

RECLAMATION

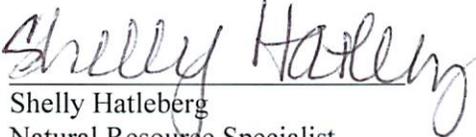
Managing Water in the West

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Meridian Farms Water Company Phase 2 Fish Screen Project

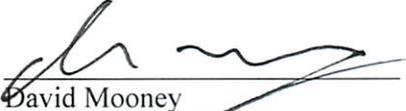
FONSI 15-28-MP

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BACKGROUND

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) prepared a joint Environmental Assessment/Initial Study (EA/IS) for the *Meridian Farms Water Company Phase 2 Fish Screen Project*, dated August 2012.

The loss of juvenile fish at water diversions in the Central Valley has been identified as contributing to anadromous fish population declines. The Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) provides that the Central Valley Project (CVP) shall be operated to meet all obligations under state and Federal law, including the Endangered Species Act (ESA). One measure to help fulfill CVPIA's goals of at least doubling the average population levels of anadromous fish in the Central Valley is to provide funds for the construction of fish screens on unscreened water diversions.

In March of 2002, Meridian Farms Water Company (MFWC) completed a Surface Water Diversion and Fish Screening Feasibility Study that evaluated alternatives for improvements to their existing diversion facilities to provide a positive barrier fish screen for anadromous fish at each pump intake. The alternative selected for further study was a plan to consolidate the three existing diversions into two new pump station facilities with positive barrier fish screens. In 2008, the plan was divided into two phases for construction (Phase 1 and Phase 2) and an EA/IS and Mitigated Negative Declaration/Finding of No Significant Impact (MND/FONSI) were prepared that addressed both Phase 1 and Phase 2 elements (2008 EA/IS). Funds were available to construct one of the planned diversions and fish screen. The MND was certified (Phase 1 and Phase 2) and FONSI was adopted (Phase 1 only).

Phase 1 was completed in 2010 and included the following elements:

- **New Grimes Diversion/Pumping Plant:** Construction of a new 30 cubic feet per second (cfs) diversion with fish screen and pumping plant installed north of the existing Grimes Diversion/Pumping Plant.
- **New Grimes Pipeline and Modifications to the existing Main Canal:** Approximately 650 lineal feet of 36-inch diameter pipeline was installed and 3,800 lineal feet of the existing earthen canal was modified to deliver flows from the New Grimes Diversion/Pumping Plant to the Grimes Service Area. Approximately 1,200 linear feet of ditch was concrete lined and 3,250 feet of earthen ditch was left unlined.
- **Drexler Pipeline:** Approximately 6,500 lineal feet of a 36-inch diameter pipeline was installed beginning at the Drexler Pumping Plant and terminating at the intersection of Summy Road and the Main Canal.
- **Existing Grimes Diversion/Pumping Plant:** The existing pumping facility was removed.

Phase 2 included the following elements as described in the 2008 EA/IS:

- **New Meridian Diversion/Pumping Plant:** A new 135 cfs diversion with fish screen and pumping plant would be installed adjacent to and would replace the existing Meridian Diversion.
- **Main Canal Modifications:** The capacity of approximately 15,200 lineal feet of the Main Canal would be increased to convey flows over to the Drexler Service Area in order to accommodate the consolidation of the Meridian and Drexler diversions.
- **New Drexler Re-lift Pumping Plant:** A new 35 cfs pumping plant would be installed at the end of the Main Canal modifications to deliver flows to the Drexler Service Area via the new Drexler Pipeline.
- **Removal of Existing Meridian Diversion/Pumping Plant:** The existing diversion/pumping facility would be removed after the new Meridian Diversion/Pumping Plant was constructed and operational.
- **Removal of the Existing Drexler Pumping Plant:** The existing pumping facility would be removed after the new pumping plant was constructed.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action includes replacement and consolidation of two of MFWC's existing unscreened diversion structures on the Sacramento River (Drexler and Meridian diversions) with a new 135 cfs screened intake and pumping facility that meets CDFW and National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) anadromous fish screen design criteria.

