

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Draft FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Stone Corral Irrigation District Warren Act Approval

FONSI-15-031



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-15-031

Stone Corral Irrigation District Warren
Act Approval

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Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act 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 the issuance of temporary Warren Act approval to Stone Corral Irrigation District for introduction and conveyance of non-Central Valley Project (non-CVP) water within the Friant-Kern Canal. This draft Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA)-15-031, *Stone Corral Irrigation District Warren Act Approval*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Background

The State of California is currently experiencing unprecedented water management challenges due to severe drought in recent years. On January 17, 2014, the Governor proclaimed a Drought State of Emergency (State of California 2014). On December 22, 2014, provisions within this proclamation were extended until May 31, 2016. On April 1, 2015, following the lowest snowpack ever recorded in California and the ongoing drought, the Governor proclaimed a second Drought State of Emergency and directed the State Water Resources Control Board to implement mandatory water reductions in cities and towns across California to reduce water usage by 25 percent (State of California 2015a). On April 23, 2015 and May 1, 2015, the State Water Resources Control Board issued curtailment notices to junior water rights holders in the San Joaquin River watershed and the Delta, respectively. The curtailment notices require junior water rights holders to stop diverting water from the watershed in order to allow it to flow to more senior water-right holders, as required by state law (State of California 2015a). On June 12, 2015, the State Water Resources Control Board issued curtailment notices to senior water rights holders with a priority date of 1903 or later in the San Joaquin and Sacramento watersheds and the Delta (State of California 2015b).

California's drought, as well as environmental and regulatory restrictions, has also reduced water supplies to many Central Valley Project (CVP) water service contractors, resulting in unprecedented zero percent water supply allocations. In order to continue meeting their customers' needs, affected contractors are pursuing a range of additional water supplies, such as transfers, pumped groundwater and other surface water sources. Stone Corral Irrigation District has purchased 1,000 acre-feet (AF) Kaweah River water (hereafter referred to as non-CVP water) from three participating Kaweah River Companies with pre-1914 water rights; Modoc Ditch Company, Jennings Ditch Company, and Lakeside

Ditch Company, which they would like to deliver for agricultural use by way of the federal Friant-Kern Canal. The district has requested a Warren Act approval for conveyance of this non-CVP water in federal facilities.

The district has proposed introducing the Kaweah River water into the Friant-Kern Canal using Lindsay-Strathmore Irrigation District's turnout at Friant-Kern Canal milepost (MP) 69.13. Stone Corral Irrigation District is located upstream of the introduction point; therefore, an operational exchange agreement with Terra Bella Irrigation District would also be needed in order for Stone Corral Water District to receive this water.

Proposed Action

Reclamation proposes to issue a five year Warren Act approval (effective through February 29, 2020) to Stone Corral Irrigation District under Article 18 of their Repayment Contracts. Under the Proposed Action, up to 1,000 AF of non-CVP surface water would be released from Terminus Dam and pumped from the Upper Wutchumna Ditch on the Kaweah River for annual introduction into the Friant Kern Canal. The proposed point of introduction for the non-CVP surface water would be Lindsay-Strathmore Irrigation District's existing turnout (Wutchumna Ditch Siphon) at MP 69.13 on the Friant-Kern Canal. As Stone Corral Irrigation District is located upstream of the introduction point, an operational exchange with Terra Bella Irrigation District (located downstream of the introduction point) is also proposed.

Under the operational exchange, Stone Corral Irrigation District would take delivery of Terra Bella Irrigation District's CVP water from Millerton Lake at MP 57.90, 59.33, 60.90 and 62.68, in lieu of the non-CVP surface water. In exchange, Terra Bella Irrigation District would take Stone Corral Irrigation District's purchased non-CVP surface water from their existing turnouts located downstream of the point of introduction.

Environmental Commitments

Stone Corral Irrigation District shall implement the environmental protection measures listed in Table 2-1 of EA-15-031 to avoid and/or reduce environmental consequences associated with the Proposed Action. 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

As described in Table 3-1 of EA-15-031, 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 the following resources: land use, cultural resources, Indian Sacred Sites, Indian Trust Assets, socioeconomic resources, environmental justice, air quality or global climate.

