

# RECLAMATION

*Managing Water in the West*

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

## **West Hills Water Treatment Plant**

**FONSI-12-096**



**U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Reclamation**

**March 2015**

## **Mission Statements**

The mission of the Department of the Interior is to protect and manage the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provide scientific and other information about those resources; and honor its trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated 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.

**BUREAU OF RECLAMATION**  
**South-Central California Area Office, Fresno, California**

**FONSI-12-096**

**West Hills Water Treatment Plant**



Prepared by: Ben Lawrence  
Natural Resources Specialist

2-17-15  
Date



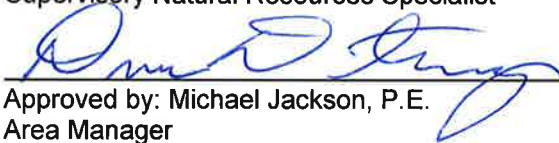
Concurred by: Jennifer Lewis  
Wildlife Biologist

2-17-2015  
Date



Concurred by: Rain L. Emerson  
Supervisory Natural Resources Specialist

03/03/2015  
Date



for

Approved by: Michael Jackson, P.E.  
Area Manager

03/10/2015  
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 Water District to connect to the San Juan Lateral to the Hollister Conduit (Conduit) for the purpose of delivering their Central Valley Project (CVP) water to a new municipal water treatment plant. This Finding of No Significant Impact is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA) 12-096, *West Hills Water Treatment Plant*, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

Reclamation provided the public with an opportunity to comment on the Draft EA and Finding of No Significant Impact between March 10, 2014 and April 9, 2014. No comments were received.

## Background

The City of Hollister (City) is located in northwestern San Benito County, California, east of Monterey Bay and west of Interstate 5 (see Figure 1-1). Residents of the Hollister Urbanized Area currently use a combination of groundwater and imported CVP surface water. Although treated drinking water in the Hollister Urbanized Area meets all primary federal and state drinking water standards, high total dissolved solids in source groundwater (800 to 1,200 mg/L, compared to 250 to 300 mg/L for imported surface water) have created a need for home water softeners, particularly in the western portion of the Hollister Urbanized Area. The high concentration of minerals and salinity also limits options for reuse and disposal of wastewater at the City's water reclamation facility downstream, due to its incompatibility with groundwater and crops.

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 water treatment plant located west of the Hollister Urbanized Area to receive their contracted CVP water at a new point of delivery from the 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 Conduit to receive their CVP water for use by the water treatment plant.

## **Proposed Action**

Reclamation proposes to authorize San Benito County Water District to make a connection to the Conduit (at the San Juan Lateral) for the purpose of delivering their CVP water to a proposed new water treatment plant. The main components of the Proposed Action include construction and operation of a raw water pump station, the West Hills water treatment plant itself, and raw and treated water transmission pipelines. Detail on each component and design drawings of the West Hills water treatment plant, pipelines, and associated facilities are presented in Section 2.2 of the EA.

## **Environmental Commitments**

Reclamation and San Benito County Water District will implement a variety of environmental protection measures to avoid and/or reduce environmental consequences associated with the Proposed Action. See Table 2-1 in the EA for a detailed listing. Environmental consequences for resource areas assume the measures specified would be fully implemented.

## **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:

### **Resources Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

Reclamation analyzed the affected environment and determined that the Proposed Action does not have the potential to cause direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse effects to Indian Sacred Sites or Indian Trust Assets. See Section 3.1 of the EA for additional information.

### **Water Resources**

Construction, operation and maintenance of the water treatment plant 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.

Short-term dewatering may be necessary to accommodate installation of the treated water pipeline, if groundwater infiltration in work areas adjacent to the San Benito River becomes a problem. Although dewatering could temporarily affect groundwater levels in the shallow groundwater zones, wells located in the Proposed Action Area generally pump groundwater from deeper aquifers and would not be affected. 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-walled. With these precautions any leak or spill would be contained onsite and would not reach any offsite water bodies.

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 Hollister Urbanized Area, so increasing the proportion of the area's water supply derived from surface sources would improve the quality of water delivered to users. It would also provide low-hexavalent-chromium drinking water to the City's service area within the compliance timeframes being mandated by the California Department of Drinking Water, reducing the need for other costly system improvements. Finally, improvement in the quality of the water supply would improve effluent quality from the wastewater treatment plants serving the same portion of the Hollister Urbanized Area.

### **Land Use**

Implementation of the West Hills water treatment plant 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 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.

The western portion of the treated water pipeline would be located on land which is classified as Unique Farmland. However, it would be installed within an existing right-of-way dedicated for the purpose. Therefore the presence of the pipeline is not expected to interfere with ongoing agricultural use of the property. Similarly, in the area covered by a Williamson Act contract, the pipeline would be beneath an existing residential driveway. Because the treated water pipeline would not compromise the long-term productive agricultural capability of the land, nor would it displace or impair current agricultural operations, the Proposed Action would be compatible with Williamson Act contract land uses.

