RECLAMATION
Managing Water in the West

Draft Finding of No Significant Impact

Madera Irrigation District One-Year Transfer to North Kern Water Storage District and/or Semitropic Water Storage District (2011-2012)

EA 11-042

Recommended by:

_____ Date: _____
Chuck Siek
Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist
South-Central California Area Office

Concurred by:

_____ Date: _____
Randy English
Chief, Resource Management Division
South-Central California Area Office

Approved by:

_____ Date: _____
Laura Myers
Deputy Area Manager
South-Central California Area Office

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

August 2011

Introduction

In accordance with Section 102 (2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, and the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), the South-Central California Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) finds that the proposed action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the proposed one year transfer prior to February 28, 2012 of up to 20,000 acre-feet (AF) of Madera Irrigation District's (MID) Friant Class 1 and/or Class 2 supplies to North Kern Water Storage District (NKWSD) and/or Semitropic Water Storage District (Semitropic) for existing agricultural or municipal and industrial purposes.

Background

The year 2011 has provided abundant water supplies in the Friant Unit (Friant) of the Central Valley Project (CVP). As it has done in the past under these circumstances, MID is proposing to perform a one year transfer of Friant Class 1 and/or Class 2 water that is available above its current year needs to NKWSD and/or Semitropic. Reclamation is providing the public with an opportunity to comment on the draft EA/FONSI from August 22, 2011 through September 9, 2011.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, Reclamation would approve MID's transfer of up to 20,000 AF of its Friant Water Class 1 and/or Class 2 water with delivery to occur before February 28, 2012 to NKWSD and/or Semitropic. The water would be banked within the existing NKWSD/Semitropic facilities or delivered to internal customers in-lieu of groundwater pumping. This transfer would be contingent on: 1) availability of wheeling capacity in the Friant Kern Canal, 2) wheeling capacity in locally owned conveyances used by NKWSD and Semitropic, and 3) available recharge capacity at NKWSD or Semitropic.

NKWSD and/or Semitropic would only accept the transfer water if the action can be performed within the limits of the existing environmental documentation/permits for NKWSD and Semitropic.

The Proposed Action is subject to the following conditions:

- The water: 1) would only be used for beneficial purposes and in accordance with Federal Reclamation law and guidelines; 2) transferee's will comply with all federal, state, local, and tribal law, and requirements imposed for protection of the environment and Indian Trust Assets; and 3) would be used within the Friant permitted place of use and NKWSD and/or Semitropic service areas;
- The water would not be used to place untilled or new lands into agricultural production, or to convert undeveloped land to other uses;

- The Proposed Action would not interfere with the normal CVP operations; and
- The Proposed Action would not require the construction of any new water conveyance, pumping, diversion, recharge, storage or recovery facilities.

The proposed transfer would be subject to consent from Reclamation and the FWA to ensure there is no interference with normal operations. When needed, at a later date, NKWSD and/or Semitropic could recover the transferred water using existing recovery wells equipped with electric motors. The recovered water would be conveyed to existing agricultural users within the respective service area boundaries of NKWSD and/or Semitropic using existing internal distribution facilities in compliance (where applicable) with the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA) transfer guidelines and the Friant Repayment Contracts.

Findings

Water Resources

No new facilities would be needed as a result of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action would not interfere with the normal operations of the CVP facilities, nor would it impede any CVP obligations to deliver water to other contractors or to local fish and wildlife habitat. Delivery of transferred water involved with the Proposed Action would occur when excess capacity exists. The capacities of the conveyance facilities would not change, and therefore water service or delivery obligations for these conveyances would continue as they have in the past. Taken together, the Proposed Action would not have adverse impacts on conveyance facilities or surface water resources.

The Proposed Action would decrease the reliance on groundwater pumpage of NKWSD and Semitropic. The Proposed Action would result in a small net increase in groundwater levels since more surface water would be delivered to the groundwater sub-basin underlying NKWSD and Semitropic than would have occurred absent the project. The Proposed Action would not further deplete groundwater supplies or interfere with groundwater recharge (that would otherwise occur). Taken together, the Proposed Action could result in a net rise in groundwater levels within the San Joaquin River and Tulare Lake Hydrologic Regions.