Water Resources

The Proposed Action would allow non-CVP Kaweah River water purchased from the Modoc Ditch Company, Jennings Ditch Company, and Lakeside Ditch Company to be conveyed in CVP facilities when excess capacity is available. This would allow the water to be delivered to the contractor's service areas for agricultural use. There would be no modification of the Friant-Kern Canal, and the capacity of the facility would remain the same.

The Kaweah River water is already allocated for use by Modoc Ditch Company, Jennings Ditch Company, and Lakeside Ditch Company, but they are unable to use the water for irrigation purposes because of high evapotranspiration losses through their conveyance facilities. Instead, pursuant to their water rights, the Companies have sold this water to Stone Corral Irrigation District for beneficial use. The Proposed Action does not represent a new diversion of the non-CVP water, or a new water right, but an alternate use for an existing supply.

The total quantity of water that would be conveyed in the Friant-Kern Canal under the Proposed Action would be limited to 1,000 AF/year through February 29, 2020. The quantity of water pumped into the Friant-Kern Canal by Stone Corral Irrigation District would be delivered (less conveyance losses) and used for irrigation purposes. Some of the irrigation water would be lost to evapotranspiration, and some would also percolate back into the aquifer.

Non-CVP water introduced into the Friant-Kern Canal must meet Reclamation's then current water quality requirements prior to approval for conveyance (see Appendix C for Reclamation's existing water quality requirements and monitoring plan). If testing under the monitoring program shows that the water does not meet the standards, Stone Corral Irrigation District would not be allowed to introduce the non-CVP water into the Friant-Kern Canal until water quality concerns are addressed. The water quality monitoring program is anticipated to adequately protect the quality of water in the canal and limit degradation of other users' supplies.

An operational exchange would be necessary to deliver water to the districts whose turnouts are located upstream of the introduction point (MP 69.13). This, as well as all other introductions of the non-CVP water, would be scheduled in advance with Reclamation and the Friant Water Authority; therefore, there would be no impact to operation of the canal or to other water resources.

Biological Resources

As the Proposed Action would not involve any construction, changes in water diversions from natural waterways, or any land use, there would be no impacts to federally listed or candidate species or critical habitat. As a result, Reclamation has determined there would be No Effect to proposed or listed species or critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. §1531 et seq.), and there would be no take of birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 U.S.C. §703 et seq.).

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts result from incremental impacts of the Proposed Action or No Action alternative when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment.

Water Resources

Reclamation has reviewed existing or foreseeable projects in the same geographic area that could affect or could be affected by the Proposed Action as Reclamation and CVP contractors have been working on various drought-related projects, including this one, in order to manage limited water supplies due to current hydrologic conditions and regulatory requirements. This and similar projects would have a cumulative beneficial effect on water supply during this critically dry year.

As in the past, hydrological conditions and other factors are likely to result in fluctuating water supplies which drive requests for water service actions. Water districts provide water to their customers based on available water supplies and timing, while attempting to minimize costs. Farmers irrigate and grow crops based on these conditions and factors, and a myriad of water service actions are approved and executed each year to facilitate water needs. It is likely that over the course of the Proposed Action, districts will request various water service actions, such as transfers, exchanges, and Warren Act approvals (conveyance of non-CVP water in CVP facilities). Each water service transaction involving Reclamation undergoes environmental review prior to approval.

The Proposed Action and other similar projects would not hinder the normal operations of the CVP and Reclamation's obligation to deliver water to its contractors or to local fish and wildlife habitat. Since the Proposed Action would not involve construction or modification of facilities, nor interfere with CVP operations, there would be no cumulative impacts to existing facilities or other contractors.

Capacity in the Friant-Kern Canal is limited, and if many water actions were scheduled to take place concurrently they could cumulatively compete for space. However, non-CVP water would only be allowed to enter the Friant-Kern Canal

for conveyance through federal facilities if excess capacity is available. As such, the Proposed Action would not limit the ability of other users to make use of the facilities.

Biological Resources

As the Proposed Action is not expected to result in any direct or indirect impacts to biological resources, there would be no cumulative impacts.