RECLAMATION
Managing Water in the West

Draft Finding of No Significant Impact

Transfer of up to 20,500 acre-feet of Central Valley Project Water from Central California Irrigation District to San Luis, Panoche, Del Puerto and Westlands Water Districts and up to 5,000 acre-feet of Central Valley Project Water from Firebaugh Canal Water District to San Luis Water District or Westlands Water District

FONSI-12-006

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Introduction

Background

In accordance with the National Environment 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 a transfer of up to 20,500 acre-feet (af) of Central Valley Project (CVP) water from Central California Irrigation District (CCID) to Panoche Water District (PWD), Del Puerto Water District (DPWD), San Luis Water District (SLWD) and/or Westlands Water District (WWD) (Transfer Recipient Districts) and a transfer of up to 5,000 af of CVP water from Firebaugh Canal Water District (FCWD) to SLWD or WWD. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA) EA-12-006, *Transfer of up to 20,500 acre-feet of Central Valley Project Water from Central California Irrigation District to San Luis, Panoche, Del Puerto and Westlands Water Districts and up to 5,000 acre-feet of Central Valley Project Water from Firebaugh Canal Water District to San Luis Water District or Westlands Water District*, which is incorporated by reference.

California has experienced a severe drought in recent years that has reduced water supplies to many Central Valley Project (CVP) contractors. The South-of-Delta (SOD) CVP Agricultural allocation forecast for 2012 began at 30% and then was increased to 40% (Reclamation, 2012a). As a result, SOD water contractors have a need to find alternative sources of water to not only fulfill 2012 demands, but to prepare for demands going into 2013. The proposed transfers would allow water districts and landowners greater flexibility to manage limited water supplies during summer months in these years.

Proposed Actions

Central California Irrigation District Transfers

Reclamation proposes to approve a series of annual transfers of up to 20,500 af of CCID's San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors' (Exchange Contractors) CVP Contract (Exchange Contract) supplies to the Transfer Recipient Districts. The period of the transfers would be from July 2012, following execution of the Finding of No Significant Impact and approval by the Contracting Officer, through December 2012 and April 2013 through December 2013.

Common landowners in CCID and the Transfer Recipient Districts would pump up to 75 cubic feet per second (cfs) of groundwater from up to 23 wells interspersed throughout CCID. The District has an "open enrollment" process and because of this, the exact well locations from which the water would be pumped are not yet known. This groundwater would be discharged into CCID's conveyance system to meet in-district demands. In exchange, a portion of CCID's

CVP surface water supply would be delivered to the Transfer Recipient Districts from the DMC and/or SLC.

Firebaugh Canal Water District Transfers

Reclamation proposes to approve a series of annual transfers of up to 5,000 af of FCWD's Exchange Contract CVP supplies to WWD and/or SLWD. The period of the transfers would be from July 2012, following execution of the Finding of No Significant Impact and approval by the Contracting Officer, through December 2012 and April 2013 through December 2013.

FCWD would pump up to 15 cfs of groundwater from up to 5 wells. Wells 1-4 would directly discharge into FCWD's Intake Canal, but well #5 would deliver water into Mendota Pool, where it would then enter the Intake Canal. This groundwater would be used to meet FCWD's in-district demands. A like amount of CVP water delivered to Mendota Pool by Reclamation for use by FCWD would be used by Reclamation to meet other obligations from the Mendota Pool. In exchange, a portion of FCWD's CVP surface water supply would be delivered to WWD and/or SLWD from the DMC and/or SLC.

Findings

Water Resources

For the CCID action, the transfer of 20,500 af would offset a small portion of the total 2012-2013 surface water supply deficit in the Transfer Recipient Districts. The water transfer would minor compared to the total surface water supply deficits in the Transfer Recipient Districts; however some individual growers would benefit.

Water supplies in CCID would continue to meet agricultural water demand despite the transfer. CCID would pump an equivalent amount of groundwater to offset surface water deliveries. This transfer would be required to follow the environmental commitments outlined in EA-12-006 subsection 2.2.3. Following these commitments would maintain safe yield in the groundwater basin. The CCID groundwater pumping may be further offset by a reduction in groundwater pumping in the Transfer Recipient Districts.

The 20,500 af of lower-quality groundwater pumped into the CCID's distribution system is required to not increase the TDS in CCID's canals to more than 700 mg/L.

Under the Proposed Action CCID would have sufficient water supplies to meet their water demands. CVP and California State Water Project (SWP) facilities would not be impacted as the transferred water must be scheduled and approved

by Reclamation and DWR. No natural streams or water courses would be affected since no additional pumping or diversion that would not have happened under the No Action Alternative would occur. There would be a minor positive impact to surface water resources and no impact to groundwater resources due to the Proposed Action.

