

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Draft FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Additional One-Year Extension of the Mendota Pool Group Exchange Agreements

FONSI-17-053



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-17-053

**Additional One-Year Extension of the
Mendota Pool Group Exchange
Agreements**

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Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has released this draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) which is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA)-17-053, *Additional One-Year Extension of the Mendota Pool Group Exchange Agreements*, hereby incorporated by reference, for public review.

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

Background

Reclamation currently executes annual exchange agreements with the Mendota Pool Group (MPG) and Donald J. Peracchi and affiliates (Peracchi). Members of the MPG and Peracchi own or operate farmland served from the San Luis Canal in Westlands Water District (Westlands), as well as in the vicinity of the Mendota Pool in Farmers Water District (Farmers WD) and surrounding areas. The annual exchange agreements allow MPG farmers and Peracchi to cumulatively exchange up to 25,000 acre-feet (AF) of groundwater pumped into the Mendota Pool for Central Valley Project (CVP) irrigation water delivered to their lands in Westlands via the San Luis Canal.

The environmental documentation for the exchange agreements includes the 2005 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the 10-year MPG exchange program (EIS-01-081) and a 2012 Environmental Assessment (EA) for the annual exchange agreements with Peracchi (EA-12-023). In addition, Reclamation executed a series of one-year exchange agreements with the MPG and Peracchi over a three-year period (2015-2018) to extend the existing 10-year exchange program that ended February 28, 2015. For the purposes of this document, all subsequent references to the MPG will include both formal MPG members as well as Peracchi.

Since the 10-year MPG exchange program expired in February 2015, MPG have requested a subsequent 20-year exchange program. Reclamation and Westlands are preparing a joint EIS/Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to the NEPA and California Environmental Quality Act for the proposed 20-year exchange program. However, since the environmental review of the proposed 20-year exchange program will not be completed before the expiration of the existing three-year extension to the MPG exchange program, MPG have requested a temporary one-year extension of the existing program.

Alternatives Considered

No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, Reclamation would not execute one-year exchange agreements with the MPG. Additional water supplies would need to be acquired to meet the demands for their existing farmland in Westlands should CVP supplies be insufficient. Groundwater pumping by farmers around the Mendota Pool would continue to be used for irrigation of lands adjacent to the Pool, as well as transfers or exchanges that do not involve Reclamation.

Proposed Action

Reclamation proposes to execute one-year exchange agreements with the MPG, thus providing a temporary one-year extension until the joint EIS/EIR for the 20-year exchange program is completed. Specific details of the exchange program are included in Section 2.2 of EA-17-053.

Environmental Commitments

The current pumping program for the MPG exchange program are adaptively managed to minimize environmental impacts. MPG pumping is developed and reviewed on an annual basis to allow for year-to-year variations in hydrologic conditions which are defined in the spring, prior to the start of pumping. The annual pumping program is based on the consideration of several factors including the design constraints (e.g., water quality at the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractor's canal intakes or at the Mendota Wildlife Area), the results of the previous year's monitoring program, the extent of groundwater level recovery, hydrologic conditions, and any Reclamation contractor's rescheduling of CVP deliveries from the previous water year. These would continue, with modifications under the Proposed Action. Specific details of the design constraints and monitoring program are included in Section 2.2.1 of EA-17-053.

Findings

In accordance with NEPA, Reclamation determined that the approval of the Proposed Action 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 following reasons are why the impacts from the proposed action are not significant:

1. The proposed action will not significantly affect public health or safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)).
2. The proposed action will not significantly affect natural resources and unique geographical characteristics such as proximity to 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. There is no potential for the effects to be considered highly controversial (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)).
4. 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)).
5. 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)).
6. The proposed action will not have cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)).
7. The proposed action will not significantly affect historic properties (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)).
8. The proposed action will not significantly affect listed or proposed threatened or endangered species, or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)).
9. The proposed action will not threaten a violation of Federal, State, tribal or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)).
10. The proposed action will not affect any Indian Trust Assets (512 DM 2, Policy Memorandum dated December 15, 1993).
11. Implementing the proposed action will not disproportionately affect minorities or low-income populations and communities (EO 12898).
12. The proposed action will not limit access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007 and 512 DM 3).