

Shafter Wasco Irrigation District Kimberlina Groundwater Recharge Basin and Banking Project Environmental Assessment

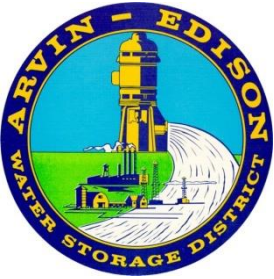
Response to Public Comments

The Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District Kimberlina Groundwater Recharge Basin and Banking Project Environmental Assessment (EA) was made available for public review from September 1, 2016 to September 20, 2016. One comment letter from Arvin-Edison Water Storage District (AEWSD) was received and is included in this attachment. The following text provides responses to those comments and notes any resulting changes to the EA. The changes made to the EA did not introduce any significant new information or result in any changes to the impact assessment.

1. Further information on the affected environment for water resources, and specifically, groundwater quality, has been added to Section 3.1.1 of the EA.
2. Reclamation is coordinating with the Friant Water Authority on revisions to these standards. However, these are the standards currently in place at the time of the analysis.
3. Further information on the proposed water quality monitoring has been added to the environmental commitments included in the Proposed Action (Section 3.1.2.4 of the EA). Further information has also been added to the affected environment and environmental consequences (Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 of the EA) for water resources, and specifically, groundwater quality, respectively, of the EA.
4. Reclamation agrees that the current thresholds are much higher than the background concentrations in the CVP water diverted from the San Joaquin River. However, the salinity threshold is within the 700-3,000 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ range recommended for irrigation with slight to moderate restrictions and the nitrate-nitrogen threshold is within the recommended range of 5 – 30 mg/L. Neither of these thresholds exceed the current California Drinking Water Standards (2,200 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ and 45 mg/L respectively).¹
5. See Response 4.
6. See Response 3.

¹ Title 22. The Domestic Water Quality and Monitoring Regulations specified by the State of California Health and Safety Code (Sections 4010-4037), and Administrative Code (Sections 64401 et seq.), as amended.

7. The Proposed Action would potentially convey groundwater in the FKC in addition to other past, present and future actions that would also introduce groundwater into the FKC, as described in Section 3.1 of the EA. However, because the Proposed Action would not utilize the FKC for conveyance in all years, and implementation of the proposed monitoring as described in Section 2 of the EA would ensure that the water introduced into the FKC under the Proposed Action would meet the same water quality requirements as other actions to convey groundwater in the FKC, the Proposed Action would not considerably contribute to cumulative water quality effects in the region. This information clarifying the Proposed Action's potential to contribute to cumulative impacts on water quality has been added to Section 3.11 of the EA.
8. Comment noted.
9. The suggested language has been added to the No Action Alternative description in the EA.
10. Comment noted.
11. The pump-back capacity would match the capacity of the three project wells. Deepwell production would vary with groundwater depth. After a year of recharge, all three wells together may produce 20 CFS. This clarifying language has been added to Section 2.2 of the EA.
12. Comment noted.
13. Reclamation is coordinating with Friant Division Contractors on potential thresholds for determining degradation, such as a limit on increase of salinity and/or turbidity in the canal caused by introduction of non-Central Valley Project water. Reclamation will consider comments from AEWSD and others in setting these thresholds.



ARVIN-EDISON WATER STORAGE DISTRICT

September 19, 2016

Via Electronic Mail (rvictorine@usbr.gov) & Fax (916) 978-5469

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**Re: *San Joaquin River Restoration Program Groundwater Project
Near Wasco – Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District's Kimberlina
Groundwater Recharge Basin and Banking Project***

Dear Ms. Victorine:

Following are Arvin-Edison Water Storage District's (AEWSD) comments on the subject EA (Program).

The proposed Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District (SWID) Kimberlina Groundwater Recharge Basin and Banking Project (Program) is a creative water management action and should generate many benefits, and to many parties. AEWSD is generally supportive of these types of projects. Subsequently, AEWSD's primary concerns about the Program relate to the proposed discharge of non-project water from the Program into the Friant-Kern Canal (FKC) and potentially causing significant water quality impacts to AEWSD's surface and groundwater irrigation supplies and water banking programs, and the associated negative impacts on crops in the District among other things. AEWSD's comments fall into the following three categories and are focused on; 1) the proposed changes to water quality from the introduction of Program water supplies into the FKC, 2) a lack of direct and cumulative impacts analysis and 3) general EA comments and or observations.