A portion of the treated water pipeline would cross the 100-year flood hazard area of the San Benito River. The treated water pipeline would be buried at a depth of approximately four feet within or adjacent to Nash Road and would be installed within the Nash Road Bridge at the river crossing. As such, the pipeline would not impede or redirect flood flows.

### **Biological Resources**

Many special-status plants and animals identified in the EA as potentially affected 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, 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 Proposed Action Area. Potential impacts to burrowing owls would be avoided and or minimized by implementing the environmental protection measures described in Table 2-1 of the EA. 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 water treatment plant. Temporary habitat loss would result from construction of the raw water and treated water pipelines. Potential effects associated with the Proposed Action could 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. Potential long-term effects resulting from project operation could include mortality, injury, or physiological stress due to worker vehicles, persistent human presence, operational noise, and nighttime lighting.

Environmental protective measures as described in the EA 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” exclusion fencing, amphibian relocation, construction monitoring, construction personnel training, and use of qualified biologists during surveys and monitoring.

On February 11, 2015, a Biological Opinion was issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the effects of construction and operation of the West Hills water treatment plant (see Appendix C of the EA). They concluded the proposed water treatment plant would not jeopardize the continued existence of the federally listed California red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, and the



San Joaquin kit fox. Reclamation and San Benito County Water District will comply with requirements of the Biological Opinion issued by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### **Cultural Resources**

The Proposed Action involves the construction of a water treatment plant and its ancillary components (i.e., pipelines and pump house). Receiving water from the Conduit requires Reclamation permission which constitutes an undertaking as defined by Section 301(7) of the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 and its implementing regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 800. The Proposed Action Area has been investigated for the presence of cultural resources as part of the Section 106 process pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.4. No archaeological resources were identified within the project Area of Potential Effect. However, the Conduit is assumed to be an eligible property as a contributing element of the CVP. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not affect those characteristics that contribute to the eligibility of the CVP for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Reclamation made a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.5(b). Reclamation received concurrence with this determination from the State Historic Preservation Officer and has concluded the Section 106 process. 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.

### **Socioeconomic Resources**

The Proposed Action would support the planning goals of San Benito County and the City. Improving the reliability and drinking water quality for the Hollister Urbanized Area 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, 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 Proposed Action Area, which are primarily located in the Hollister Urbanized Area, 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 Hollister Urbanized Area. The City's residents in the western portion of the Hollister Urbanized Area, 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 Action 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, although temporary, would incrementally add to the regional atmospheric loading of air pollutants during project development. However, the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District 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 temporarily 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, San Benito County Water District modeled anticipated emissions and compared the results to the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District threshold. The resulting anticipated emissions were determined to be below the threshold of concern. Compliance with relevant Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District Rules and Regulations (such as Rule 403 – Particulate Matter) would be implemented 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 Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District thresholds of significance.

Carbon monoxide can be a localized problem at high concentrations. However, construction of the water treatment plant would be relatively short-term and would not emit carbon monoxide in quantities that would pose a health concern. Operation of the water treatment plant and pipeline are also not anticipated to result in or contribute to carbon monoxide concentrations that would exceed the California 1-hour ambient air quality standard of 20 parts per million (ppm) or the 8-hour standard of 9 ppm because of the negligible amount of carbon monoxide generated by operational sources.

Construction of the water treatment plant would also temporarily result in short-term exhaust emissions of diesel particulate matter, which is a toxic air contaminant, from on-site heavy duty-equipment. However, the duration of construction (~600 days) would be short relative to the standard exposure period of 70 years. Also, most construction would take place at a substantial distance from sensitive residential receptors, with the nearest residence being 400 feet from the water treatment plant and the nearest residence being 800 feet from the raw water pump site. Portions of the conveyance pipeline would be installed closer to residences; however the pipeline installation would be a continually

moving activity, and would not take place at any particular location for an extended period of time.

Long-term operation of the water treatment plant would not result in any unpermitted sources of toxic air contaminant emissions in the respective air district jurisdictions. Testing of the emergency generator would be required occasionally, but would result in negligible particulate emissions and would comply with applicable Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District rules.

### **Global Climate Change**

Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District has not yet set a significance threshold for greenhouse gases, so as a conservative approach San Benito County Water District has adopted the interim threshold of 10,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalents per year (CO<sub>2e</sub>/year) used by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the South Coast Air Quality Management District. Under South Coast Air Quality Management District guidelines, emissions from construction are amortized over thirty years and added to operational emissions for comparison to the threshold. San Benito County Water District adopted the same approach for their analysis.

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 San Benito County Water District using CalEEMod, based on the Proposed Action's anticipated schedule and construction methods. Using this data, the total construction-related emissions of greenhouse gases would total 1,896 metric tons CO<sub>2e</sub>. Amortized over 30 years (as per South Coast Air Quality Management District guidelines), the Proposed Action would result in approximately 63 metric tons CO<sub>2e</sub>/year.

