

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Agreement for the Reimbursement of Groundwater Pumping Costs for the Gray Lodge Wildlife Area between the United States and the State of California

FONSI Number 16-10-MP

Recommended by:



Date:

8/24/2016

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Concurred by:

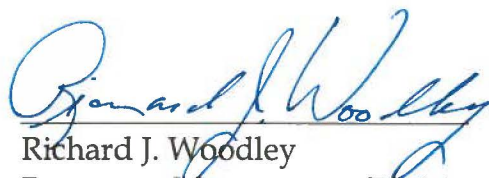


Date:

8/24/2016

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Approved by:



Date:

8/25/2016

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**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Mid-Pacific Region**

Introduction

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) proposes entering into the “*Agreement for the Reimbursement of Groundwater Pumping Costs for the Gray Lodge Wildlife Area between the United States and the State of California*” (Reimbursement Agreement) with the State of California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) in order to reimburse CDFW for costs associated with pumping groundwater as part of Level 4 (L4) supplies for the Gray Lodge Wildlife Area (WA; Refuge) (Proposed Action). The term of the Reimbursement Agreement would be effective in Water Year (WY) 2016 and cover WY 2016 through WY 2030, approximately 15 years.

Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

No Action: The No Action Alternative would consist of Reclamation not entering into an agreement with the CDFW to fund the pumping of groundwater supplies to help meet Gray Lodge WA’s Level 2 (L2) demand or Incremental Level 4 (IL4) water allocation. The pumping of the wells for purposes defined in the Environmental Assessment (EA) would not occur and this groundwater would not be developed and utilized within Gray Lodge WA to help meet L2 or IL4 refuge water needs. The volume of groundwater pumped would likely decrease. Gray Lodge WA would not receive full L2 supplies annually, resulting in impacts to CDFW’s ability to effectively manage habitat through less than full L2 or L4 water supplies.

Proposed Action: Reclamation proposes to reimburse CDFW through the Reimbursement Agreement for the costs associated with operation and maintenance of CDFW’s groundwater wells for groundwater utilized as part of Gray Lodge WA’s CVPIA allocation. CDFW is willing to continue pumping groundwater to meet part of Gray Lodge WA’s L4 supplies, to benefit one or more of the following: 1) meet scheduled water needs during Biggs-West Gridley Water District’s annual conveyance facilities shutdown season; 2) supplement limited quantities of L2 surface supplies up to the full L2 allocation; 3) meet some or all of the Refuge’s IL4 allocation; and, 4) augment reduced L2 surface supplies in critically dry years when the Refuge’s L2 allocation is reduced below 100%. The term of the Reimbursement Agreement would be effective in Water Year (WY) 2016 and cover WY 2016 through WY 2030, approximately 15 years. (Note: “Water Year” means the period from and including March 1 of each calendar year through the last day of February of the following calendar year.)

Groundwater pumping would be limited to 16,159 AF annually, the amount supported in previous environmental compliance documents covering earlier groundwater pumping reimbursement agreements between Reclamation and CDFW for Gray Lodge WA. The 16,159 AF is also acknowledged by Butte County’s Department of Water & Resource Conservation as the Gray Lodge WA’s historic use and meeting the safe-yield criteria of their Groundwater Management Plan.

A water quality monitoring plan (WQMP) will be developed covering CVPIA groundwater supplies under the long-term Reimbursement Agreement. Implementation of the WQMP would ensure that pumping of these developed water supplies would not impact water quality of existing water supplies.

Under the Proposed Action, CDFW would monitor groundwater levels from all inactive and active wells, along with collecting groundwater pumping volumes from these wells, on a monthly basis at Gray Lodge WA, and provide this data to Reclamation. Since approximately 1991, CDFW has consistently monitored groundwater levels from all inactive and active wells on a monthly basis, along with collecting monthly groundwater pumping volumes, at Gray Lodge WA. CDFW has provided Reclamation with this data since 2003.

Public Comment

Public reviews were conducted for the 2009 EA and subsequent EAs associated with past reimbursement agreements. No comments were received.

Findings

Based on the attached EA, Reclamation finds that the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The EA describes the existing environmental resources in the area of the Proposed Action, and evaluates the effects of the No Action and Proposed Action alternatives on specific resources. This EA was prepared in accordance with National Environmental Policy Act, 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 Proposed Action's impacts are not significant:

1. The Proposed Action will not significantly affect public health or safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3)).
2. The Proposed Action will not significantly impact natural resources and unique geographical characteristics such as historic or cultural resources; parks, recreation, and refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order (EO) 11990); flood plains (EO 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3) and 43 CFR 46.215(b)).
3. The Proposed Action will not have possible effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)).

4. The Proposed Action will neither establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)).
5. There is no potential for the effects to be considered highly controversial (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)).
6. The Proposed Action will not have significant cumulative impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)).
7. The Proposed Action has no potential to affect historic properties (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)).
8. The Proposed Action will not result in adverse impacts to water resources or land resources. The Proposed Action will result in no substantial change or impact to CVP operations, nor will it result in any change to Delta projected pumping by the CVP. The pumped groundwater will be delivered to the WA using existing conveyance facilities. Implementation of the WQMP will ensure that pumping and conveyance of water under this Proposed Action will not impact existing water supplies or water quality. The Proposed Action will not adversely impact water conveyance facilities or activities within the WA.
9. The Proposed Action will not affect listed or proposed threatened or endangered species (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)).
10. The Proposed Action will not violate federal, state, tribal or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)).
11. The Proposed Action will not affect any Indian Trust Assets (512 DM 2, Policy Memorandum dated December 15, 1993).
12. Implementing the Proposed Action will not disproportionately affect minorities or low-income populations and communities (EO 12898).
13. 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 and 512 DM 3).