

# RECLAMATION

*Managing Water in the West*

## Draft Finding of No Significant Impact

# West Hills Water Treatment Plant

FONSI-12-096

Prepared by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ben Lawrence  
Natural Resources Specialist  
South-Central California Area Office

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Concurred by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
See Attachment  
Archaeologist/Architectural Historian  
Mid-Pacific Regional Office

Date: See Attachment

Concurred by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
See Attachment  
Native American Affairs Specialist  
Mid-Pacific Regional Office

Date: See Attachment

Concurred by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jennifer Lewis  
Wildlife Biologist  
South-Central California Area Office

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Concurred by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisory Natural Resources Specialist  
South-Central California Area Office

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Michael Jackson  
Area Manager  
South-Central California Area Office

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# 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 to allow San Benito County to connect to the Hollister Conduit for the purpose of delivering their Central Valley Project (CVP) water to a new municipal water treatment plant (WTP). This Finding of No Significant Impact is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA) 12-096, *West Hills Treatment Plant*, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

## Background

In order to address long-term water needs, Hollister completed a Master Plan and Coordinated Water Supply and Treatment Plan in 2011 (State Clearinghouse #2010061069). In addition to water quality improvement efforts, the plan also includes additional sources of supply to improve reliability. This includes construction of a new WTP located west of the Hollister Urbanized Area (HUA) to receive CVP water from the Hollister Conduit (Conduit), which is a federal facility. The raw water would be treated at the plant and delivered to the existing distribution infrastructure in western Hollister. Permission is needed from Reclamation to tap into the Hollister Conduit to supply water for the WTP.

## Proposed Action

Reclamation proposes to authorize San Benito County Water District (SBCWD) to make a connection to the Hollister Conduit for the purpose of delivering their CVP water to a proposed new WTP. The main components of the proposed project include construction and operation of a raw water pump station, the West Hills WTP itself, and raw and treated water transmission pipelines. Detail on each component and design drawings of the West Hills WTP, pipelines, and associated facilities are presented in the EA.

## Environmental Commitments

SBCWD 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
Water	A site drainage plan shall be prepared and incorporated into the final construction plans.
Water	A Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan shall be prepared to limit erosion impacts from construction.
Traffic	The construction contractor shall prepare a transportation management plan in coordination with San Benito County and the City of Hollister in order to mitigate traffic disruptions.
Biological Resources	Preconstruction surveys by US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)-approved biologist(s) for California red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, and San Joaquin kit fox will be performed immediately prior to groundbreaking activities.

**West Hills Water Treatment Plant  
Draft FONSI 12-096**

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Protection Measure</b>
Biological Resources	A USFWS-approved biological monitor(s) will be onsite at all times during initial ground-breaking activities until wildlife exclusion fencing is installed around perimeter of the Proposed Action area. Upon completion of these activities, the monitoring biologist will inspect exclusion fencing on a daily basis to look for tears and to ensure no California red-legged frog or California tiger salamander have become trapped along the fence line. The applicant will maintain and/or replace these barriers immediately if necessary.
Biological Resources	No sooner than 30 days prior to construction mobilization, a biologist shall conduct a preconstruction nesting bird survey of the proposed West Hills WTP site, pipeline alignments, and all staging areas and haul routes. The biological monitor shall survey linear features in segments as construction becomes imminent. If nesting birds are identified, the biologist in consultation with the California Department of fish and Wildlife would identify an appropriate protection buffer around the nest based on site conditions, and the buffer area shall be excluded from the approved work area.
Biological Resources	Preconstruction surveys and implementation of avoidance and minimization measures for burrowing owls would be conducted in areas supporting potentially suitable habitat within 30 days prior to the start of project construction according to 2012 Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation.
Biological Resources	No more than 30 days prior to mobilization activities, a USFWS-approved biologist shall conduct a preconstruction survey in all off-road construction areas according to established standardized protocols in the 2011 <i>U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Standardized Recommendations for Protection of the Endangered San Joaquin Kit Fox Prior to or During Ground Disturbance</i> .
Biological Resources	Any California red-legged frog or California tiger salamander observed during preconstruction surveys will be monitored by the approved biologist and allowed to passively leave the site or, if determined necessary by the USFWS-approved biologist, removed from the work area(s) and relocated to an appropriate location in accordance with a USFWS-approved Relocation Plan.
Biological Resources	Amphibian exclusion fencing will be established around the perimeter of the Proposed Action, including the West Hills WTP, along both sides of water pipeline construction corridors, and along both sides of access roads. Exclusion fencing will remain around the specified work areas for the duration of ground disturbing activities.
Biological Resources	The Applicant proposes to purchase compensation land for the loss of habitat, temporary and or permanent impact to special-status species from an USFWS-approved conservation bank.

