
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) is authorized by the Wellton-Mohawk Transfer Act of June 20, 2000, (P.L. 106-221) to transfer title to the facilities and associated adjacent lands of the Wellton-Mohawk Division of the Gila Project (Division) to the Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District (District). This Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) has been prepared by the United States Department of the Interior (DOI), Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to document the potential environmental impacts of the proposed title transfer and comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

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for administration of the Gila Project and for management of federal lands in Yuma County that were acquired or withdrawn from the public domain for purposes of the Gila Project.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

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 primary purpose of reclaiming and irrigating lands in the State of Arizona.

Reclamation and the District signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in July 1998, as amended, defining the method and procedures by which title to the Division works, facilities, and certain federally owned lands would be transferred from the United States to the District. Following the publication of this FEIS, the Regional Director, Lower Colorado Region, as delegated by the Secretary, will prepare a Record of Decision (ROD) to document the agency's decision in this matter.

1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

As part of the second phase of the National Performance Review, Reclamation is undertaking a program to transfer title to facilities of limited regional importance that could be efficiently managed by non-federal entities. This effort recognizes Reclamation's commitment to a federal government that works better and costs less. The transfer of title

1 would divest Reclamation of the responsibility and liability for the operation and
2 maintenance of the Division.

3 The proposed title transfer would consolidate management responsibility with the District,
4 and thereby allow the District to have greater flexibility in influencing growth in the
5 Wellton-Mohawk Valley, limit development encroachment on productive agricultural lands,
6 and consolidate ownership of lands and facilities to protect the Gila River Flood Channel.

7 **2.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES**

8 Two alternatives are evaluated in this FEIS: the No Action Alternative, and the Proposed
9 Action/Preferred Alternative. Several other alternatives were considered during the public
10 scoping process, but these were eliminated from further detailed analysis as described in
11 Section 2.3.

12 **2.1 No Action Alternative**

13 Under the No Action Alternative, federal lands administered by Reclamation would not be
14 transferred to the District. The facilities would remain in federal ownership and continue to
15 be used for the operation and maintenance of the irrigation and drainage systems, the Gila
16 River Flood Channel and adjacent mitigation areas, and other features of the Division. Other
17 federal lands considered under the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative would continue to
18 be administered by Reclamation for an undefined period. Consistent with established
19 policy, Reclamation would consider requests for uses of Division lands for purposes such as
20 transportation and infrastructure, and public purposes such as parks and schools.
21 Reclamation may identify certain Division lands as excess to Reclamation needs and
22 appropriate for disposal.

23 **2.2 Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative**

24 The Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative involves transfer of ownership of the federal
25 facilities and certain lands of the Division. The facilities to be transferred consist of the
26 following:

- 27 ➤ Irrigation canals and laterals extending throughout the District
- 28 ➤ The Wellton-Mohawk Conveyance Channel (main drain) and various small drains
- 29 ➤ Protective dikes that prevent damage to canals from overland runoff
- 30 ➤ Floodways that convey overland runoff to the Gila River channel
- 31 ➤ The Gila River Flood Channel and related environmental mitigation areas
- 32 ➤ Various buildings and structures associated with the operation and maintenance of
- 33 the Division

1 The lands included in the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative consist of rights-of-way
2 (ROWs) and other federal lands in and adjacent to the District aggregating to approximately
3 47,626 acres, of which nearly 60 percent are ROWs and easements. Certain lands would be
4 transferred to the District at no additional cost. Other lands would be purchased by the
5 District at fair market value. The lands are divided into the following categories:

- 6 ➤ ***Rights-of-way and easements for facilities.*** ROWs consist of lands used to directly
7 accommodate construction or facilities that were a part of the Division repayment
8 contract. These lands would be transferred to the District at no additional cost.

- 9 ➤ ***Lands and rights-of-way acquired from GVPD and MMWCD.*** These are lands and
10 ROWs acquired from the Gila Valley Power District (GVPD) and the Mohawk
11 Municipal Water Conservation District (MMWCD) for Division purposes. Their
12 acquisition costs were included in the District's repayment obligation and would be
13 transferred to the District at no additional cost.

- 14 ➤ ***Additional Lands to be Purchased.*** These include lands that Reclamation withdrew
15 from the public domain but were not used for project purposes, and lands that
16 Reclamation purchased from private landowners under the authorities of the Salinity
17 Control Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-320) and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian
18 Community Water Rights Settlement Act of 1988 (P.L. 100-512). The acquisition
19 costs of these lands were not included in the District's repayment obligation, and
20 would be purchased by the District at market value.

