



— BUREAU OF —
RECLAMATION

Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record

Henry Miller Reclamation District #2131 High Groundwater Mitigation 25-Year Transfer Program

Interior Region 10 – California Great Basin

ED Tracking #: CGB-ED-2025-059

Prepared and Recommended by:

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Mission Statements

The U.S. 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, Native Hawaiians, 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.

Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to examine the potential effects to the environment associated with Reclamation's Proposed Action. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) follows implementation regulations for an EA described in 43 CFR Part 46 and the Department of the Interior Handbook of NEPA Implementation Procedures (516 DM 1). This FONSI is supported by Reclamation's Henry Miller Reclamation District #2131 High Groundwater Mitigation 25-Year Transfer Program EA (EA Number CGB-ED-2025-059), incorporated here by reference.

Purpose and Need

The Proposed Action addressed two critical needs, one local, and one region wide. Growers within HMRD are plagued by shallow groundwater conditions, with the depth to groundwater in some areas less than 18 inches. These conditions reduce crop yields, restrict the planting of permanent crops, and create a subsurface drainage issue that, in some areas, must be managed at significant cost. To remediate these conditions, San Luis Canal Company (SLCC)/Henry Miller Reclamation District (HMRD) rely on a shallow groundwater pumping program to lower the water table in affected areas. Between 1996 and 2023, SLCC pumped an annual average of 16,899 acre-feet per year (AFY).

On a region-wide scale and in recent years, the State of California has experienced unprecedented water management challenges due to severe drought. South of Delta Central Valley Project (CVP) contractors, such as the Transfer Recipient Districts (see EA figure 1), experienced reduced water supply allocations from 2007 to 2022 due to hydrologic conditions and regulatory requirements. In 2020, based on hydrologic conditions, Reclamation declared an initial 20 percent allocation for South of Delta CVP agricultural contractors for the 2020 Contract Year¹. In 2021, agricultural South of Delta CVP contractors received an initial allocation of 5% which was suspended and then later confirmed at 0%. In 2022, the agricultural South of Delta CVP contractors received an allocation of 0%. As a result, South of Delta water contractors have a need to find alternative sources of water to fulfill demand. The proposed transfers would allow

¹ Contract Year is from March 1 through February 28/29 of the following year.

SLCC and landowners in the Transfer Recipient Districts greater flexibility to manage limited water supplies.

Proposed Action

Reclamation proposes to approve a series of annual transfers over a 25-year period (calendar year 2025 through 2050) of up to 10,000 AFY of SLCC's Exchange Contract CVP water supplies to the Transfer Recipient Districts. The proposed transfers could occur from January through December of each year and would not exceed the cumulative maximum of 250,000 AF over the 25-year period.

To make the SLCC CVP water supplies available for transfer, SLCC will continue to implement their water conservation program that includes shallow groundwater pumping and water conservation projects that captures shallow groundwater and reduce surface water seepage losses by up to 10,000 AFY. Groundwater wells pump shallow groundwater from a depth of between 21 and 69 feet below ground surface (Table 4), well above the Corcoran Clay layer, to remove water from the crop root zone. The pumped groundwater would be conveyed in HMRD's existing conveyance system and delivered to water users.

Groundwater pumped into the system under the project would be blended at a rate that meets daily flow and water quality objectives established by SLCC and used in District. SLCC staff would collect and tabulate monthly meter readings from the wells to provide an accounting of each well's pumping and total pumping for the program. A like amount of SLCC CVP water supply (up to 10,000 AFY) would be made available for transfer to the Transfer Recipient Districts. All transfers would be consistent with CVP Place of Use requirements. The "up to" transfer amount of 10,000 AFY is less than SLCC's annual pumping average of 16,899 AFY. Groundwater pumping will not increase in response to the Proposed Action.

Only existing wells will be used for the program. New wells will need a separate environmental analysis prior to their groundwater being considered for transfer under the proposed action.

HMRD/SLCC must provide documentation to Reclamation, as to how water is being made available for transfer as outlined in the Draft Technical Information for Preparing Water Transfer Proposals (Water Transfer White Paper, 2019) and the Background and Recent History of Water Transfers in California (2015).

Finding

The Proposed Action does not include the construction of new facilities or modifications to existing facilities, but rather the transfer of water generated from water conservation measures

intended to capture shallow groundwater and reduce seepage loss. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not result in any effects to historic properties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

The Proposed Action would not involve the conversion of any land that has never been tilled or land that has been fallowed and untilled for three or more years or change the land use patterns of cultivated or fallowed fields that have value to listed species or to birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. No natural stream courses or waterways potentially utilized by listed aquatic species would be altered. No critical habitat occurs within the area affected by the Proposed Action and so none of the primary constituent elements of any critical habitat would be affected.

In accordance with NEPA, Reclamation considered potential short-term and long-term effects of the Proposed Action, both beneficial and adverse. The impacts of the Proposed Action are not significant, with respect to the affected environment and degree of effects of the action (516 DM 1), based on the following:

1. The Proposed Action will not significantly affect public health and safety.
2. The Proposed Action will not significantly affect economic activity.
3. The Proposed Action will not significantly affect the quality of life of the American people.

Reclamation provided the public with an opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment between March 28, 2025, and April 26, 2025. Reclamation received two comment letters.

After consideration of the information described above and analysis contained within the EA, Reclamation finds that the Proposed Action would not have a significant impact on the human environment.

Decision

This document certifies that Reclamation has considered all relevant information raised in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and that the NEPA process has concluded. The proposed action described above complies with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation, and Responsible Official has decided to adopt this FONSI.