

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Finding of No Significant Impact

Westlands Water District Warren Act Contract for Groundwater Pumping into the Coalinga Canal

FONSI-13-042

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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 issuance of a Warren Act Contract (WAC) to Westlands Water District (WWD) for groundwater pumping into the Coalinga Canal. This Finding of No Significant Impact is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA) 13-042, *Westlands Water District Warren Act Contract for Groundwater Pumping into the Coalinga Canal*, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

Background

California is in the midst of unusually dry hydrologic conditions, which are creating a hardship for farmers in the agricultural areas of the San Joaquin Valley. In order to meet the needs of their customers, water districts are relying on exchanges, transfers and pumped groundwater to make the best use of the limited available supplies.

The Warren Act (Act of February 21, 1911; Chapter 141, 36 Stat. 925) authorizes the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to enter into contracts to impound, store, or convey non-project water in federal facilities, when excess capacity is available. WAC are issued by Reclamation to allow movement of this non-federal water through federal facilities.

WWD, located in Fresno and Kings Counties, has arranged to convey pumped groundwater from private well owners. WWD has requested permission from Reclamation to convey this water to their customers by way of the Coalinga Canal, a federal facility. WWD has requested a WAC for a period of five years to convey up to 10,000 acre-feet (AF) each year. A land use authorization is also needed to maintain and operate the necessary piping to discharge groundwater to the canal. WWD has requested a 25-year authorization for the pipes, which are already in place.

Proposed Action

Reclamation proposes to issue a WAC for the introduction of up to 10,000 AF per year (AFY) of groundwater into federal facilities by WWD growers as excess capacity is available. The groundwater would be pumped from up to nine private wells within the District for introduction into the Coalinga Canal, and then conveyed and delivered within WWD's boundaries through the Pleasant Valley system. The WAC would be in effect for up to five years.

Reclamation's annual approval would be contingent upon WWD's submittal of an estimated schedule of AF to be pumped and water quality reports for approved wells that introduced the non-project water from the prior year and of any pending wells that would be utilized in the current year. All non-project groundwater conveyed and delivered to WWD would be used for irrigation purposes.

Additionally, Reclamation would issue a 25-year license to use, operate and maintain existing pipelines from various wells over Reclamation's right of way along the Coalinga Canal.

Environmental Commitments

WWD will implement the following environmental protection measures to reduce environmental consequences associated with the Proposed Action (Table 1). Environmental consequences for resource areas assume the measures specified would be fully implemented.

Table 1 Environmental Protection Measures and Commitments

Resource	Protection Measure
Biological Resources	The Proposed Action does not include, nor does this EA evaluate, the conversion of any land fallowed and untilled for three or more years. The Proposed Action must not change the land use patterns of cultivated or fallowed fields that may have some value to listed species or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
Water Resources	WWD will comply with Reclamation's Water Quality Monitoring Plan in effect when the WAC is issued. If the quality of the Non-CVP water from one or more of the wells will degrade the quality of water in or introduced into the Coalinga Canal, WWD will be required to immediately terminate pumping into the canal from the source that will cause the degradation.

Reclamation's South-Central California Area Office has initiated an Environmental Commitment Program in order to implement, track and evaluate the environmental commitments developed for the Proposed Action.

Findings

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.

Water Resources

The Proposed Action would not change any existing CVP water delivery diversion points. Since only excess capacity would be used, it would not interfere with normal CVP operations.

Reclamation would require the non-CVP water introduced into the Coalinga Canal to meet established water quality standards. If water degradation due to one or more of the pump-ins occurs, the responsible discharges would be terminated, and the operators would be required to reestablish acceptable quality standards before resuming discharges into the Canal.

Groundwater pumping is known to lower water tables, and over time can result in soil subsidence as water-bearing strata are dewatered and settle. WWD has estimated that their safe groundwater yield is approximately 200,000 AF per year. The quantity of water involved in the Proposed Action is a small percentage of this amount and therefore is considered to be minor in comparison to the overall aquifer capacity and water use trends in the central valley.

Land Use

Allowing groundwater to be pumped and conveyed in the Coalinga Canal would support current land uses by making water available for agriculture.

Biological Resources

Under the Proposed Action, the water would be conveyed in existing facilities to established agricultural lands. No native lands or lands fallowed and untilled for three or more years would be disturbed as this water would be used on existing farmed lands. WWD would comply with Reclamation's Water Quality Monitoring Plan in effect when the WAC is issued. The Proposed Action would not affect protected migratory birds, imperiled species, unique habitats, or species and habitats.

The requirement that no native lands be converted without consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the stringent water quality standards for conveyance of pumped water into the Coalinga Canal, would preclude any impacts to wildlife, whether Federally listed or not.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Proposed Action would provide supplemental water to WWD to sustain existing crops. Socioeconomic conditions within the region as described in the affected environment would be within historical fluctuations in conditions. Conditions would remain the same as existing conditions and there would be no impacts to socioeconomic resources.

Environmental Justice

Under the Proposed Action, the availability of additional replacement water would help maintain agricultural production and local employment in WWD. Employment opportunities for low-income wage earners and minority population groups would be consistent with historical conditions. Disadvantaged populations would not be subject to disproportionate impacts.

Air Quality

All of the pumps to be used for this action are electric, with the exception of one 432-horsepower pump, at State Well ID 19S/16E-33N01. Air emissions from internal combustion engines in the San Joaquin Valley are regulated by the SJVAPCD under their Rule 4702. The rule sets emission thresholds designed to reduce the contribution of these engines to air quality violations in the Central Valley. The well owner would be required to use only equipment which complies with the SJVAPCD standards.

Air quality impacts from electrically-driven pumps are difficult to quantify, since the power they use could come from a variety of locations and a variety of sources. However, emissions from power plants are highly regulated, and their air permits are issued with regional air quality goals in mind. Generation of power required to operate the pumps involved in this action is not expected to cause any power plant to exceed their permitted emission thresholds.

Energy Use and Global Climate

All of the pumps to be used for this action are electric, with the exception of one 432-horsepower pump, at State Well ID 19S/16E-33N01. Worst-case GHG emissions were estimated to be approximately 1500 short tons, which is far below the established de minimis threshold. Therefore emissions under real-world operating conditions should also be well below thresholds of concern.

Air quality impacts from electrically-driven pumps are difficult to quantify, since the power they use could come from a variety of locations and a variety of sources. However, the power required to operate the pumps is not expected to represent an unusually large demand on the regional power grid, and should not cause any unexpected or unusual increase in emissions from power plants.

Cumulative Impacts

Capacity in federal canals is limited, and if many water actions take place concurrently they could cumulatively create conflicts. However, non-project water such as would be moved under the Proposed Action would only be allowed to enter the canal system if excess capacity is available, so it would not limit the ability of other users to make use of the facility.

When low-quality groundwater is introduced into the canal system it has the potential to degrade the quality of water for all users. If many low-quality wells are allowed to discharge to the canal, dilution benefits are lost and there can be cumulative adverse impacts. However, all well owners are required to test their water before being allowed to discharge to the canal. If water quality standards are not met, discharges must stop until quality concerns are addressed. This is expected to prevent cumulative adverse impacts to canal water quality.

Large-scale groundwater pumping is known to lower water tables, and has resulted in ground subsidence in the Central Valley over the years. The effects are less pronounced in wet years, and worsen in years when surface water supplies are more limited. WWD monitors groundwater depth and quality, and reports annually on trends. If cumulative effects are determined to present an unacceptable risk to groundwater supplies, policy actions could be developed to mitigate adverse impacts.