The 2008 EA/IS was updated and the current EA/IS (2012) reflects and analyzes the current Phase 2 Project. The Proposed Action includes the following elements:

- **New Meridian Diversion/Pumping Plant:** A new 135 cfs diversion with fish screen and pumping plant would be installed adjacent to the existing Meridian Diversion.
- **New Drexler Re-lift Pumping Plant:** A new 35 cfs pumping plant would be installed at the end of the Main Canal modifications to deliver flows to the Drexler Service Area via the new Drexler Pipeline.
- **Main Canal Modifications:** Approximately 15,200 linear feet of the Main Canal would be widened up to three feet, depending on the location, to provide adequate capacity to convey flows to the Drexler Service Area in order to accommodate the consolidation of the Meridian and Drexler diversions.
- **Drexler Pipeline Extension:** The Drexler Pipeline would be extended by approximately 500 feet to improve service to a portion of the Drexler Service Area and reduce pumping costs. The outlet box at the end of the Drexler Pipeline could be modified to reduce pumping costs.

- **Removal of Existing Meridian Diversion/Pumping Plant:** The existing diversion/pumping facility would be removed after the new Meridian Diversion/Pumping Plant is constructed and operational.
- **Removal of the Existing Drexler Diversion/Pumping Plant:** The existing pumping facility would be removed after the new Drexler Re-Lift Pumping Plant is construction and operational.
- **Grimes Canal Modifications:** Concrete lining of approximately 2,500 linear feet of the Grimes canal. (Note: this element of the Proposed Action has not yet been funded, and implementation is to be determined based on funding support. The adequacy of environmental compliance for the remaining portions of the project would not be affected if this component is not funded.)

The CVPIA (Section 3406 [b][21]) authorizes Reclamation to assist the State of California in developing and implementing measures to avoid losses of juvenile anadromous fish resulting from unscreened diversions on the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers and their tributaries.

FINDINGS

Based on the subject EA/IS, Reclamation finds that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The EA/IS describes the existing environmental resources in the Proposed Action area, evaluates the effects of the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives on the resources, and proposes measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any adverse effects. This EA/IS was prepared in accordance with NEPA, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and DOI Regulations (43 CFR Part 46). Effects on several environmental resources were examined and found to be absent or minor. This analysis is provided in the EA/IS, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Agriculture and Land Use

The project area contains agriculturally zoned properties, lands designated as Prime Farmland, and parcels listed under Williamson Act contracts. However, construction of permanent facilities would be confined to existing disturbed facilities, including existing roadways, canal rights-of-way, and levees along the Sacramento River. For this reason, the Proposed Action would not conflict with any existing Williamson Act Contracts. Construction of the Meridian Pumping Plant and new fish screen may require removal of two to five walnut trees in the adjacent orchard. The Drexler re-lift Pumping Plant would be located at the edge of an agricultural parcel and the Drexler pipeline extension would cross a small portion of agricultural land. However, the pipeline would be buried deep enough, where appropriate, so it would not preclude future agricultural activities. Other temporary construction-related impacts to important farmland would be associated with materials staging areas. In these instances, where temporary and permanent disruption to agricultural operations would occur, MFWC would compensate affected land owners in accordance with State and local laws and ordinances related to compensation for impacts to agricultural lands. As a result, the Proposed Action would not have a significant impact on agricultural resources or land use.

Air Quality and Climate Change

The Proposed Action would not alter existing land use designations in the project area and would not facilitate any new growth not previously envisioned in the County's currently adopted General Plan. Following construction, operational vehicle trips would be similar to existing conditions. Consequently, construction and operation of the Proposed Action would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of any applicable air quality regulation, plan, or policy. As a result, there would be no significant impacts to air quality or climate change.

Biological Resources

The analysis in the EA/IS indicates that the impacts to wildlife would be less than significant with the implementation of avoidance and minimization measures. Impacts to special-status species, including giant garter snake (GGS), salmonids and North American green sturgeon, would be avoided or minimized by implementing the measures discussed in the EA/IS, the Action Specific Implementation Plan (ASIP), and the Biological Opinions (BO) from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries (April 4, 2013 and November 7, 2014, respectively). With the screened intake, there would be an overall net benefit to listed fish species as a result of the Proposed Action.

To reduce and minimize impacts to GGS as a result of the implementation of the Proposed Action, measures described in the EA/IS, ASIP and BOs would be implemented as appropriate. Compensation would be required for permanent loss of GGS habitat. With implementation of 2008 EA/IS Mitigation Measures BIO-1, BIO-4, BIO-6 through BIO-14, and BIO-17, and modified 2008 EA/IS Mitigation Measures BIO-2, BIO-3, BIO-16 and BIO-18 presented in the current EA/IS, there would be no significant impacts to GGS.