For the FCWD action, transfer of 5,000 af would offset a small portion of the total 2012-2013 surface water supply deficit in WWD and SLWD; however some individual growers would benefit.

Water supplies in FCWD would continue to meet agricultural water demand despite the transfer. FCWD would pump an equivalent amount of groundwater to offset surface water deliveries. This transfer would be required to follow the environmental commitments outlined in EA-12-006 subsection 2.2.3. Following these commitments would maintain safe yield in the groundwater basin. The FWCD groundwater pumping may be further offset by a reduction in groundwater pumping in the Transfer Recipient Districts.

The following wells would pump:

- 8 cfs well estimated to pump up to 1,700 af
- 4 cfs well estimated to pump up to 1,100 af
- 5 cfs well estimated to pump up to 1,000 af
- 3 cfs well estimated to pump up to 900 af
- 5 cfs well estimated to pump up to 300 af (well # 5)

Due to the shallow zone from which the wells are pumping, the groundwater being intercepted would be water that is normally replenished annually. There has been no long-term (KDSA 2011overdraft experienced in this aquifer. Additionally, since the wells are pumping a relatively small quantity from an area of no other groundwater pumping and the pumping is being done from the shallow zone, subsidence is unlikely to occur. The Mendota Pool Group reports have shown that pumping from shallow aquifers does not cause subsidence.

The 5,000 af of low quality groundwater pumped into the FCWD's distribution system has been calculated to change the Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) in FCWD's Intake Canal by no more than 30 mg/L. This water quality impact is within the normal water quality fluctuation in the canal system due to Delta pumping tidal influences and other influences. Under the Proposed Action, FCWD would have sufficient water supplies to meet their water demands. CVP and SWP facilities would not be impacted, as the transferred water must be scheduled and approved by Reclamation and DWR. No natural streams or water courses would be affected since no additional pumping or diversion that would not have happened under the No Action Alternative would occur. There would be no impact to surface or groundwater water resources due to the Proposed Action.

Cumulative Impacts

Because the Proposed Action would not involve construction or modification, nor interfere with CVP or SWP operations, there would be no cumulative impacts to existing facilities or other contractors.

Because CCID and FCWD would follow the Exchange Contractors' AB3030 Groundwater Management Plan and pumping be restricted to below the safe yield, there would be no cumulative impacts to groundwater or subsidence in the Exchange Contractors' service area. Since the transfers may reduce groundwater pumping in the Transfer Recipient Districts, the Proposed Action may reduce the risks of groundwater overdraft and subsidence in their respective areas. As a result, the Proposed Action may have a cumulative beneficial effect on groundwater resources.

Because groundwater quality would be monitored by CCID and FCWD, there would be no cumulative impacts to water quality involving water delivered via their distribution systems. Since the transferred water delivered via the DMC and SLC would be CVP supplies, there would be no cumulative impacts to water quality delivered to the Transfer Recipient Districts.

These findings indicate that there may be beneficial effects and no adverse impact to water resources resulting from the Proposed Action.

Land Use

For the proposed action involving CCID, the water delivered to the Transfer Recipient Districts would offset a small portion of their surface water supply deficit. The 20,500 af/year of additional water supplies would allow continued production on lands that would have otherwise been fallowed, and sustain permanent crops that otherwise may have been abandoned.

There would be no land use changes in CCID as their water supply quantity would not change. Irrigated acreages and crop mixes would remain the same.

There would be a slight positive impact on land use in the Transfer Recipient Districts due to the ability of some established row crops to remain in production and the enhanced survival of orchards and vineyards.

For the proposed action involving FCWD, the 5,000 af/year of additional water delivered to SLWD or WWD would offset a portion of their surface water supply deficit. The 5,000 af/year of additional water supplies would allow continued production on lands that would have otherwise been fallowed, and sustain permanent crops that otherwise may have been abandoned.

There would be no land use changes in FCWD as their water supply quantity would not change. Irrigated acreages and crop mixes would remain the same.

There would be a slight positive impact on land use in SLWD and/or WWD due to the ability of some established row crops to remain in production and the enhanced survival of orchards and vineyards.

Cumulative Impacts

There would be no new construction or excavation occurring as part of the Proposed Action. No native or untilled land (fallow for 3 years or more) would be cultivated with the CVP water involved with these actions. The Proposed Action would not increase or decrease water supplies that would result in development. Due to these requirements and since the Proposed Action supports current land use, there would be no cumulative adverse impacts to land use.

These findings indicate that there may be beneficial effects and no adverse impact to land use resulting from the Proposed Action.

Air Quality

Most of the wells that would be pumped have electric motors. Two wells have diesel engines that meet California Air Resources Board and Environmental Protection Agency Tier 3 specifications. As such, the engines meet the emission requirements for compression engines as outlined in San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District Rule 4702, Section 5.2.4. Projected emissions from these engines would be below the *de minimis* amounts specified in 40 CFR § 93.153. Therefore, a determination of general conformity under the Clean Air Act is not required, and there would be no air quality impacts associated with this Proposed Action.

