

# RECLAMATION

*Managing Water in the West*

## **FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**Temporary Acquisition of Water for San Joaquin Valley  
Wildlife Refuges from Kern-Tulare Water District and  
Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District**

**April 22, 2005**



Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of the Interior, through the Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), proposes to purchase temporary banked water supplies from Kern-Tulare Water District to be exchanged for 20,000 acre feet from Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District for delivery to San Joaquin Valley wildlife refuges. The acquired water will be used to provide critical wetland habitats at the refuges as authorized under Section 3406(d)(2) of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA).

Reclamation's *Report on Refuge Water Supply Investigations* (1989) describes water needs and delivery requirements for National Wildlife Refuges, State Wildlife Management Areas and the Grassland Resource Conservation District in the Central Valley of California. In this report the average annual historical supplies are called "Level 2", and the supplies needed for optimum habitat management are called "Level 4". Section 3406(d)(1) of the CVPIA requires the Secretary of the Interior to provide firm delivery of Level 2 water supplies to each wildlife refuge in the Central Valley of California. Section 3406(d)(2) of the CVPIA further directs the Secretary to provide additional water supplies to meet Level 4 needs through the acquisition of water from willing sellers. The water to be acquired is known as "Incremental Level 4" supplies. Incremental Level 4 supplies, when added to Level 2 supplies, make up full Level 4 supplies.

Reclamation, as the Federal lead agency, has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This EA is focused solely on the potential impacts of purchasing up to 20,000 acre feet of water from Kern-Tulare Water District to meet Level 4 water needs at San Joaquin Valley Wildlife Refuges. Environmental documentation has already been prepared that addresses the overall impacts of acquiring full Level 4 supplies at the refuges, the conveyance of water to the refuges, and use of water on the refuges. The overall impacts of implementing the CVPIA, including providing Level 4 water supplies to the refuges, are addressed in a *Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS)* (Interior 1999). Also, Environmental Assessments/Initial Studies (EAs/ISs) have been prepared that address the conveyance of water to the San Joaquin Valley Wildlife Refuges (Interior et al 2003, Interior 1997a, Interior 1997b), and the use of water on these refuges (Interior 2001 and Interior et al 2001).

Central Valley Project (CVP) water acquired by Kern-Tulare for sale to Reclamation through transfer from Friant Division CVP Contractors is covered under the EA prepared for the *Blanket Approval of Historic, Temporary Transfers and Exchanges of Central Valley Project Water Between Friant Water Service Contractors* (Interior, 2000).

## **1.1 PURPOSE AND NEED**

The Proposed Action is to enter into an agreement with Kern-Tulare Water District and Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District to acquire water to meet a portion of the Incremental Level 4 requirements for the San Joaquin Valley wildlife refuges for the 2005 water year.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to acquire Incremental Level 4 water supplies to optimally manage Central Valley wetland habitat areas as identified in the 1989 Refuge Water Supply Study Investigations. The difference between water supplies for optimum refuge management (Level 4) and average annual deliveries (Level 2) are related to management for habitat diversity, which includes timing and duration of fall and late winter flooding, summer water for food production, and maintenance of permanent wetland habitat. There is a need to acquire water during the 2005 water year to meet Level 4 water requirements at the San Joaquin Valley wildlife refuges.

## **2.0 PROPOSED ACTION**

The Proposed Action is for Reclamation to enter into an agreement with Kern-Tulare Water District and Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District to acquire temporary banked water supplies to meet a portion of the Incremental Level 4 requirements for San Joaquin Valley wildlife refuges.

This is CVP water (Class I and II Friant) which has been acquired through transfer from Friant Division CVP Contractors by Kern-Tulare Water District and stored in the Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District groundwater bank. This water will be transferred to Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District in exchange for Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District's State Water Project Table A water. Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District requires a 3% loss as part of the exchange. Therefore, Kern-Tulare Water District will deliver 20,619 acre-feet of its banked CVP water to Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District in order to regulate and deliver by exchange 20,000 acre-feet to San Joaquin and Tulare basin wildlife refuges.

The exchange water would be delivered at the O'Neill Forebay and conveyed to the refuges through two possible routes. The water can be provided to Kern National Wildlife Refuge (KNWR) from the California Aqueduct to the refuge from canals owned and operated by the Buena Vista Water District. KNWR is within the State Water Project place of use. Alternatively, the exchange water can be conveyed to the San Joaquin Valley Wildlife Refuges (Grassland, Los Banos, Volta, Mendota, China Island, Salt Slough, and West Bear) through the CVP Delta Mendota Canal and existing irrigation canals operated by various entities. Delivering the exchange water to the San Joaquin Valley wildlife refuges will require a change petition to the State Water Resources Control Board to approve temporary deliveries of State Water Project (SWP) water outside the SWP place of use.

Under either of these scenarios, the exchange water could be delivered to some refuges as Level 2 water supplies and exchanged to meet Incremental Level 4 needs at other refuges(s). This exchange between Level 2 and Incremental Level 4 supplies is permitted under Article 7 of the Long-Term Refuge Water Supply Contracts for the San Joaquin Valley refuges and would maintain the balance of Level 2 and Incremental Level 4 refuge water supplies consistent with the obligations to each refuge under the contracts.

## **2.1 NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE**

Under the No-Action Alternative, water deliveries to the San Joaquin Valley wildlife refuges would consist of firm Level 2 water supplies provided from the CVP and purchase of Incremental Level 4 supplies from other willing sellers. As a result, the No-Action Alternative is not likely to result in any appreciable change in refuge water management operations. Absent this water purchase, water currently available for acquisition from the Kern-Tulare Water District would be beneficially used by the District or would be marketed to other willing buyers.

## **3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

The Proposed Action results in no significant change in CVP or SWP operations, nor in any change in Delta pumping by the CVP or SWP. The water acquired from Kern-Tulare Water District is surplus to its current needs, and the proposed exchange of water with Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District does not change its available water supplies. Groundwater levels would not be impacted by the Proposed Action. The acquired water will be delivered to the refuges using existing conveyance facilities. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not have any significant water supply or land use impacts.

Endangered species will not be affected by the Proposed Action which involves the purchase of temporary banked water supplies from Kern-Tulare Water District to meet Incremental Level 4 water needs at San Joaquin Valley wildlife refuges. Adverse and beneficial impacts associated with the conveyance of water to the refuges and use of water on the refuges have been addressed in other environmental documents, as cited earlier, and are not part of the Proposed Action.

## **4.0 CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

Reclamation consulted and coordinated with the Kern-Tulare Water District and Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District, and FWS regarding development of this Proposed Action.

### **4.1 Public Involvement and Scoping**

A draft of this EA was circulated to interested parties for a 21-day public review period from March 10, 2005 through March 31, 2005. No comments were received on the draft EA during this period.

## 5.0 LIST OF PREPARERS

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### Kern-Tulare Water District

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## 6.0 REFERENCES

Interior, 1989. *Report on Refuge Water Supply Investigations, Central Valley Hydrological Basin, California*. United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Mid-Pacific Region, March 1989.

Interior, 1997a. *San Joaquin Basin Action Plan and North Grasslands Area Conveyance Facilities EA/IS*. U.S. Department of the Interior, Reclamation, Southern California Area Office, June 1997.

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Reclamation, 1990. *National Environmental Policy Handbook.* Denver, CO