Given the overall benefit to fish as a result of the Proposed Action, as well as the use of a cofferdam, the fish salvage requirement for dewatered work sites, the localized and minimal in-river disturbances, and constructing within the work period when fish would least likely be in the area, the Proposed Action is expected to result in minimal impacts to fisheries resources of the Sacramento River. With the implementation of 2008 EA/IS Mitigation Measures BIO-19, BIO-20 and proposed Mitigation Measures BIO-A through BIO-H¹ presented in the current EA/IS, impacts to listed and special-concern fish species would not be significant.

¹ Mitigation measures BIO-A through BIO-H are identified with alphabetical letters instead of numbers to avoid confusion with mitigation measures from the 2008 EA/IS.

The sensitive natural community that would be potentially impacted by the Proposed Action is the Sacramento River and associated Valley foothill riparian. However, with avoidance, minimization, and erosion control measures outlined in the EA/IS, impacts to the Sacramento River and riparian habitats are considered less-than significant. Implementation of 2008 EA/IS Mitigation Measure BIO-1, modified 2008 IS/EA Mitigation Measures BIO-2 and BIO-23 and Mitigation Measure BIO-G would ensure no disturbance and encroachment into these sensitive riparian habitat areas, thus resulting in no significant impact.

The Proposed Action would temporarily and permanently fill perennial stream channel (Sacramento River) with the proposed placement of the Meridian diversion facilities within the ordinary high water mark of the Sacramento River. These features are navigable and therefore regulated under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act. In addition, existing irrigation channels would be modified to improve conveyance from the proposed diversion facilities. These channels would likely be considered jurisdictional by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) per Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) and Regional Water Quality Control Board per Section 401 of the CWA. The only feature that may qualify as a wetland and/or waters of the U.S. in the Proposed Action area is the Sacramento River. Implementation of BIO-I and modified 2008 EA/IS Mitigation Measure BIO-28 would reduce impacts to wetlands in the event that the potential fill of these features requires compensation.

Cultural Resources

The Proposed Action is the type of activity that has the potential to affect historic properties. A records search, a cultural resources survey, and Tribal consultation did not identify historic properties within the area of potential effect. All project activities would result in no historic properties affected pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.4(d)(1). The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concurred with Reclamation's determinations and findings on February 12, 2008 and Reclamation concluded the Section 106 compliance process. Since no historic properties would be affected, no cultural resources would be impacted as a result of implementing the Proposed Action.

Geology and Soils

Implementation of erosion and sediment control measures as described in the EA/IS would reduce erosion rates during and after construction. Operation of the screened intake structure is not expected to result in changes to erosion compared to existing conditions. The screened intake would be designed to minimize erosion or disturbance to soils and the area disturbed during construction would be stabilized with vegetation or engineered structures as described in the EA/IS. There are no significant impacts to geology and soils associated with the Proposed Action.

Water Quality

Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during construction activities; however, the increases would be temporary. Minimization and avoidance measures, as presented in the EA/IS, would be implemented to reduce adverse impacts on water quality in accordance with the water quality certification standards and conditions of the CWA Sections 404 and 401 permits. The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on water quality.

Noise

The project site is located in rural Sutter County. Sensitive receptors in the vicinity of the Proposed Action area are generally limited to scattered rural residences and small residential areas in the town of Meridian. The Meridian pump station would generate noise comparable to that of the existing pump station facility; no long-term changes to the ambient noise environment are anticipated. The Drexler re-lift pump station is located over 3,000 feet from the closest resident and therefore would have little or no effect on the existing ambient noise environment. In addition, measures described in the EA/IS have been incorporated into the Proposed Action, which would require noise attenuation during construction activities to minimize exposure of persons to noise levels in excess of applicable standards. In addition, implementation of 2008 IS/EA Mitigation Measure NOISE-1 would further minimize increases in noise levels. Therefore, this would not result in a significant impact.

Traffic

Construction of the Proposed Action would intermittently and temporarily generate increases in vehicle trips by construction workers and construction vehicles on area roadways. Construction activities would also result in a temporary reduction in the number of, or the available width of, travel lanes on roads where full or partial closures are required, resulting in short-term traffic delays for vehicles traveling past the construction zones, and in some cases, temporary closure of road segment, with resulting disruption to access for adjacent land uses and streets for both general traffic and emergency vehicles. Construction-generated traffic would be temporary and therefore would not result in any long-term degradation in operating conditions or level of service on any local roadways. Implementation of mitigation measures in the EA/IS would reduce potential conflicts during construction activities.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action would not disproportionately affect any minority or low income populations. Therefore, no impacts regarding Environmental Justice would occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

Indian Trust Assets and Indian Sacred Sites

There are no Indian reservations, Rancherias, allotments or Indian Sacred Sites in the project area. The Proposed Action does not have the potential to affect ITAs.