

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Finding of No Significant Impact

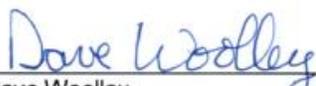
Westlands Water District, San Luis Water District and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California 2010-2011 Water Exchange and Transfer Program

FONSI-10-71

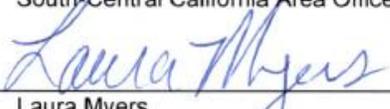
Recommended by:

 Date: 11/10/10
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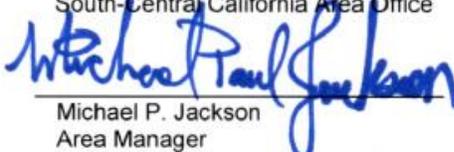
Concurred by:

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U.S. Department of the Interior
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Mid Pacific Region
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Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has determined that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the approval of an Exchange and Transfer Program involving Westlands Water District, San Luis Water District and Metropolitan Water District (MWD). This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Final Environmental Assessment (EA) Number EA-10-71, *Westlands Water District, San Luis Water District and Metropolitan Water District of Southern California 2010-2011 Water Exchange and Transfer Program*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Background

Three years of drought and dry conditions which continued early into the 2010 rainfall season resulted in relatively low south-of-Delta Central Valley Project (CVP) water allocations. This situation was followed by above normal late season rainfall throughout much of California. Although water supply allocations increased they remained below 50 percent levels for both the State Water Project (SWP) and CVP contractors relying on south-of-Delta exports. The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and Reclamation will continue to facilitate water transfers and to seek approval from the State Water Resources Control Board as appropriate.

Westlands Water District and San Luis Water District hereafter referred to jointly as the "Exchanging-Districts", each receives their principal water supplies under contract with Reclamation from the CVP. Due to ongoing constraints on their CVP water supplies, the Exchanging-Districts are consistently experiencing water shortages and have pursued various precautionary measures to acquire supplemental water to their CVP supplies. As a result, the Exchanging-Districts acquired supplemental water supplies in 2009 that were carried over for use in 2010. However, due to a late increase in 2010 water allocations the Exchanging-Districts have water stored in San Luis Reservoir that is surplus to their previously planned 2010 water needs. Due to limited storage space in the reservoir, the Exchanging-Districts could be in jeopardy of forfeiting this valuable water supply.

As a result, the Exchanging-Districts have requested and Reclamation proposes to approve an exchange/transfer project in which the Exchanging-Districts will deliver up to 150,000 af of CVP water to MWD. MWD will return up to 100,000 af (two-thirds of total CVP water) of their SWP Table A water to the Exchanging-Districts next year when the water can be planned for and incorporated into their cropping needs. The remaining 50,000 af of CVP water will be considered and treated as transferred to MWD.

Reclamation's finding that implementation of the Proposed Action will result in no significant impact to the quality of the human environment is supported by the following findings:

Findings

Water Resources

The Exchanging-Districts have water available that is surplus to their current year operational water supply needs, and will benefit by managing this surplus into water that can be utilized next year. MWD currently has storage capacity available, and it will benefit by being able to move and store up to an additional 150,000 af of water in their facilities.

Under the Action Alternative, the Exchanging-Districts will convert via the exchange a portion of their 2010-11 water supplies into supplies that can be assured for delivery in 2011-2012. Likewise, MWD will utilize the exchanged CVP supplies in 2010 to replenish depleted reserves.

The CVP and SWP facilities will not be impacted as the Action Alternative must be scheduled and approved by Reclamation and DWR. Additionally, the transfer must be conducted in a manner that will not harm other CVP contractors or other CVP contractual or environmental obligations, or SWP contractors. Therefore, there will be no impact to normal operations of the facilities.

MWD will convey the Exchanging-Districts' CVP water using Article 55 of MWD's SWP contract which provides for the conveyance of non-SWP water in SWP facilities including the California Aqueduct. The conveyance of water under Article 55 is subject to capacity in the California Aqueduct and meeting all SWP requirements. Water will be delivered for storage in existing facilities and ultimately used for existing Municipal and Industrial (M&I) uses. Article 55 is available in its entirety in EA-10-71, Appendix D.

MWD may incorporate Central Valley groundwater storage involving Arvin-Edison Water Storage District, Semitropic Water Storage District or Kern-Delta Water District. The operation of these banking programs was analyzed as a condition of their construction, and any banking operations associated with the Action Alternative will adhere to the same operational regulations.

The exchange will enhance the water resources available to both Exchanging-Districts and MWD without increasing Delta exports resulting in no adverse impact to water resources.

Land Use

Under the Action Alternative, there will be no land use changes within the Exchanging-Districts' service areas in 2010 as their water supplies will not be reduced below anticipated demands. There could be a positive impact on agricultural land use within the Exchanging-Districts' service areas compared to the No Action Alternative due to the ability of the landowners to make planting decisions for 2011 with the knowledge that up to 100,000 af will be returned to them in addition to their allocated 2011-2012 CVP supply.

The conveyance of water under Article 55 is subject to capacity in the California Aqueduct and meeting all SWP requirements. Due to the unique and temporary availability of this water, the Action Alternative will not lead to long-term land use changes. The water supplies are surplus to the Exchanging-Districts 2010 needs and do not provide a reliable or consistent water supply that could be considered growth inducing in MWD. Water will be delivered to storage in existing facilities and ultimately used for existing M&I uses. However, because no new long term supply

is involved, neither the exchange or transfer portions of the proposal will facilitate growth. These findings indicate that there will be no adverse impacts to land use.