San Benito County Water District also modeled expected annual operating emissions with CalEEMod, using emission factors for assumed reference equipment and conditions. The annual greenhouse gas emissions associated with operation of the water treatment plant were calculated to be approximately 259 metric tons CO<sub>2e</sub>/year. Combined with the amortized construction emissions, the Proposed Action would result in a total of approximately 322 metric tons CO<sub>2e</sub>/year, which would be well below the 10,000 metric tons CO<sub>2e</sub>/year threshold adopted by San Benito County Water District.

### **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 noise exposure criteria at certain locations. However, construction would be limited to conventional daytime hours, which would mitigate the inconvenience and annoyance caused by the temporary increase in noise.

The main sources of noise from operations at the water treatment plant 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 water treatment plant, and would include the operation of three water pumps. Based on modeling of the noise propagation, unmitigated noise exposure from operation of the proposed water treatment plant and raw water pump station equipment is expected to exceed San Benito County's permitted nighttime ambient noise levels. In order to mitigate these 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 residences.

### **Traffic**

The Proposed Action 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 State Route 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.

In order to address these, 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, 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**

### ***Water***

A variety of other actions in the surrounding area would involve excavation of soil or discharges of stormwater or groundwater, and could affect the same water conveyance systems as the Proposed Action. However, the Proposed Action, as well as the other construction activities, would be covered by the permitting programs established by the Clean Water Act. These permits contain stipulations and requirements designed to minimize and mitigate adverse impacts to protected water bodies. Typical conditions include measures to control stormwater runoff, soil erosion, and the potential for spills of objectionable materials during construction. It is expected that these measures would be adequate to mitigate the risk of adverse cumulative impacts to water resources.

### ***Land Use***

A variety of other development projects have been proposed within San Benito County and the City. 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 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 change are limited and do not conflict with other public goals and needs.

### ***Biological Resources***

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. San Benito County Water District would implement the appropriate avoidance and minimization measures, including acquiring compensatory habitat credits, to address impacts to habitat as needed to minimize potential cumulative impacts.

### ***Socioeconomic Resources***

The Proposed Action does not directly promote additional development, but it removes a possible obstacle (limited utility capacity) to future growth. All future development in the Hollister Urbanized Area would be subject to the planning policies and regulations enforced by various jurisdictions to ensure that growth proceeds in a way that is consistent with public expectations. Allowing land use to proceed in accordance with land use plans would provide a cumulative socioeconomic benefit to the area.

### ***Air Quality***

According to the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District, no single project is sufficient in size, by itself, to result in nonattainment of ambient air quality standards. Instead, a project's individual emissions contribute to existing cumulatively significant adverse air quality impacts. If a project exceeds the identified significance thresholds or is inconsistent with the Air Quality Management Plan, its emissions would be considered to be a significant contributor to the region's air quality problems. Alternatively, if a project does not exceed the significance thresholds and is consistent with the Air Quality Management Plan, then the project is considered to not be in conflict with air quality goals. Since the Proposed Action would be consistent with the Air Quality Management Plan and emissions generated during construction and operation would not exceed Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District's air quality thresholds, it is expected that it would not result in cumulative adverse impacts to the basin's air quality.

### ***Global Climate Change***

Greenhouse gases by their nature are global and cumulative in effect. While this project would add to the global inventory of greenhouse gases, its total emissions are below the conservative threshold of significance used by South Coast Air

Quality Management District. Therefore it is expected that the Proposed Action's contribution to cumulative impacts would be relatively minor.

### **Noise**

**Construction-Related Cumulative Noise** The nearest planned construction project is the proposed Rodriguez Union Road subdivision, to the south of the proposed treatment plant site. Noise from the construction of the subdivision is likely to be similar to noise produced by construction of the proposed treatment plant and pipelines. The schedule for subdivision construction has not been established, but it is possible that the construction schedules for the two actions would overlap. Both projects would be subject to the same requirements for noise mitigation such as work hour restrictions and maintaining equipment in good working condition. With appropriate mitigation measures the net effect should not be unreasonable or unusual for such temporary sources of noise.

**Operations-Related Cumulative Noise** Once constructed, the Rodriguez Union Road subdivision described above is not expected to generate substantial long-term noise, and would not result in a cumulative noise effect. There are additional road projects planned (Union Road Bridge and Hospital Road Bridge) which could result in a localized increase in traffic noise, but they are located over a mile from the project site. The incorporation of noise barriers into the Proposed Action is also expected to adequately mitigate ongoing noise from the water treatment plant and associated facilities. Therefore cumulative impacts are not expected.

### **Traffic**

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 Action. However several have defined, known schedules which are anticipated to coincide with the construction of the water treatment plant.

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 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. Coordination between contractors and local jurisdictions is expected to adequately address the potential for cumulative traffic impacts.