



— BUREAU OF —  
RECLAMATION

# FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI-21-04-BDO, CGB- EA-2021-018)

## Volta Wells – 5 Year Incremental Level 4 Groundwater Pumping and Level 2 Diversification Project (2021-2026)

### Bay-Delta Office, Sacramento, CA

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## **Mission Statements**

The Department of the Interior (DOI) conserves and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people, provides scientific and other information about natural resources and natural hazards to address societal challenges and create opportunities for the American people, and honors the Nation's trust responsibilities or special commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated island communities to help them prosper.

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.

# Background

In 2016, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) and signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) to diversify Central Valley Project Level 2 (L2) and supplement Incremental Level 4 (IL4) refuge water supplies by pumping groundwater from two groundwater wells located at the Volta Wasteway (VW) within the California Fish and Wildlife's Volta Wildlife Area.

The 2016 FONSI and EA focused on the potential impacts of pumping of up to 6,600 acre-feet (AF) of groundwater per year. The groundwater was delivered to certain South-of-Delta (SOD) Central Valley Project Improvement Act designated federal wildlife refuges, state wildlife areas, and private wetlands (collectively referred to as "Refuges"), and exchanged for SOD Refuge L2 surface water supplies with the Del Puerto Water District (DPWD) and the San Luis Water District (SLWD). Analyses and background information from the 2016 EA and FONSI are incorporated by reference and can be located at the following link:

[https://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_details.php?Project\\_ID=24775](https://www.usbr.gov/mp/nepa/nepa_project_details.php?Project_ID=24775)

Reclamation proposes the continuation of pumping up to 6,600 AF of groundwater annually for an additional period of five years. The action will include the continuation of monitoring well production, water quality, groundwater levels, and land subsidence. Monitoring would occur at each well location to confirm that groundwater quality is suitable for refuge use.

## Alternatives Including Proposed Action

### No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, Reclamation would not continue the agreement with the DPWD and the SLWD to fund the pumping of groundwater supplies and/or exchange of Refuge L2 water for groundwater supplies to help meet SOD Refuges' demand for IL4 water, as well as exchange of Refuge L2 water for agricultural irrigation purposes. The pumping of the wells for the defined purposes would not occur and the volume of groundwater pumped would likely decrease. The DPWD and SLWD would not be able to utilize Refuge L2 water.

### Proposed Action Alternative

The Proposed Action remains unchanged from the 2016 FONSI and EA, except for the updated five-year timeline of February 2021 through February 2026. Reclamation proposes to continue to diversify SOD Refuge L2 water and supplement SOD Refuge IL4 water supplies by pumping groundwater from two groundwater wells located at the VW. Reclamation proposes to continue the agreement with the DPWD and the SLWD to fund groundwater pumping in exchange for Refuge L2 Water. Under the Proposed Action, the Refuges will continue to be able to utilize the pumped groundwater to provide suitable habitat for species and DPWD and SLWD will continue to utilize the exchanged water for agricultural purposes. The Proposed Action includes monitoring well production, water quality, groundwater levels, and land subsidence.

The Proposed Action would utilize existing facilities and would not involve ground disturbance or construction. The Volta Wells would collectively provide up to 6,600 AF of groundwater of acceptable quality annually, which can be conveyed to SOD Refuges. Monitoring would occur at each well location to confirm that groundwater quality is suitable for refuge use. Monitoring data would be used to ensure that the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to resources identified, including water quality within the delivery canals and groundwater levels in the area of the Proposed Action. Based on the data acquired, a determination could be made to modify or curtail the groundwater pumping operations at any time during the five-year period to avoid potential impacts.

The groundwater would be conveyed down the VW to Pond 10 where the Grassland Water District (GWD) would divert the water into their internal conveyance system for distribution to various Refuges within the Grassland Resource Conservation District (GRCD). The Volta Wells could pump groundwater up to 24 hours a day all year long as long as the water is of acceptable quality that can be conveyed and used within SOD Refuges.

The groundwater pumping may be directly funded by Reclamation, or funded by DPWD and SLWD, in exchange for a smaller volume of Refuge L2 water supplies. The exchanged Refuge L2 water would be used for agricultural purposes within DPWD and SLWD. The groundwater will be substituted in lieu of SOD Refuges receiving a portion their Refuge L2 surface water supply. The use of groundwater is expected to free up to 3,300 acre-feet of Refuge L2 water supply annually. The Refuge L2 water freed up by groundwater substitution will be delivered to the DPWD and the SLWD. The DPWD and the SLWD will utilize the Refuge L2 water supply within their service areas for reasonable and beneficial use. The Proposed Action will diversify Refuge water supply, improve water supply reliability, and minimize adverse impacts to the Central Valley Project agricultural contractors.

## Findings

Reclamation considered potential short-term and long-term effects of the Proposed Action, both beneficial and adverse. Following are the reasons why the impacts of the Proposed Action are not significant, with respect to the affected environment and degree of effects of the action (40 CFR 1501.3(b)).

1. Cultural Resources: Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action is the type of undertaking that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties, should such properties be present, pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.3(a)(1). As such, Reclamation has no further obligations under 54 U.S.C. § 306108, commonly known as Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
2. Section 7 Endangered Species Act (ESA): The Proposed Action will not significantly affect listed threatened or endangered species or their designated critical habitat. Based on extensive biological monitoring occurring at this project site as part of the Volta Wells pilot project since 2011, impacts are not expected to occur from water quality affecting the prey base of the federally-listed giant garter snake (GGS). Groundwater from the two existing production wells will be pumped into the VW and then ultimately into the GWD

conveyance system and delivered downstream throughout the GRCD, similar to all GWD refuge water supplies. In a memo dated February 12, 2021, Reclamation requested concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) that the Proposed Action is not likely to adversely affect GGS. Reclamation will not implement the action prior to Section 7 consultation with USFWS being completed. Overall, the Proposed Action will provide a benefit to waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors, as the water would be used for refuge management to sustain wetland habitats. The Proposed Action may benefit GGS by providing additional wetland habitat.

3. The Proposed Action will not significantly affect public health or safety (40 CFR 1501.3(b)(2)(iii)).
4. The Proposed Action will not violate federal, state, tribal or local law protecting the environment (40 CFR 1501.3(b)(2)(iv)).
5. The Proposed Action will not affect any Indian Trust Assets (512 DM 2, Policy Memorandum – July 2, 1993).
6. Implementing the Proposed Action will not disproportionately affect minorities or low-income populations and communities (EO 12898 – February 11, 1994).
7. The Proposed Action will not limit access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007 – May 24, 1996 and 512 DM 3 – June 5, 1998).