

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Finding of No Significant Impact

San Joaquin River Flow Modification Project

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FONSI No. 12-01-MP



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

BACKGROUND

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) prepared an environmental assessment/initial study (EA/IS) in January 2012 to evaluate the effects of providing two years of continued implementation of State Water Resource Control Board's Decision-1641 (D-1641) spring "pulse" flow targets for the San Joaquin River at Vernalis. Reclamation previously contracted with the San Joaquin River Group Authority to help it meet D-1641 pulse flow targets through the San Joaquin River Agreement (SJRA) for a period of twelve years. Reclamation proposes to enter into an agreement with Merced Irrigation District (MID) to help Reclamation provide spring "pulse" flows from Lake McClure to the Merced River. The proposed agreement results in the proposed action and includes the following elements:

1. Reclamation's payment to MID for the availability to use water from the MID to supplement New Melones Reservoir releases to satisfy a D-1641 31-day spring pulse flow target;
2. To operate New Melones Reservoir in the same manner as it has been historically operated during the SJRA to meet base flow objectives under D-1641 (Feb through April 14 and May 16 through June);
3. To operate the Stanislaus River consistent with the Reasonable and Prudent Alternative (RPA) actions specified by the National Marine Fisheries Service in the 2009 Biological Opinion (BO) on the Coordinated Long-term Operation of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project (2009 BO). Specifically, the Stanislaus River is operated to comply with Action III.1.3. (to maintain suitable steelhead temperatures) and Action III.1.2 (to meet the minimum flows in Appendix 2-E, as measured at Goodwin Dam during spring and fall) These spring releases also help satisfy supplemental pulse flow requirements under a modified D-1641 Vernalis flow target during the 31-day spring pulse flow period; and
4. To operate the Jones Pumping Plant in conformance with RPA export limitations under the 2009 BO.

The draft EA/IS was available for public review and comment from January 17, 2012 to February 1, 2012. No comments were received.

FINDINGS

Based on the attached EA/IS, Reclamation finds that the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required for carrying out the Proposed Action.

The EA complies with the Council of Environmental Quality's Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), Department of the Interior Regulations (43 CFR Part 46) and other requirements such as the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and local and State requirements.

Water Supply: The operational releases from New Melones down the Stanislaus River will remain unchanged in all areas.

Biological Resources: The Proposed Action is likely to benefit fall-run Chinook salmon and steelhead. The Proposed Action will not affect any other listed or proposed species.

Cultural Resources: The proposed action does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties, if present, pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.3(a)(1).

Hydrology and Water Quality: Under the Proposed Action, increased river flows down the Merced and San Joaquin Rivers during the spring pulse flow period as measured at Vernalis will benefit water quality. Potential direct and indirect benefits that may be realized under the Proposed Action Alternative include reduced water temperatures, increased dissolved oxygen content, and potential extension of channel inundation.

Indian Trust Assets: Indian Trust Assets (ITAs) are legal interests in assets that are held in trust by the U.S. Government for Federally recognized Indian tribes or individuals. The Project will not affect ITAs.

Environmental Justice: The Project will not result in adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations.