conditions.	Potential indirect impacts may result from the Proposed Action associated with the change in ownership of certain lands within the District. The District does not intend to restrict public access to lands proposed for transfer except on tracts that may be developed or established for conservation purposes.
Indian Trust Assets	No Indian Trust assets are known in the project area.	No Indian Trust assets are known in the project area.
Environmental Justice	No environmental justice issues have been identified for the No Action Alternative.	The effects of the proposed title transfer would not be disproportionately focused on minority or low-income populations.