

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Draft FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Reclamation Approvals Associated with the Poso Creek Water Company's Multiyear Banking and Transfer Program

FONSI-17-006



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
South-Central California Area Office

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Mission Statements

The Department of the Interior protects and manages the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage; provides scientific and other information about those resources; and honors 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-17-006

**Reclamation Approvals Associated with
the Poso Creek Water Company's
Multiyear Banking and Transfer Program**

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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 Poso Creek long-term water banking and transfer program. This draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA)-17-006, *Reclamation Approvals Associated with the Poso Creek Water Company's Multiyear Banking and Transfer Program*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

No final decision shall be made on the FONSI until public review has been completed and comments, if any, considered.

Background

Poso Creek Water Company, LLC (Poso Creek) is a California mutual water company owned and operated by a group of landowners who farm lands in various water districts in the San Joaquin Valley, including the following districts within the Central Valley Project (CVP) place-of-use: San Luis Water District (San Luis), Semitropic Water Storage District (Semitropic), Westlands Water District (Westlands), and Wheeler Ridge-Maricopa Water Storage District (Wheeler Ridge).

In 2007, Poso Creek entered into a long-term water banking agreement (through December 31, 2035) with Semitropic (Poso Creek Banking Agreement) in which Poso Creek became a banking partner with 60,000 acre-feet (AF) of guaranteed storage capacity in the Semitropic water bank and up to 20,000 AF of firm recovery and recharge capacity in a given year. Since 2007, Poso Creek members have recharged 37,614 AF of CVP water and recovered 19,256 AF of CVP water for transfer and/or exchange amongst the participants of the Poso Creek's exchange program.

Historically, Reclamation annually approved transfers of CVP water supplies from Friant Division CVP Contractors and/or South-of-Delta CVP contractors to Poso Creek. In order to better manage available and future water supplies, Poso Creek has requested long-term transfer approvals of available CVP water from Reclamation under their proposed multi-year banking and transfer program.

Proposed Action

Reclamation will approve a series of transfers of up to 50,000 AF per year of available CVP water supplies over a 9-year period. Transfers of CVP water would be from CVP contractors to Poso Creek members either for direct agricultural use on member lands located within Westlands, San Luis, Wheeler Ridge, and Semitropic or for banking in Semitropic and/or Kern

Water Bank for later use on member lands within those same districts. Specific details of the proposed transfers are included in Section 2.2 of EA-17-006.

Environmental Commitments

Poso Creek members shall implement the environmental protection measures listed in Table 2 of EA-17-006 to 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 of EA-17-006, 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: air quality, cultural resources, environmental justice, global climate change, Indian Sacred Sites, and Indian Trust Assets.

Biological Resources

The Proposed Action would not involve any construction, changes in water diversions from natural waterways, or changes in land use. The water involved in the Proposed Action would be used to support existing uses, and would not be used to convert fallowed lands or lands that have been untilled for three or more years. No native lands would be cultivated as a result of the Proposed Action. As a result, Reclamation has determined that 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.).

Water Resources

Reclamation would approve the transfer of up to 50,000 AF per year of available CVP water to Poso Creek. This would improve Poso Creek members' water supply reliability and operational efficiency, especially for recovery during water short years and for recharge during wet years, which is necessary to normalize water supplies in a very volatile supply market. Also, the Proposed Action would allow for better water management by helping to alleviate the need to pump additional groundwater. This could have a beneficial impact on Westlands in those areas where there is potential subsidence issues.

As the water supplies would be from existing CVP allocations, the Proposed Action would not alter CVP operations, water storage or release patterns from CVP facilities, or the maximum volume of water delivered to the contractors. The delivery of CVP water acquired from willing sellers would not affect water supply diversions from the Delta since this would be the same water supply already allocated to the contractors located south-of-delta and no additional diversion would be needed. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not interfere with Reclamation's obligation to deliver CVP water to other CVP contractors, or other environmental

purposes. Finally, CVP water would be delivered through existing infrastructure and would not require additional construction or modification of facilities for delivery. Thus, there would be no impact to CVP operations, facilities, or supplies.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts result from incremental impacts of the Proposed Action 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.

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.

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. Reclamation and CVP contractors have been working on various water management projects, including this one, in order to better manage limited water supplies due to changing hydrologic conditions and regulatory requirements. This and similar projects would have a cumulative beneficial effect on water supply during dry years.

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 to exchange water supplies among themselves. And as such, each water service transaction involving Reclamation would undergo environmental review prior to approval.

The Proposed Action would allow Westlands, San Luis, Wheeler Ridge, and Semitropic to have greater long term flexibility in their water management actions, use existing water supplies in a timely manner, and provide overall all better management of their water supply. This would provide a cumulatively beneficial impact to water supplies within the Districts.