Water Quality Guidelines

A significant observation is there appears to be no water quality data whatsoever made available in the EA. In particular, all water users have recently become more sensitive to salt and nitrate loading as regulated in the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program and CVSALTS Program, but no information on these constituents is provided. In lieu of data, the Program references compliance with the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) Water Quality (WQ) Guidelines. AEWSD has extensively commented on the referenced WQ Guidelines in the past, and which comments are hereby incorporated by reference. As you may be aware, Reclamation has stated in previous responses to AEWSD that the WQ Guidelines will be "...updated...along a separate track." AEWSD looks forward to working with Reclamation in the near future on revisions to the archaic and deficient 2008 Water Quality Guidelines. In 2016, four (4) significant projects proposing to introduce water in the FKC have been noticed (released for comment) and it seems prudent for Reclamation to engage in such WQ Guideline revisions NOW and therefore provide project proponents, and those impacted by degraded water supplies, with the most probable outcome of such revisions.

AEWSD's primary concerns with the March 2008 WQ Guidelines remain as follows:

- Guidelines address only "non-project water" but should clarify they apply to all sources of introduced water supplies that are NOT chemically the same as water from Millerton Lake whether someone considers them non-project supplies or not; and
- Title 22 standards generally are not protective of the water quality for irrigation uses; and

- Guidelines do not adequately protect downstream users from significant water quality impacts as there are no in-canal standards; and
- Type B water has to “generally” comply with Title 22, but may exceed Title 22 for certain constituents of concern as determined by Reclamation and Friant Water Authority on a case-by-case basis; and
- Type C water is not required to meet any water quality requirements as it is erroneously stated to be “physically the same as Project water.” However, this is a misstatement because State Water Project water or CVP water that is conveyed from the Delta and introduced into the CVC and ultimately into the FKC does not originate from Millerton Lake and is not chemically the same as FKC water. The same is true of the groundwater introduced into the CVC from various banking programs that use the CVC for conveyance. Subsequently, the provisions of the Policy are woefully deficient.

2
continued

Limits of Degradation

AEWSD understands a portion of the Program is to introduce Non-Project water into the FKC and merely a *reference* to the WQ Guidelines was cited. No water quality information regarding the Program supply was provided, no analysis between Program water to baseline FKC water was made, and there is no analysis of the downstream water quality or associated adverse impacts from the Program.

3

By allowing the degradation, if any, Reclamation is purposely allowing a few districts to benefit by the high quality of their FKC supply, while denying the same benefit to AEWSD and other downstream long term contractors.

4

Finally, AEWSD’s request to avoid degradation of its water supplies isn’t new, unique, or unreasonable. Reclamation has imposed anti-degradation conditions on other CVP facilities including, for example, the Delta-Mendota Canal and associated selenium and Total Dissolved Solids requirements. While Reclamation’s requirements for protection of CVP water quality should be even-handed, that does not appear to be the case for the FKC.

5

Reference to AEWSD’s Contract

While the United States does not warrant the quality of water delivered to a contractor, the United States is obligated to operate and maintain project facilities in the most practical manner to maintain the quality of the water at the highest level possible.

6

Furthermore, the water supplied to AEWSD pursuant to its repayment contract is Central Valley Project Water stored or flowing through Millerton Lake. Indeed, the definition of Class 1 water is defined as “*that supply of water stored in or flowing through Millerton Lake...*”

Water that is stored in or flowing through Millerton Lake is pristine Sierra Nevada snowmelt and, as such, relied upon by AEWSD to maintain its water quality. No information about the Project’s water quality or anticipated degradation, if any, was made available. The Project as proposed may degrade AEWSD’s contractual water supply. AEWSD wishes to continue to utilize its Friant Division supplies, un-degraded, to benefit AEWSD landowners and its water management programs.