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

Construction, operation and maintenance of the proposed project could temporarily degrade water quality through erosion, accidental release of pollutants or discharge of polluted runoff, and/or a change in the volume of runoff. Compliance with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit requirements, including preparation of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP), and implementation of appropriate best management practices would reduce the potential for these impacts to water quality.

Construction of the proposed project may also require short term dewatering to accommodate installation of the treated water pipeline adjacent to the San Benito River. If required, this could temporarily affect groundwater levels in the shallow groundwater zones. However, wells located in the project area generally pump groundwater from deeper aquifers and would not be affected by dewatering activities in the shallow groundwater zone. Furthermore, any effects related to lowering the shallow groundwater table would be temporary since dewatering would be required for only a limited period during construction.

Ongoing operation and maintenance of the proposed water treatment plant would involve the use and storage of various chemicals and fuels used in the water treatment process. Chemicals would be stored in bulk chemical storage tanks located in an enclosed area, and chemical piping located outside of the chemical containment area would be double-contained. With these precautions any leak or spill would be contained onsite and would not reach receiving waters.

The Proposed Action would provide a new source of imported surface water for municipal supply, by treating and distributing CVP water. Imported water generally has lower Total Dissolved Solids concentrations than groundwater in the HUA and would improve the quality of municipal supply. Improvement in the quality of the water supply would in turn improve effluent quality from the wastewater treatment plants serving the same portion of the HUA.

### **Land Use**

Implementation of the West Hills WTP project would include construction of a new water treatment plant, raw water pump station, raw water pipeline, and treated water pipeline which would be constructed primarily in an undeveloped area of unincorporated San Benito County. The site and surrounding areas are currently used for agricultural (livestock grazing) and low-density rural residential purposes. The proposed pipelines would be below-grade and in suitable existing easements, so they would not change overall land usage or appearance. The treatment plant itself would represent a change from current land use patterns; however San Benito County and the City of Hollister have specifically excluded water treatment plants and associated facilities from zoning restrictions. Further, the overall project is consistent with the land development plans for the area in that its purpose is to provide water supplies which support planned development.

### **Biological Resources**

Many of special-status plants and animals described in the EA are unlikely to occur within the boundaries of the disturbed land areas. However, birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and federally-protected species that may occur in the vicinity of the Proposed Action areas include: burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), California red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, and San Joaquin kit fox. Habitat loss along with habitat disturbance and the resulting impact to wildlife is the primary potential effect of the Proposed Action.

**Migratory Birds** There is potential nesting habitat for burrowing owl in the action area. Potential impacts to burrowing owls would be avoided and or minimized by implementing the environmental protection measures described above. Therefore, there would be no take of birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

**Federally-listed Species** Permanent habitat loss would result from construction of the West Hills WTP. Temporary habitat loss would result from construction of the raw water and treated water pipelines. Effects associated with the Proposed Action also include mortality, injury, or physiological stress during project construction because of ground disturbance, operation of construction equipment, worker vehicles, increased human presence, dewatering activities, unplanned spills of toxic substances, and potential rescue and relocation activities. Long-term effects resulting from project operation include potential for mortality, injury, or physiological stress due to worker vehicles, persistent human presence, operational noise, and nighttime lighting.

Environmental protective measures as described above would be implemented in order to avoid and/or minimize potential impacts to federally listed species and their habitat. These measures would include, but are not limited to, the following: preconstruction surveys, installation of “amphibian-friendly” barrier fencing, amphibian relocation, construction monitoring, construction personnel training, and use of qualified biologists during surveys and monitoring.