Biological Resources

The Action Alternative will not involve the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more consecutive years or any new development. While the Action Alternative could reduce the potential for fallowed acreage, it will not substantially change the land use patterns of the cultivated or fallowed fields that may have some value to listed species or to birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Since no natural stream courses will be utilized as part of the Action Alternative, there will be no effects on listed fish species. No changes in Delta exports or operations will occur, so no impacts on species utilizing the Delta will occur.

The aspect of the Action Alternative that is of possible concern, environmentally, is the unbalanced portion of the exchange that results in a transfer. However, the net amount of water that will remain in MWD can only be utilized to replenish depleted storage reserves until its end-use for existing M&I uses because it is a one-time supply that cannot facilitate long-term use such as development. The 150,000 af of water that will be involved in the exchanges are supplies already allocated to the Exchanging-Districts and no additional water supplies will be diverted from rivers or lakes. No new construction or additional Federal points of diversion will be required. However, slight changes in timing and locations of when and where water is diverted and stored south of the Delta could occur, and there may be small changes¹ in ground or surface water levels within MWD. These reservoir level changes will be within normal operating levels, as the reservoirs are below capacity due to drought conditions. These changes will not impact any federally listed or proposed species or critical habitat.

The relatively small amounts of water associated with the Action Alternative and the requirement that no native lands be converted without consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will preclude impacts to wildlife, including federally listed species. Habitat for listed species is mostly absent in the vast agricultural areas where small declines in fallowed ground may occur, and listed species and habitat suitability will not be affected by these small short term changes in the vast agricultural area. Other Federally protected species utilize agricultural lands, which would not be subject to a land use change as a result of the Action Alternative. These findings indicate that there will be no adverse impacts to biological resources.

Cultural Resources

Exchanging and transferring water as described in the Action Alternative is an undertaking as described in Section 301(7) of the National Historic Properties Act (NHPA), initiating Section 106 of the NHPA and its implementing regulations at 36 CFR Part 800. All transfers and exchanges will occur through existing facilities and water will be provided within existing service area boundaries to areas that currently use water. The Action Alternative will not result in modification of any existing facilities, construction of new facilities, change in land use, or growth. As a result, Reclamation has determined that the Action Alternative is not the type of activity that has the potential to affect historic properties pursuant to the regulations at 36 CFR

¹ The combined storage of Pyramid, Castaic, Silverwood, Perris and Diamond Valley reservoirs is nearly 1.5 million acre-feet as compared to the 50,000 acre-feet involved in the transfer. MWD reports a total storage capacity (groundwater and surface water) of 4.7 million acre-feet.

Part 800.3(a)(1), no cultural resources will be impacted as a result of implementing the Action Alternative.

Indian Trust Assets

Approval of the Action Alternative will not involve any construction on lands or impact water, hunting, and fishing rights associated with the nearest Public Domain Allotment. Therefore, the Action Alternative does not have a potential to adversely affect Indian Trust Assets.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Action Alternative will allow the Exchanging-Districts to beneficially use water that is surplus to their current year operational needs into a supply that could be utilized next year to supplement CVP allocations. This will help maintain the stability of the agricultural market and economic vitality for the San Joaquin Valley to a certain degree. The exchange and transfer is a temporary action and will provide short-term beneficial impacts to socioeconomic conditions in the affected region.

Likewise, MWD currently has available storage capacity, and it will benefit by being able to move and store up to an additional 150,000 af of water in these facilities which will replenish their reserves with the portion of water left in-district as part of the agreed terms. MWD has had to draw from their storage reserves because of the drought and dry conditions, which has reduced these reserves to at or near critical levels.

Environmental Justice

The Action Alternative could reduce dislocation and promote continued employment within the affected environment. The Action Alternative will not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. Employment opportunities for low-income wage earners and minority population groups will be within historical conditions.

Air Quality

Under the Action Alternative, movement of water between Exchanging-Districts and MWD will be done via gravity flow and/or pumped using electric motors which have no emissions. The air quality emissions from electrical power have been considered in environmental documentation for the generating power plant. There are no emissions from electrical motors and therefore a conformity analysis is not required under the Clean Air Act and there will be no impact on air quality.

Global Climate

The emissions from the generating power plant to provide the electricity needed to convey up to 150,000 af of water are small when compared to the overall water supplies and power used each year to move water where it is needed. Greenhouse Gas (GHG) generated by the Action Alternative is expected to be small compared to other sources contributing to potential climate change, and while any increase in GHG emissions will add to the global inventory of gases that will contribute to global climate change, the Action Alternative will result in minimal increases in GHG emissions and a net increase in GHG emissions among the pool of GHG will not be detectable.

Cumulative Impacts

The Action Alternative was found to have no significant adverse impacts on water, biological and cultural resources, ITA, and environmental justice. The Action Alternative is a one-time, temporary action, and when added to other actions does not contribute to cumulative adverse impacts to existing environmental conditions. Slight beneficial impacts to land use and socioeconomics will be short-term and within historical variations, and will not contribute to cumulative impacts.

Coordination to schedule the deliveries for all these actions will be required with the appropriate operating entity to ensure that the normal operations of the facilities involved will not be hindered. Overall, there will be no significant cumulative impacts from the Action Alternative.