Cumulative Impacts Analysis

Regarding cumulative impacts, the EA states “...*the incremental impact when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions.*” (EA, p. 3-55.) The cumulative impact evaluation of the draft EA does not comply with NEPA. In fact, there is no study of cumulative water quality impacts.

7

General EA Observations and Comments

AEWSD welcomes SWID's commitment to prioritize the "exchange" of its Friant supply to return water to Homer over the direct delivery of previously banked supplies from the banking project. Prioritizing the exchange in lieu of groundwater discharge into the FKC will reduce the potential impacts to AEWSD and others and is greatly appreciated.

8

Throughout the document, the No Action alternative needs to include language that SWID would not have the ability to return previously banked water to the Friant-Kern Canal (example language in red font below).

9

"Under the No Action Alternative, Reclamation would not provide funding for the construction of the proposed groundwater recharge basins and related facilities and appurtenances, including water control structures, pipelines, and conveyance channels and Shafter-Wasco ID would not have the ability to discharge groundwater (return previously banked water) into the FKC."

Since 2014, the San Joaquin River Restoration Program has allocated and delivered "Unreleased Restoration Flows" and it is noted that this supply is not included in the Program.

10

Finally, anticipated well flow rates and the potential pumping plant flow rates that would deliver water into the Friant-Kern Canal are both lacking. An estimated range of capacities for both facilities would be helpful for planning purposes.

11

In summary, our comments focused on both Reclamation's Water Quality Policy, which we believe to be deficient, and well as potential water quality impacts to AEWSD from the Program. In regards to the latter, SWID has met with AEWSD to discuss our concerns which has resulted in the attached letter agreement. Subsequently, our concerns with the potential water quality impacts to AEWSD from the Program have been satisfactorily addressed.

12

The remaining and outstanding issue of the deficient USBR Water Quality Policy is in Reclamation's court to address.

13

Thank you, and again we appreciate the opportunity to provide input into the Program, and the efforts made by SWID to address our concerns.

If you have questions or comments, please don't hesitate to call or email.

Sincerely,



Steve Collup
Engineer-Manager

Enclosure

cc: Board of Directors
David A. Nixon, Deputy GM
Jeevan Muhar, Assistant Manager
Dana Munn, Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District
Michael Jackson and Chris Eacock, USBR

Shafter~Wasco Irrigation District

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September 18, 2016

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RE: USBR Draft Environmental Assessment
Shafter-Wasco Kimberlina Groundwater Recharge Basin and Banking Program

Gentlemen:

Per our recent conversations:

1. Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District ("SWID") is processing the above Environmental Assessment for the "Shafter-Wasco Kimberlina Groundwater Recharge Basin and Banking Program" (Program) which contemplates a return of banked water to Program participants either by A) exchange of Friant Division contract supplies or by B) extraction and delivery of groundwater to the Friant Kern Canal (FKC) on behalf of Homer LLC during periods when SWID does not have adequate Friant contract supplies to effect an exchange.
2. Arvin-Edison Water Storage District ("AEWSD") is concerned that existing water quality standards regulating the discharge of groundwater into the FKC do not adequately protect AEWSD contract supplies from degradation and do not mitigate the water quality impacts of discharging groundwater supplies into the FKC and mixing with contract supplies scheduled to be delivered to AEWSD.

3. Subsequently, the delivery of groundwater from the Program to the Friant-Kern Canal may result in adverse water quality impacts to Arvin-Edison. Due consideration for such impacts shall be negotiated between SWID, desiring to introduce water into the Friant-Kern Canal, and AEWSD

4. It is anticipated that potential impacts, and the need for mitigation, if any, pursuant to item 3 above, will only come into play when AEWSD is actually receiving all or a portion of the Program water, whether it is delivered to AEWSD through simultaneous operations with the Program or coming from previous storage of Program water in the FKC prism. When negotiating mitigation of water quality impacts to AEWSD supplies, due consideration will be given to other programs that may also be discharging into the FKC.

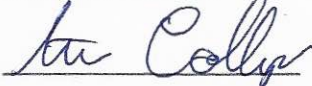
If you are in agreement, please date, sign and return.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dana S. Munn', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dana S. Munn
General Manager

ACCEPTED AND AGREED:

By: 

Date: 9/18/16