### **Cultural Resources**

The Proposed Action involves the construction of a water treatment plant and its ancillary components (i.e., pipelines and pump house). Drawing water from the Hollister Conduit requires Reclamation permission, which constitutes an undertaking as defined by Section 301(7) of the NHPA initiating Section 106 and its implementing regulations at 36 CFR § 800. The proposed project area has been investigated for the presence of cultural resources as part of the Section 106 process pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.4. No cultural resources were identified within the project APE, resulting in a determination of no historic properties affected. As such, should the Proposed Action be implemented, the resulting activity will have no impact on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Socioeconomic Resources**

The Proposed Action would support the planning goals of the County and the City of Hollister. Improving the reliability and drinking water quality for the HUA is a benefit to the residents and businesses of the area.

### **Environmental Justice**

The Proposed Action could result in temporary impacts to nearby residences during the construction phase (between late 2014 and summer 2016), particularly in the form of short-term increases in noise and traffic disruptions. There would also be a long-term change in the visual character of the proposed treatment plant site, with the introduction of new buildings and treatment facilities. These localized impacts and inconveniences are not expected to affect the environmental justice populations in the project area, which are primarily located in the HUA, one mile east of most of the planned construction.

Once the water treatment plant is operational, it would provide a reliable, high-quality water supply to meet current and future operational needs of the residents of the HUA. The City’s residents in the western portion of the HUA, who are disproportionately low-income and/or minorities, would benefit directly from improved source water quality that is lower in dissolved solids.

## **Air Quality**

The proposed construction would take place between late 2014 and the summer of 2016. It would include the construction of a water treatment plant, raw water pump station and pipelines for raw and treated water. During construction, ozone precursors and criteria pollutants would be emitted by operation of construction equipment as well as vehicles traveling to and from the project site. These emissions would incrementally add to the regional atmospheric loading of air pollutants during project development. However, the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD) has determined that emissions from construction projects using typical equipment are accommodated in the emission inventories of State- and federally-required air plans and would not have a significant impact on the attainment and maintenance of ozone ambient air quality standards.

Fugitive dust would also be produced by various construction activities, including clearing and grading, excavation, vehicle movement over paved and unpaved surfaces, and wind action over disturbed surfaces. To determine impacts, SBCWD modeled anticipated emissions and compared the results to the MBUAPCD threshold. The resulting anticipated emissions were determined to be below the threshold of concern. Compliance with relevant MBUAPCD Rules and Regulations (such as Rule 403 – Particulate Matter) would be required in order to minimize fugitive dust.

Annual operational emissions were modeled with CalEEMod, using emission factors for assumed reference equipment and conditions. The model showed that operational emissions would also be below MBUAPCD thresholds of significance.

## **Energy Use and Global Climate**

Greenhouse gases would be generated during construction as a result of the use of equipment and construction-related on-road vehicular activity. These sources were modeled by SBCWD using CalEEMod, based on the proposed project's anticipated schedule and construction methods. Using this data, the annual emissions (2014 and 2015) of GHGs would total 1,896 MT of CO<sub>2e</sub>. Amortized over 30 years, the proposed project would result in approximately 63 MT CO<sub>2e</sub>/year.

SBCWD also modeled expected annual emissions with CalEEMod, using emission factors for assumed reference equipment and conditions. Total annualized GHG emissions were calculated to be 322 MT CO<sub>2e</sub>/year, which would be well below the 10,000 MT CO<sub>2e</sub>/year threshold of significance adopted by SBCWD.

## **Noise**

Project construction, daily project operation, and project traffic increases on local area roadways would temporarily increase noise levels in the project vicinity. Unmitigated, this noise exposure could temporarily exceed applicable County of San Benito and City of Hollister noise exposure criteria at certain locations. However, construction would be limited to conventional daytime hours, which would reduce the inconvenience and annoyance caused by the temporary increase in noise.

The main sources of noise from operations at the WTP would be from the reclaim pump station, an air scouring system located in the vicinity of the filter effluent, and one water pump located at the backwash pump station. The proposed raw water pump station would be located on the east side of

Union Road, southwest of the proposed WTP, and would include the operation of three water pumps. Based on modeling of the noise propagation, unmitigated noise exposure from operation of the proposed WTP and raw water pump station equipment is expected to exceed San Benito County's permitted nighttime ambient noise levels. In order to reduce impacts, noise barriers would be constructed along the north and east sides of the water treatment plant air scouring system and backwash pump station, respectively. Additionally, a permanent barrier would be constructed along the east side of the raw water pump station.

Peak traffic to and from the treatment plant following construction is expected to be approximately 10 vehicles per hour, at the beginning and end of the work day. This low volume of traffic is not expected to affect ambient noise levels at nearby noise-sensitive receivers.

