

RECLAMATION

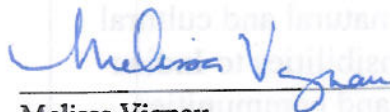
Managing Water in the West

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Release of Oakdale Irrigation District's and South San Joaquin Irrigation
District's Pre-1914 Water Rights Water from New Melones
Reservoir

FONSI 13-04-CCAO

Recommended by:



Date:

4/8/13

Melissa Vignau
Chief, Resources Management Division
Central California Area Office

Approved by:



Date:

4/8/2013

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

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Mission Statements

The mission of the Department of the Interior is to protect and provide access to our Nation's natural and cultural heritage and honor our trust responsibilities to Indian Tribes and our commitment to island communities.

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
San Francisco Region

Background

In 1988, Oakdale Irrigation District (OID) and South San Joaquin Irrigation District (SSJID) entered into an Agreement and Stipulation that committed the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to deliver water to the districts in recognition of the districts' prior water rights. Under an operations agreement between Reclamation and the districts, the districts operate Goodwin Dam under Reclamation's direction. Historically, Reclamation has released water from Goodwin Dam to the Stanislaus River to meet Reclamation's instream flow commitments and water quality and flow objectives at Vernalis. Reclamation delivers water to the districts for diversion at Goodwin Dam. The districts have a maximum annual entitlement of up to 600,000 acre-feet.

Alternatives Including Proposed Action

No Action Alternative

Reclamation would not approve OID's request made on behalf of the two districts to release their collective water down the Stanislaus River to improve conditions for downstream fisheries.

Proposed action

OID has requested, on behalf of SSJID and themselves, to release of up to 80,000 AF of their 2013 water year allocation under the 1988 Agreement and Stipulation for the purpose of fish and wildlife preservation and enhancement in the Stanislaus and San Joaquin Rivers. The combined districts anticipated 2013 allocation will likely be between 570,000 to 600,000 AF. The release of up to 80,000 AF of 2013 allocation will be within this quantity. Total daily releases to the Stanislaus River would be for up to 3,250 cubic feet per second (cfs) (which includes augmentation of the 2009 National Marine Fisheries Service Biological Opinion for the Long-Term Operations of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project, Appendix 2E flows) and may occur any time between April 8 through May 31, 2013. These additional releases will be variable (likely varying from 500 cfs to greater than 2,300 cfs). Based on information provided by OID/SSJID, Reclamation considers this one-time request to be a reasonable "In Basin Use" of water as the term Stanislaus River Basin Area is identified in the *Record of Decision - Stanislaus River Basin Alternatives and Water Allocation - New Melones Unit, Central Valley Project, California*. Reclamation is therefore recognizing this proposal as a one-time event and will direct the release of a portion of OID/SSJID's allocated water rights water from Goodwin to be released down the Stanislaus River. This water would then be considered abandoned in the San Joaquin River.

On behalf of the two districts, OID will monitor the affect from the increased flows on habitat and fish and provide this information to Reclamation.

Findings

Based on the attached environmental assessment (EA), Reclamation finds 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, evaluates the effects of the No Action and Proposed Action alternative on the resources. This EA was prepared in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act, Council on Environmental Quality 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 attached EA, and the analysis in the EA is hereby incorporated by reference.

Cultural Resources

The Proposed Action has no potential to cause effects to historic properties pursuant to the Section 106 implementing regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 800.3(a)(1).

Indian Trust Assets

The Proposed Action does not have a potential to affect Indian Trust Assets.

Indian Sacred Sites

The Proposed Action does not have the potential to affect Indian Sacred Sites.

Environmental Justice

No changes in agricultural communities or practices will result from the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action will not have any disproportionately negative impact on low-income or minority individuals within the Proposed Action area.

Air Quality

There will be no emission of criteria pollutants that will cause detectable changes to the baseline conditions or exceed Federal, State, and local thresholds for the Mountain Counties Air Basin as the releases are part of normal operations and do not require new construction.

