

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Willow Creek Ranch Conservation Easement Acquisition Project

FONSI 14-21-MP

Recommended by:

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Date: 8/29/14

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

Background

Reclamation proposes to provide \$800,000 from the Central Valley Project Conservation Program (CVPCP) to the California Rangeland Trust (Rangeland Trust) to help purchase a conservation easement on 5,522 acres of the 5,954-acre Willow Creek Ranch (Ranch). The Ranch is located in San Benito County adjacent to Pinnacles National Park's northern boundary.

The purpose of the CVPCP is to help mitigate the past impacts of Reclamation's Central Valley Project (CVP) on threatened and endangered species, and minimize future impacts. Three federally listed species (California tiger salamander, California red-legged frog and California condor) would benefit from the conservation easement, all of which have declined at least partially due to the conversion of habitat to irrigated agriculture in the western San Joaquin Valley, in part due to the availability of CVP water.

Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

No Action

Reclamation would not provide \$800,000 from the CVPCP to the Rangeland Trust to help purchase a conservation easement on 5,522 acres of the 5,954-acre Ranch. The Rangeland Trust would have to obtain the \$800,000 from other public and/or private sources. If the funding cannot be secured, they may not be able to purchase the Ranch.

Proposed Action

Reclamation will provide \$800,000 from the CVPCP to the Rangeland Trust to help purchase a conservation easement on 5,522 acres of the 5,954-acre Ranch. The total estimated cost for the easement is \$1,852,000. A long term management plan for the Ranch would be developed and implemented if the Rangeland Trust is able to purchase an easement. This management plan would address water, grazing, recreation and other human uses, invasive plants and animals, and federally listed species habitat requirements. Prior to easement acquisition, a baseline conditions report would be prepared documenting existing development, agricultural uses, and natural resources. An easement monitoring plan would also be developed. The Rangeland Trust would work with the landowners and funding partners to assure that all parties agree with the conditions, restrictions and/or requirements of the easement, management plan, baseline conditions report, and monitoring plan.

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 EA describes the existing environmental resources in the area of the Proposed Action, and evaluates the effects of the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives on the resources of the Ranch. This EA was prepared in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act, Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and Department of the Interior Regulations (43 CFR Part 46). Effects on several environmental resources were

examined and found to be absent or minor. That analysis is provided in the attached EA, and the analysis in the EA is hereby incorporated by reference.

Following are the reasons why the impacts of the proposed action are not significant:

1. The proposed action will not significantly affect public health or safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)).
2. The proposed action will not significantly impact natural resources and unique geographical characteristics such as historic or cultural resources; parks, recreation, and refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order (EO) 11990); flood plains (EO 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3) and 43 CFR 46.215(b)).
3. The proposed action will not have possible effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)).
4. The proposed action will neither establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)).
5. There is no potential for the effects to be considered highly controversial (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)).
6. The proposed action will not have significant cumulative impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)).
7. The proposed action has no potential to affect historic properties (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)).
8. The proposed action will not affect listed or proposed threatened or endangered species (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)).
9. The proposed action will not violate federal, state, tribal or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)).
10. The proposed action will not affect any Indian Trust Assets (512 DM 2, Policy Memorandum dated December 15, 1993).
11. Implementing the proposed action will not disproportionately affect minorities or low-income populations and communities (EO 12898).
12. The proposed action will not limit access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007 and 512 DM 3).