### **Traffic**

The proposed project would be phased throughout an approximate two-year construction period. Construction of each portion of the proposed improvements would result in short-term, localized increases in the traffic volume. The number of construction-related vehicle trips would vary each day, depending on the type of project component, construction phase, planned activity, and material needs.

The estimated daily vehicle trips for construction would represent less than one percent of existing traffic on regional roads, and would not be expected to substantially inconvenience the traveling public. Construction traffic would be more noticeable on local two lane roads (e.g., Union Road, Nash Road, and Westside Boulevard), but the increased traffic volumes would remain at levels lower than the carrying capacity of those roads and would not exceed the congestion thresholds established by San Benito County.

Due to the existing 18-foot width of Riverside Road and 12-foot width of Richardson Road, installation of the planned treated water pipeline would result in the temporary closure of those roads during construction. Access along the roadways would only be permitted for construction vehicles, local residents, and emergency vehicles. Although local access would be provided throughout construction, short-term congestion events could limit accessibility and result in increased travel times.

Project construction could also temporarily impair access to alternative transportation facilities (public transit, bicycle, or pedestrian facilities), and could temporarily decrease the performance or safety of such facilities. Specifically, the temporary increase in traffic associated with construction-related vehicles (especially slow-moving trucks) accessing the project site via Nash Road and SR 25 (Airline Highway) could disrupt or cause the slowing of County Express transit vehicles along these roadways. The influx of haul trucks during construction period could also conflict with existing and planned bicycle facilities and users of such facilities.

The construction contractor would be required to prepare and implement a traffic control plan to reduce traffic impacts on the roadways at and near the work site, as well as to reduce potential traffic safety hazards and ensure adequate access for emergency responders. Development and implementation of this plan shall be coordinated with jurisdictional agencies (e.g., City of Hollister, San Benito County, Caltrans), as appropriate.

Operational activities at the proposed treatment plant would generate a small amount of new traffic. Most of this traffic is expected to be passenger automobiles, although deliveries and waste hauling would require larger trucks. This minor amount of traffic is not anticipated to meaningfully affect traffic patterns or challenge capacity on the area's road network.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

A variety of other development projects have been proposed within San Benito County and the City of Hollister. Some of these, such as planned residential subdivisions, would represent a change in land use patterns. Both jurisdictions have enacted formal plans to manage growth in a responsible manner which is consistent with public needs and expectations. Zoning and other land use controls are in place to ensure that any cumulative effects from land use are limited and do not conflict with other public goals and needs.

Numerous activities, regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal), continue to eliminate habitat for listed and proposed threatened and endangered species. Habitat loss and degradation affecting both animals and plants continue as a result of several factors, including urbanization, oil and gas development, road and utility right-of-way management, flood control projects, climate change, grazing by livestock, and agricultural practices. Listed and proposed animal species may be affected by poisoning, shooting, increased predation associated with human development, and reduction of food sources. All of these nonfederal activities are expected to continue to adversely affect listed and proposed species. The Proposed Action would temporarily disturb California red-legged frog and California tiger salamander uplands habitat during construction activities. The temporary disturbed habitat would be returned to its preexisting condition once construction is complete. However, the Proposed Action would also eliminate non-native grassland habitat that is considered suitable habitat for San Joaquin kit fox and which could also be utilized by California red-legged frog and California tiger salamander. SBCWD would implement the appropriate avoidance and minimization measures, including compensatory habitat, to address impacts to habitat as needed to minimize potential cumulative impacts.

There are several planned and proposed projects located within the vicinity of the project site. The construction timing of the majority of those additional projects has not been established, and therefore it is not known whether any or all of them would be under construction during construction of the proposed project. However several have defined, known schedules which are anticipated to coincide with the construction of the WTP.

Roadways adjacent to and within the vicinity of the various projects could experience an increase in traffic volumes and reduced capacity as a result of these construction projects with overlapping schedules. While the effects of the additional construction vehicles are expected to be accommodated within the capacity of the roadways and intersections, the increased traffic volumes associated with the overlapping and concurrent projects could increase potential traffic hazards for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians on affected roadways during construction of each planned facility. Implementation of the mitigation measures described above, as well as coordination with between contractors and local jurisdictions, is expected to adequately address the potential for cumulative traffic impacts.