Global Climate Change

The Proposed Action will not emit green house gasses that will exceed the 25,000 metric ton/year threshold. Trends in climate change will not be affected. In addition climate change will not have an impact to the Proposed Action.

Water Resources

The proposed releases will augment the 2009 National Marine Fisheries Service Biological Opinion reasonable and prudent measures Appendix 2E schedule for below normal and above normal water years. The Proposed Action will not change 2013 water allocations. It is assumed that the additional water released down the Stanislaus River is water that the districts will have used under their 2013 water allocation or will have added to their Conservation Account consistent with the 1988 Agreement and Stipulation.

Given current forecasts of projected inflows to New Melones, reasonable assumptions about irrigation demands by OID and SSJID, information about the proposed action by the districts, and the one-time nature of the action, it is anticipated that there will be a net reduction of zero to 80,000 AF in New Melones storage at the end of September 2013 with the likely effect to be about 30,000 to 40,000 AF. Any adverse effect or change to the cold water pool management due to this potential reduction in storage at the end of September may be minimal unless a prolonged period of extended drought is entered, and the effect may be balanced by the more immediate benefit of augmented fishery flows this fall.

Biological Resources

This water will be in addition to NMFS Biological Opinion Appendix 2E schedule down the Stanislaus River. Reclamation will continue to operate to all Delta actions related to the NMFS 2009 Biological Opinion Reasonable and Prudent Alternative. Under the Proposed Action, additional flows may provide cooler water temperatures and outmigration cues to salmonids during the pulse flow period, providing a beneficial effect on listed fish species.

Facility Operations

Given current forecasts of projected inflows to New Melones, reasonable assumptions about irrigation demands by OID and SSJID, information about the proposed action by the districts, and the one-time nature of the action, it is anticipated that there will be a net reduction of zero to 80,000 AF in New Melones storage at the end of September 2013 with the likely effect to be about 30,000 to 40,000 AF. Using the 90% and 50% exceedance forecast projected for end of September, end of September storage could range between a low of 918,000 AF (reduction of 80,000 AF to 90% exceedance) to a high of 1,135,000 AF (no net reduction in storage to 50% exceedance). This may impact Reclamation's ability to meet certain temperature criteria in the fall, and may lead to a reduction in water available to the CVP in future years, but will depend on the subsequent year's hydrology. The improvement to anadromous fish habitat in the Stanislaus and San Joaquin Rivers will balance this possible effect.

Recreation

The Proposed Action will allow additional water to be released down the Stanislaus River beginning in April. Rafting companies will be able to schedule trips as early as April and customers may have enhanced recreation experiences on the Stanislaus River earlier in the recreation season.

There will be temporary impacts to swimmers and boaters at Caswell Memorial State Park at flows greater than 1,500 cfs. However the park offers alternate trails and picnic areas that are available to visitors during trail inundation periods.

Because of the critically dry conditions for this water year, the boat ramp at Angels Creek is anticipated to become unusable sometime late in the season. Additional releases may cause this boat ramp to become unusable earlier. Additional releases may make additional boat ramps inaccessible later in the season causing boaters to either launch their boats at a different ramp, move to another lake or reservoir for boating, or forgo boating altogether. Because of the critically dry conditions at the reservoir, this is already anticipated to occur to some degree.

Cumulative Effects

There are no additional projects identified for this water year (or subsequent years). The NMFS 2009 BO includes actions that affect carryover storage, and combined with the current request, there could be cumulative impacts from the action. Given that this is a critically dry year, reductions in storage could be exacerbated if the dry hydrologic pattern continues. Because fisheries flows prescribed in Appendix 2E of the NMFS 2009 BO were developed to avoid jeopardy, these additional flows could also have a beneficial effect on salmonids because of the already dry conditions in the Stanislaus River. Benefits to salmonids will be for the April/May

timeframe, and these benefits would be immediate. Any potential cumulative impacts to storage depend on the recurrence of dry conditions into the future.

Public Review Period

The EA was made available April 3 through April 7, 2013. Reclamation received one comment during the comment period.