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**United States Department of the Interior**

**Bureau of Reclamation  
Mid-Pacific Region  
Sacramento, California**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**THE TEMPORARY ACQUISITION OF WATER  
FROM MERCED IRRIGATION DISTRICT FOR SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY REFUGES  
FOR WATER SUPPLY YEAR 2000 - 2001**

Recommended by:

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Water Acquisition Program Manager

Concur:

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Regional Environmental Officer

Approved by:

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Regional Resources Manager, Sacramento

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
October 12, 2000

**FINAL**

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**October 12, 2000**

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FONSI Number: 00-11-MP

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**The Temporary Acquisition of Water from Merced Irrigation District for San Joaquin Valley  
Refuges for Water Supply Year 2000 - 2001**

There is a need to purchase water during the 2000/2001 water supply year to meet incremental Level 4 requirements to provide critical wetland habitats for the benefit of migratory waterfowl, other migratory birds, and wetland-dependent wildlife. Pursuant to Section 3406(d)(2) of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) must provide 80 percent of the full Level 4 water requirements in 2000/2001.

The Proposed Action is for the Department of Interior (Interior) to purchase up to 25,000 acre-feet of water from Merced Irrigation District (Merced ID) during the period of October through December, 2000 to meet incremental Level 4 water supply requirements for the water service year 2000/2001 for San Joaquin Valley wildlife refuges. The wildlife refuges that may receive the acquired water are: Grasslands Resource Conservation District, Kern National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), San Luis NWR (West Bear Creek Unit), Los Banos Wildlife Area (WA), and North Grasslands WA (Salt Slough Unit). A secondary beneficial use of the purchased water is to provide increased in-stream flows during the fall in the Merced and Lower San Joaquin Rivers that will benefit fall-run chinook salmon. These flows will enhance Merced and Lower San Joaquin River flows over and above those already planned which benefit attraction and spawning flows for Chinook salmon.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared that evaluates the potential environmental impacts, both beneficial and adverse, associated with the Proposed Action and a No-Action Alternative. The EA is attached for reference. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, Reclamation has found that the purchase of water from Merced ID for use at the San Joaquin Valley wildlife refuges would not result in a significant adverse impact on the environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is based upon the following:

- § This water is in surplus of Merced ID's needs for the water year 2000/2001, and will be provided from storage at Lake McClure behind Exchequer Dam with the point of diversion being downstream at the Crocker-Huffman Dam (a diversion dam) on the Merced River. The

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source of Merced ID's water supply comes from water available under an appropriative water right (License #11395, issued by the SWRCB).

- \$ Merced ID will enter into a refill obligation agreement with Reclamation to ensure that the scheduling of the refill of Lake McClure after the proposed transfer will not adversely affect the State Water Project (SWP) or Central Valley Project (CVP). Without this water purchase, water available for acquisition from Merced ID in the fall of 2000 is water previously collected to storage or would be stored under Merced's water rights.
- \$ To the extent that purchased water is available for export, once the water is conveyed to the Delta, it will be wheeled by SWP pumping facilities (Banks Pumping Plant) into the California Aqueduct and conveyed to the O'Neill Forebay. From the O'Neill Forebay, the water would be either conveyed to the Delta Mendota Canal or conveyed via the California Aqueduct, south for delivery to the various wildlife refuges in the San Joaquin Valley. Conveyance to the refuge boundaries will be accomplished using water district conveyance facilities.
- \$ No changes in land use will occur as a result of the Proposed Action.
- \$ The delivery of Level 4 incremental water supplies to the wildlife refuges will have a secondary beneficial impact to fishery resources and riparian areas as a result of an increase in the in-stream flows.
- \$ The Proposed Action is not likely to adversely affect Federal or State-listed special status species.
- \$ The improvement of the habitats at the San Joaquin Valley Wildlife refuges are also expected to result in a slight to moderate increase in recreational opportunities.
- \$ Power generation on the Merced River would not be significantly impacted by the Proposed Action.
- \$ Flows would fluctuate within historical levels thus precluding impact to any cultural resources.
- \$ The absence of Indian Trust Assets in areas affected by the water transfer precludes any impact.

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- \$ No adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economical effects, on minority populations and low-income populations is expected as a result of the Proposed Action.
  
- \$ The Proposed Action would not contribute to a cumulatively significant adverse impact when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions given the relatively small amount of water involved, and the short-term and temporary nature of the water acquisition.
  
- \$ The acquired water to be exported from the Delta will be pumped through excess SWP capacity, in compliance with all existing environmental laws, regulations, and agreements.