

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Finding of No Significant Impact

Lower American River Anadromous Fish Habitat Restoration Project

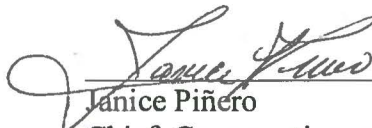
Recommended by:



Date: 2/10/2016

Ben Nelson
Natural Resources Specialist
Bay-Delta Office

Concurred by:



Date: 2/10/2016

Janice Piñero
Chief, Conservation and Conveyance Division
Bay-Delta Office

Approved by:



Date: 2/10/2016

Craig Muehlberg
Acting Area Manager
Bay-Delta Office



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Background

The Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA), section 3406 (b)(13) directs the Department of the Interior to develop and implement a continuing program for the purpose of restoring and replenishing, as needed, salmonid spawning gravel lost due to the construction and operation of Central Valley Project dams and other actions that have reduced the availability of spawning gravel and rearing habitat in the American River below Nimbus Dam. This CVPIA program may include preventive measures, such as re-establishment of meander belts and limitations on future bank protection activities, in order to avoid further losses of instream and riparian habitat.

Proposed Action

The Bureau of Reclamation proposes to create new side channels, modify existing side channels, and place gravel and instream habitat structure in the American River below Nimbus Dam. The need for the action derives from the decline of naturally spawned salmonid stocks resulting from several factors, including loss of spawning and rearing habitat. Habitat has declined due in part to the curtailment of coarse sediment recruitment caused by the blockage of the river channel by dams and the change from historic flow variability patterns.

Restoration actions included under the Proposed Action will occur at up to three sites per year through 2030. The Proposed Action is further described in the attached environmental assessment (EA) and hereby incorporated by reference.

Findings

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, Reclamation has found that the proposed action to create new side channels, modify existing side channels, and place gravel and instream habitat structure is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Consequently, an environmental impact statement is not required. The attached EA was prepared to evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed action and the no action alternative.

Potential impacts on several environmental resources were examined and found to be minimal or nonexistent. These resources include seismicity, earthquakes, and subsidence; aesthetics; land use, population, and housing; agricultural and forestry resources; socioeconomics; and paleontological resources. This determination is further supported with the environmental commitments described in the attached EA.

Indian Trust Assets

There are no Indian reservations, Rancherias, or allotments in the project area. The Proposed Action will not affect any Indian Trust Assets (512 DM 2, Policy Memorandum; December 15, 1993).

Indian Sacred Sites

There are no identified Indian Sacred Sites within the Proposed Action area; therefore this project would not inhibit use or access to any Indian Sacred Sites.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)

Executive Order 12898 requires each Federal agency to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental impacts, including social and economic effects of its program, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations. The Proposed Action would not result in any adverse human health or environmental effects to minority or low-income populations.

Water Resources

The hydrologic effects of the proposed actions are limited to changes in water surface elevations resulting from the introduction of the gravel and redirection of some flow from the main river down the proposed side-channels. The Proposed Action would be completed in accordance with permit conditions and Best Management Practices (BMPs) to protect water quality. These practices would prevent sediments, fuels, hydraulic fluids, hazardous material, and other pollutants from entering the river, and control turbidity within acceptable levels.

Biological Resources

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) provided Reclamation a biological opinion (BO) on July 14, 2015. NMFS determined that the Proposed Action *may affect and is likely to adversely affect* Central Valley steelhead, and *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* Sacramento River winter-run Chinook Salmon and Central Valley spring-run Chinook Salmon. NMFS also concluded that the Proposed Action is *not likely to destroy or adversely modify* their critical habitats. It was determined that the Proposed Action would adversely affect the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) of Pacific salmon in the project area. Reclamation has adopted the EFH conservation recommendations, which are included in the BO as NMFS's reasonable and prudent measures and associated terms and conditions.

On September 14, 2015, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) concurred that work at the Sacramento Bar site *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* the federally listed threatened Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*). Reclamation will consult with the Service under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act for future sites.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

The adherence to BMPs that dictate the use, containment, and cleanup of contaminants will minimize the risk of creating hazards and introducing hazardous materials to the waterway.

Geology and Soils

Construction activities will involve excavation and grading, which could increase the potential for soil erosion. All disturbed soils within the project site will be stabilized to reduce erosion potential. Planting, seeding with native species, and mulching will be used where feasible.

Air Quality

The Proposed Action will involve minor ground disturbance, the operation of construction equipment, and worker commutes that will result in temporary emissions. Temporary project construction emissions will be minimal and the release of greenhouse gases (GHGs) when compared to the scope of the current anthropogenic release of GHGs will be negligible. The Proposed Action will include dust control measures.

Recreation and Traffic

Impacts to recreation and traffic from construction activities will be temporary and localized. Activities that may impact public recreation areas will be coordinated with the responsible agencies.

Noise

Based on construction equipment noise emission levels and the incorporation of the below BMPs, implementation of the Proposed Action will comply with the exterior noise level standards. Noise impacts will be temporary and localized and there will be no long-term operational noise sources.

Cultural Resources

Reclamation conducted records searches, consultation, and archaeological pedestrian surveys and reached a finding of no historic properties affected for the Sacramento Bar site. The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concurred with Reclamation's finding of no historic properties affected for the Sacramento Bar site on September 21, 2015. Reclamation will consult with the SHPO at all sites.

Cumulative Effects

There are no adverse impacts associated with implementation of the Proposed Action with the Environmental Commitments and, therefore, there are no cumulative effects to consider. Implementation of the Proposed Action is not expected to result in significant adverse cumulative effects, in combination with other projects, within or outside of the project area.

Public Review

The EA was made available for public comment. Reclamation issued a press release on January 20, 2016, providing a link to the EA and instructions on how to comment. No comments were received.