

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Eastern Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area Habitat Protection Project (Mouren
Cattle Company parcels)

FONSI 14-22-MP

Recommended by:



Date: 9/9/14

Douglas Kleinsmith
Natural Resource Specialist
Mid-Pacific Regional Office
Bureau of Reclamation

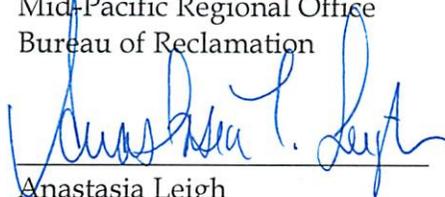
Concurred by:



Date: 9/9/14

Dan Strait
Program Manager, Habitat
Restoration Program
Mid-Pacific Regional Office
Bureau of Reclamation

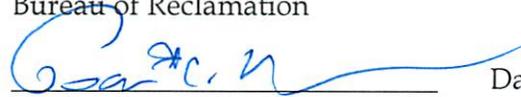
Approved by:



Date: 9/10/2014

Anastasia Leigh
Regional Environmental Officer
Mid-Pacific Region
Bureau of Reclamation

Approved by:



Date: 9/15/14

Cesar Blanco
Chief, Project Implementation Division
Pacific Southwest Region
Fish and Wildlife Service



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Mid-Pacific Region

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office
Sacramento, California

Background

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) propose to provide funds to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to help purchase up to 2,240 acres in the eastern Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area owned by the Mouren Cattle Company. Initial funding would be \$822,074 from the Central Valley Project Improvement Act Habitat Restoration Program (HRP) and \$80,000 from the Central Valley Project Conservation Program (CVPCP). The proposed acquisition parcels are located on the eastern slope of the Ciervo Hills, a low-lying north-south trending range that forms the western edge of the San Joaquin Valley between Panoche Creek and Cantua Creek at the border of western Fresno County.

The CVPCP and HRP help mitigate the past impacts of Reclamation's Central Valley Project (CVP) on threatened and endangered species, and minimize future impacts. The CVPCP and HRP also help meet mitigation required by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) Decision 1641 (D-1641). D-1641 concurred with a Reclamation petition to expand Reclamation's authorized place of use to include certain areas already receiving CVP water. D-1641 also states that Reclamation will provide compensation and habitat values that mitigate for those associated with the delivery of CVP water to lands previously outside the authorized place of use. The CVPCP and the HRP are the main programs with which Reclamation provides mitigation to meet D-1641 requirements.

The federally-listed San Joaquin kit fox, giant kangaroo rat, blunt-nosed leopard lizard, and San Joaquin woolly threads would benefit from the Ciervo Hills acquisition, all of which have declined as a direct result of the conversion of arid grasslands and scrublands to irrigated agriculture in the western San Joaquin Valley, in part due to the availability of CVP water.

Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

No Action

Reclamation would not provide \$600,000 from the HRP and \$80,000 from the CVPCP, and FWS would not provide \$222,074 from the HRP, to BLM to help purchase part of 2,240 acres in the eastern Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area. BLM would need to obtain the total of \$902,074 from other public and/or private sources. If the funding cannot be secured, BLM would not be able to purchase and preserve the parcels.

Proposed Action

Reclamation would provide \$600,000 from the HRP and \$80,000 from the CVPCP, and FWS would provide \$222,074 from the HRP, to BLM to help purchase part of 6 parcels of land totaling 2,240 acres in the eastern Ciervo-Panoche Natural Area. BLM has prioritized the six parcels based on habitat connectivity and threat from development. Reclamation and FWS may provide additional funding in future years of up to \$3,097,926 to BLM to purchase some or all of the identified Mouren Cattle Company parcels not purchased in 2014. This would require additional National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance.

After acquisition of the parcels, BLM would manage the lands consistent with the management goals and objectives of the Panoche-Coalinga Area of Critical Environmental Concern

(PCACEC). BLM's goals and objectives for the PCACEC are to manage these lands for the protection of special status species and to promote scientific research and education. A livestock grazing program would be established to meet both the management plan goals and objectives of the PCACEC, and to implement the terms and conditions and conservation recommendations for livestock grazing in selected allotments of the BLM Hollister Field Office under FWS Biological Opinion 1-1-92-F-11.

Findings

Based on the attached environmental assessment (EA), Reclamation and FWS find that the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The attached EA describes the existing environmental resources in the Proposed Action area and evaluates the effects of the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives on the resources. This EA was prepared in accordance with NEPA, Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and Department of the Interior Regulations (43 CFR Part 46). Effects on several environmental resources were examined and found to be absent or minor. That analysis is provided in the attached EA, and the analysis in the EA is hereby incorporated by reference.

Following are the reasons why the impacts of the proposed action are not significant:

1. The proposed action will not significantly affect public health or safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)).
2. The proposed action will not significantly impact natural resources and unique geographical characteristics such as historic or cultural resources; parks, recreation, and refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order (EO) 11990); flood plains (EO 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3) and 43 CFR 46.215(b)).
3. The proposed action will not have possible effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)).
4. The proposed action will neither establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)).
5. There is no potential for the effects to be considered highly controversial (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)).
6. The proposed action will not have significant cumulative impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)).
7. The proposed action has no potential to affect historic properties (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)).
8. The proposed action will not affect listed or proposed threatened or endangered species (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)).
9. The proposed action will not violate Federal, state, tribal or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)).

10. The proposed action will not affect any Indian Trust Assets (512 DM 2, Policy Memorandum dated December 15, 1993).

11. Implementing the proposed action will not disproportionately affect minorities or low-income populations and communities (EO 12898).

12. The proposed action will not limit access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007 and 512 DM 3).