

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Finding Of No Significant Impact

Protection of Alkali Scrub Habitat on the Sand Ridge at the Atwell Island Project, Kings and Tulare Counties, California

FONSI 15-16-MP

Recommended by:



Date:

12/8/15

Jamie LeFevre
Natural Resource Specialist
Mid-Pacific Regional Office
Bureau of Reclamation

Concurred by:



Date:

12/8/15

Dan Strait
Program Manager, CVPCP/HRP
Mid-Pacific Regional Office
Bureau of Reclamation

Approved by:



Date:

12/11/2015

Anastasia Leigh
Regional Environmental Officer
Mid-Pacific Region
Bureau of Reclamation

Background

Through interagency agreement R15PG00094, Reclamation will provide \$835,400 for the land acquisition project titled *Protection of Alkali Scrub Habitat on the Sand Ridge at the Atwell Island Project, Kings and Tulare Counties, California* in which funds will be provided to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) through the Central Valley Project Improvement Act Habitat Restoration Program (HRP), and the Central Valley Project Conservation Program (CVPCP). BLM would purchase up to 250.8 acres to expand the Atwell Island Project (AIP) at which BLM manages the lands for the protection of special status species and wildlife travel corridors. The parcels proposed to be acquired are located in the southern San Joaquin Valley in unincorporated portions of Tulare and Kings Counties, adjacent to the AIP.

The CVPCP and HRP help mitigate the past impacts of Reclamation's Central Valley Project (CVP) on threatened and endangered species, and help minimize future impacts. The CVPCP and HRP also help meet mitigation required by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) Decision 1641 (D-1641). On December 29, 1999, through D-1641 the SWRCB concurred with a Reclamation petition to expand its authorized place of use to include certain areas already receiving CVP water. The Decision states that Reclamation shall provide compensation and habitat values that mitigate for actions associated with the delivery of CVP water to lands previously outside the authorized place of use. The CVPCP and the HRP are the main programs with which Reclamation provides mitigation to meet D-1641 requirements.

The federally-listed Tipton kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys nitratoides nitratoides*), San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*) and blunt-nosed leopard lizard (*Gambelia sila*) would benefit from acquisition and conservation of lands by BLM. The species' populations have declined as a direct result of the conversion of arid grasslands and scrublands 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

Under the no action alternative, Reclamation would not provide \$835,400 from the CVPCP and HRP to BLM to purchase 250.8 acres in unincorporated portions of Tulare and Kings Counties. BLM would need to obtain the \$835,400 from other public and/or private sources. If the funding cannot be secured, BLM would not be able to purchase and preserve the parcels.

Proposed Action

Reclamation would provide \$835,400 from the HRP and CVPCP to BLM to help purchase 14 parcels of land totaling 250.8 acres in unincorporated portions of Tulare and Kings Counties. BLM has prioritized the 14 parcels based on habitat connectivity and greatest threat from development.

After acquisition of the parcels, BLM would inventory the properties and manage the lands consistent with the Bakersfield Resource Management Plan and AIP Management Plan. BLM manages the AIP for the protection of special status species, to promote environmental education, and to create wildlife-related recreational opportunities. Further information on achieving these goals and objectives can be found in the Atwell Island Restoration Project Activities 2000-2001 report of the Interagency Land Retirement Team which describes the approved management actions for lands administered by BLM's Bakersfield Field Office.

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 attached EA describes the existing environmental resources in the Proposed Action area and evaluates the effects of the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives on the resources. The EA was prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 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 has no potential to affect historic properties (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)).
2. The proposed action will not affect any Indian Trust Assets (512 DM 2, Policy Memorandum dated December 15, 1993).
3. The proposed action is not on Federal land. After the acquisition of the parcels and ownership is transferred to BLM, EO 13007 would become effective. BLM would be responsible for working with any tribes to ensure any activities do not impede use of sacred sites.
4. Implementing the proposed action will not disproportionately affect minorities or low-income populations and communities (EO 12898).
5. The proposed action will directly benefit listed threatened or endangered species (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)).