21 3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

22 The basic operation of the Division is anticipated to remain unchanged under either
23 alternative. Any additional environmental impacts from the implementation of the Proposed
24 Action would be primarily related to potential changes in land use that may subsequently
25 occur.

26 The geographic scope of this FEIS is the Wellton-Mohawk Valley, which for purposes of
27 this analysis is defined as the 47-mile long, east-west corridor along the Gila River that
28 contains the District. The table below summarizes the effects of the No Action Alternative
29 and the Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative.

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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 purchased by the District. The rate and distribution of future land development would be subject to Reclamation decisions regarding disposal of these lands, guided by local planning and zoning. Local demand would motivate any net change in land development rates or uses.	Reclamation would transfer to the District ownership of approximately 28,197 acres of rights-of-way and easements for facilities and the Gila River Flood Channel, and ownership of approximately 19,429 acres of additional land. Land management would be integrated into the prevailing agricultural, open space, and other use trends in the area. Future land uses would be subject to local planning and zoning decisions and subject to the planning envisioned in the Yuma County 2010 Plan.
Geologic Resources	Development of sand and gravel operations would continue in the project area, as required for local and regional development. Any development on federal lands would require NEPA compliance, and, if located within jurisdictional waters of the United States, a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit.	Potential for sand and gravel development and operations would continue in the project area in the same way as with the No Action Alternative. Future sand and gravel development on transfer lands outside the jurisdictional waters of the United States may no longer require NEPA compliance. Future sand and gravel development on transfer lands inside jurisdictional waters of the United States would still require a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit, which may include NEPA compliance.
Soil Resources	Reclamation and District programs would not affect soil resources or their use in the District for the foreseeable future. No loss of prime and unique farmland would be expected.	District programs would not affect soil resources or their use in the District for the foreseeable future. No loss of prime and unique farmland would be expected.
Water Resources	Current District water entitlement or water supply operations would be unchanged.	Current District water entitlement or water supply operations would be unchanged.
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 Endangered Species Act (ESA) and NEPA.	ESA consultation with the USFWS was completed with the finding that the title transfer may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect any federally threatened or endangered species. Transferring lands out of federal ownership would remove future federal compliance requirements of Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA, except for the Gila River Flood Channel lands, which are subject to Section 7 ESA requirements for the flood channel project. Non-federal lands are subject to ESA under Section 10. Actions requiring Section 404 permits in jurisdictional waters of the United States would require ESA Section 7 compliance.

Resource/Issue	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative
Cultural Resources	Cultural resources on federal lands would remain under federal control and be subject to federal management pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and other federal laws.	A comprehensive program to identify cultural resource sites has been completed. Cultural resources, including currently undiscovered sites, located on the transferred lands would pass from federal management and protection. Arizona Antiquity laws may provide some protection for cultural resources discovered after transfer. National Register eligible cultural resources would either be protected through the use of conservation easements or mitigated in a manner set forth in a Historic Properties Treatment Plan. Certain lands with cultural resources not transferred may be considered for cooperative management arrangements between tribes and Reclamation.
Socioeconomic	No changes in the amount of federal land included in Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) payment calculations would occur. The No Action Alternative would not cause a change in employment. Development trends would remain unchanged.	Given the level 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. Employment may increase.
Public Health and Safety	Public health and safety in the District would continue under current conditions.	There are no foreseeable changes in District operation following title transfer that would affect public health and safety.
Air Quality	Air quality in the District would continue unchanged from current conditions and trends, regulated by the State of Arizona.	There are no foreseeable changes in operation resulting directly from the transfer of title that would significantly change the air quality from current agricultural practices, foreseeable economic development, or other sources. Potential indirect impacts may result from a change in ownership of certain lands within the District. However, actions occurring on lands following a transfer would be subject to separate air quality regulation and permitting by the State of Arizona.
Transportation	Transportation routes and facilities in the Division would remain unchanged from current conditions.	Transportation routes and facilities in the District would likely remain unchanged from current conditions.
Recreation	Recreation opportunities in the District would remain unchanged from current conditions.	Indirect impacts may result associated with the change of ownership of certain lands. The District does not currently plan to restrict public access except where access is incompatible with other uses, development, or resource protection needs.
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.

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