Cumulative Impacts

All emissions result in a cumulative increase in pollutants within the air basin; however emissions from the Proposed Action are well below the *de minimis* thresholds.

These findings indicate that there would be no significant adverse impact to air quality as a result of the Proposed Action.

Global Climate

The Proposed Action would result in the direct emissions of greenhouse gases through the use of diesel fuel. Greenhouse gases generated are expected to be extremely small compared to sources contributing to potential climate change since the movement of water under the Proposed Action would be conveyed mostly via electric pumps which would not result in the power plant exceeding operating capacity, and, thus, the applicable emissions permit. The total greenhouse gas emissions from the diesel pumps would be far below the 25,000 metric tons per year threshold for reportable greenhouse gas emissions. As such,

the Proposed Action would not result in a substantial change in greenhouse gases emissions, and there would be no adverse effect to global climate.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts from greenhouse gas emissions generated by the Proposed Action are expected to be extremely small compared to the background emissions in the area. The total emissions are well below any established threshold. While any increase in greenhouse gases emissions would add to the global inventory of gases that would contribute to global climate change, the Proposed Action would not result in a substantial increase in local or global greenhouse gas emissions.

CVP water allocations are made dependent on hydrologic conditions and environmental requirements. Since Reclamation operations and allocations are flexible, any changes in hydrologic conditions due to global climate change would be addressed within Reclamation's operation flexibility and therefore water resource changes due to climate change would be the same with or without the Proposed Action.

These findings indicate that there would be no significant adverse impact to global climate as a result of the Proposed Action.

Biological Resources

Most of the habitat types required by species protected by the Endangered Species Act do not occur in the project area. The Proposed Action would not involve the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more years. The Proposed Action also would not change the land use patterns of the cultivated or fallowed fields that do have some value to listed species or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Since no natural stream courses or additional surface water pumping would occur, there would be no effects on listed fish species. No critical habitat occurs within the area affected by the Proposed Action and so none of the primary constituent elements of any critical habitat would be affected. Based on the two districts' commitments and the background salinity levels, TDS would remain at or below 700 mg/L, which would be low enough to protect the giant garter snake both in Mendota Pool and in suitable habitat in the Grasslands wetlands. Requirements by CCID for non-detect levels of selenium, and the fact that FCWD will not approve any water transfer involving a substitution of groundwater that FCWD determines would interfere with their ability to meet water quality objectives imposed by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board would protect the giant garter snake from effects of elevated selenium. There would be no loss of acres of land planted with rice as a result of these proposed actions. Although these are transfers with regard to Reclamation's involvement, there would be groundwater substitution.

The short duration of the water availability, the requirement that no native lands be converted without consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and

the stringent requirements for transfers under applicable laws would preclude any impacts to wildlife, whether Federally listed or not.

Cumulative Impacts

As the Proposed Action is not expected to result in any direct or indirect impacts to biological resources, there would be no cumulative impacts.

These findings indicate that there would be no adverse impact to biological resources as a result of the Proposed Action.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Proposed Action would allow for continued water deliveries to SLWD, DPWD, PWD and WWD and would maintain the stability of the agricultural market and economical vitality for the San Joaquin Valley to some degree. The proposed transfer would not interfere with SWP or CVP priorities or operations.

The water service transactions are temporary actions and do not result in long-term increases in water supplies that would encourage urbanization or construction.

Cumulative Impacts

The Proposed Action may result in a stronger local agricultural economy during the program timeframe. Since water supply availability may allow permanent crops to be sustained during dry years, there may be beneficial cumulative impacts to socioeconomic resources as a result of the Proposed Action.

These findings indicate that there would be a potential benefit but no adverse impacts to socioeconomic resources as a result of the Proposed Action.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action would not cause dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease. The Proposed Action would not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. Some amount of agricultural production that would not be sustained with the current water availability would continue with the resulting preservation of jobs. The unemployment rate in the vicinity of the Transfer Recipient Districts suggests that any actions that maintain seasonal jobs should be considered beneficial. Employment opportunities for low-income wage earners and minority population groups would be within historical conditions. Disadvantaged populations would not be subject to disproportionate impacts.

Cumulative Impacts

Similar to the evaluation performed in socioeconomic resources, water supply availability may allow permanent crops to be sustained during dry years. Since

there may be beneficial cumulative impacts to the local agricultural economy as a result of the Proposed Action, employment would remain the same as historical levels for minority and low-income wage earners. Therefore, there may be a beneficial cumulative impact to low-income and minority populations.

These findings indicate that there would be a potential benefit but no adverse impacts to minority and low-income populations as a result of the Proposed Action.