

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

DRAFT FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Accelerated Water Transfers and Exchanges, Central Valley Water Project, South of Delta Contractors 2011-2015

FONSI-10-51

Recommended by:

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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 the approval of an accelerated water transfer and exchange program (AWTP) for the South of Delta (SOD) Central Valley Project (CVP) Contractors during the 2011-2015 water year is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) number EA-10-51, *Accelerated Water Transfers and Exchanges, Central Valley Project, South of Delta contractors 2011-2015*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

Background

SOD CVP Contractors and eligible Cross Valley Contractors need to relocate or shift CVP water supplies to meet irrigation (agricultural) demand or municipal and industrial (M&I) requirements. This would allow the temporary redistribution of water supplies within the Proposed Action area.

Reclamation proposes to implement an accelerated process for water transfers and exchanges under Section 3405 of CVPIA that have occurred among SOD and CV CVP Contractors prior to the CVPIA as well as SOD refuges as the recipients of transfers. The Proposed Action would allow Reclamation to acknowledge the proposed transfers and exchanges without any additional environmental analysis for the period March 1, 2011 through February 29, 2016. The cumulative amount of water transferred or exchanged annually would be limited to 150,000 acre-feet. Prior to acknowledgement, each proposed transfer or exchange would be reviewed by the Contracting Officer for consistency with the project description with this EA and all applicable permits, laws and regulations.

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:

Findings

Groundwater Resources

Under the Proposed Action, the delivery of transferred water will reduce the need for an amount of groundwater pumping in individual districts. Groundwater pumping can deplete the already compromised aquifer in the San Joaquin Valley. Delivery of transferred in surface water can offset the need for groundwater pumping and improve the quality of the water applied to agricultural lands for M&I purposes.

There will be a slight benefit to groundwater resources from the Proposed Action as it will reduce the need for groundwater pumping.

Surface Water Resources

The supply transferred under the Proposed Action will not affect water supply diversions from the Delta since this will be the same water supply allocated to the districts south of the Delta. No new facilities will be built nor water diverted from the Delta that will not have been diverted.

Surface water resources under the Proposed Action in the action area are identical to conditions under the No Action Alternative. The Proposed Action will not alter CVP operations, water storage or release patterns from CVP facilities, or the maximum volume of water delivered to the Contractors as compared to the No Action Alternative.

In addition, the Proposed Action will not cause any additional water to be diverted from the non-CVP sources; therefore, it will not impact non-CVP related surface water supplies.

Land Use

Under the Proposed Action, the AWTP will not cause land use changes as it precludes land use changes. These transfers and exchanges will facilitate the completion of crop production in a single growing season based on cropping patterns established early in the contract year and/or will allow continued irrigation of high value permanent crops to prevent investment losses in the trees or vines involved. These transfers or exchanges will also prevent crop revenue loss and are driven by the economics or the value of the potential crop loss compared to the cost of the water obtained. However, they will not drive the development of new farmland or M&I infrastructure as they will be of short duration and contingent upon certain hydrological conditions.

There will be no impacts to land use as a result of the Proposed Action.

Biological Resources

The limited duration of this supply precludes its use as a reliable source of water. Conversion of native land into agriculture use requires a reliable water supply. Therefore, there will be no loss of native habitat for wildlife species and no affect to listed species or critical habitat.

All of the transfer and exchange actions are within the range of existing conditions. This includes the area of use, types of use, range of river flows, and reservoir fluctuations. No additional infrastructure will be constructed. There will be no increase in deliveries, and no conversion of existing natural habitat into farmland or other uses.

Biological resources in the Proposed Action are identical to the conditions under the No Action Alternative. The Proposed Action will not alter CVP operations, water storage or release patterns from CVP facilities, or the maximum volume of water delivered to the Contractors as compared to the No Action Alternative. Therefore, biological resources conditions under the Proposed Action will be identical to those under the No Action Alternative. There will be no adverse impacts to biological resources as a result of the Proposed Action.

Cultural Resources

The Proposed Action will not alter CVP operations, water storage or release patterns from CVP facilities, or the maximum volume of water delivered to the Contractors as compared to the No Action Alternative. Therefore, there will be no impact resulting from the Proposed Action.

Indian Trust Assets

The proposed action does not have a potential to affect Indian Trust Assets.

Indian Sacred Sites

The Proposed Action involves transferring and exchanging water and utilizing existing conveyance facilities. No construction or ground disturbing activities are required that will impact known Indian sacred sites and/or prohibit access to and ceremonial use of this resource.

Environmental Justice

The Proposed Action will increase the flexibility of water deliveries to the contractors. This increased flexibility may lead to a further diversification of crops within these districts. This could lead to a shift in the timing needs of farm labor during the year the Proposed Action will occur; however, the need for farm labor is not expected to change as a result of Proposed Action. Therefore, there will be no impact.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Proposed Action will increase the flexibility of water deliveries to the contractors. This increased flexibility may lead to a further diversification of crops within these districts. This could lead to a shift in the timing needs of farm labor during the year the Proposed Action will occur; however, the need for farm labor is not expected to change as a result of Proposed Action. Therefore, there will be no impact.

Air Quality

Air quality under the Proposed Action in the action area is identical to conditions under the No Action Alternative. As has occurred historically, transfers and exchanges of this CVP water will occur via gravity flow or electric pumps. No construction will occur as a result of these transfers and exchanges. Therefore, the Proposed Action will have no impact on air quality.

Global Climate

The Proposed Action will involve no physical changes to the environment, no construction activities, and therefore, will not impact global climate change.

Cumulative Impacts

Approval will not have highly controversial or uncertain environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks. Approval of the Proposed Action is not related to other actions with individually minor but cumulatively significant environmental effects.

This action may reduce groundwater pumping slightly on a localized basis throughout the action area; however, cumulatively this action will have only a minor effect on the current management and use of groundwater resources in the Proposed Action area because the transfers and exchanges will be accomplished within the same geographical area and are of the type historically carried out among the Contractors.

The Proposed Action will not result in cumulative adverse impacts to surface water resources, water quality, or facilities when considered in combination with past, present, and future

projects. This analysis indicates that future projects, including future water transfer projects, may improve CVP water supply flexibility for individual districts but would not change the net CVP water deliveries. These types of programs will modify water supply flexibility but not change CVP contract amounts or deliveries from within the historical ranges.

The Proposed Action will not result in cumulative adverse impacts to land use resources as these transfers and exchanges are the type that have occurred historically.

Cumulatively this action will have a no effect on fish and wildlife in the Proposed Action area. Transfers and exchanges under the Proposed Action will not result in cumulative impacts to biological resources in addition to those occurring in the baseline. These issues were evaluated as part of previous environmental documentation.

The cumulative effects under the AWTP will modify temporary water supply flexibility but not change CVP contract amounts or deliveries from within the historical ranges. There will be no cumulative impacts to cultural resources, ITA or Indian sacred sites.

Transfers and exchanges under the Proposed Action will not result in cumulative impacts that will disproportionately impact minority and disadvantaged populations as the need for farm labor is not expected to change as a result of the Proposed Action.

Reclamation's action is the approval of an AWTP. Reclamation has made these actions in the past. Transfers and exchanges under the Proposed Action will not result in cumulative impacts that will adversely affect socioeconomic resources.

The Proposed Action will not result in cumulative adverse impacts to air quality. These types of programs modify water supply flexibility but do not change CVP contract amounts or deliveries from within the historical ranges.

All transfers and/or exchanges will utilize existing conveyance facilities. Conveyance will be by gravity or electric pumps. Overall, there will be no adverse cumulative impacts from the Proposed Action to global climate change.