Application of the transferred water from the FKC in NKWSD and Semitropic could result in a beneficial impact to groundwater quality since the quality of FKC water is better than that of the underlying aquifer. Therefore, the Proposed Action could have beneficial impacts on groundwater resources.

NKWSD and Semitropic have conducted monitoring programs for several decades so that any adverse groundwater impacts of water banking could be mitigated. NKWSD monitoring indicates that the wells that are currently used for recovery are in compliance with Reclamation pump-in requirements. Likewise, Semitropic monitoring indicates that water recovered by Semitropic back to the California Aqueduct has been in compliance with DWR requirements for pump-in to the California Aqueduct. There would be no adverse impacts to water quality as a result of the Proposed Action.

Land Use

The Proposed Action would not increase or decrease the amount of CVP water MID is entitled to under its contract with Reclamation. The Proposed Action would maintain current land uses by providing reliable water to agricultural and M&I users during years with surface water shortages. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not result in increased or decreased water supplies that would induce growth or land use changes.

Biological Resources

Water demands and conditions in the project area would not change and no new facilities would be constructed. The proposed water conveyance would not involve the conversion of any land and would therefore not change the land use patterns of the cultivated or fallowed fields that have value to listed species or birds protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Since no natural stream courses alteration would occur, there would be no effects on fish species. Therefore, there would be no effects on listed species or designated or proposed critical habitat.

Cultural Resources

There would be no new ground disturbance and the Proposed Action would be accomplished using existing facilities. No new lands would be put into agricultural production as a result of transfer. The Proposed Action involves the type of activity that has no potential to affect historic properties.

Indian Trust Assets

The Proposed Action would not involve any construction on lands or impact water, hunting, and fishing rights associated with Indian Trust Assets.

Environmental Justice

Under the Proposed Action, the ability to manage transferred water would help maintain agricultural production and local employment. The Proposed Action would not affect low-income or disadvantaged populations within the districts by causing dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease. Employment opportunities for low-income wage earners and minority population groups would be within historical conditions.

The Proposed Action does not propose any features that would result in adverse human health or environmental effects, have any physical effects on minority or low-income populations, and/or alter socioeconomic conditions of populations that reside or work in the vicinity of the Proposed Action.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Proposed Action would increase water supply reliability to existing agricultural users and would help to sustain existing uses. Businesses and farm workers rely on these crops to maintain jobs. Conditions would remain the same as existing conditions and there would be no adverse impacts to socioeconomic resources.

Air Quality

Under the Proposed Action, transferred water would be conveyed into storage or directly delivered to customers in-lieu of groundwater pumping through gravity flow. The air quality emissions from electrical power have been considered in environmental documentation for the

generating power plants that supply the system. There are no direct emissions from electrical motors and therefore a conformity analysis is not required under the Clean Air Act and there would be no impact on air quality. The Proposed Action would not involve any construction or land disturbing activities that could lead to fugitive dust emissions and/or exhaust emissions associated with the operations of heavy machinery.

Global Climate Change

Greenhouse gas (GHG) generated by the Proposed Action is expected to be extremely small, if any, compared to sources contributing to potential climate change. In general, water would be conveyed via gravity. The amount of pumpage would be comparable to that which would occur under the No Action Alternative during years with surface water shortages. While any increase in GHG emissions would add to the global inventory of gases that would contribute to global climate change, the Proposed Action would result in potentially minimal to no increases in GHG emissions and a net increase in GHG emissions among the pool of GHG would not be detectable.

Cumulative Impacts

Delivery of transferred water involved with the Proposed Action would occur when excess capacity exists. The capacities of the conveyance facilities would not change, and therefore water service or delivery obligations for these conveyances would continue as they have in the past.

Groundwater levels in the area would also rise slightly since the internal customers would be taking delivery of surface water in-lieu of pumping groundwater. In addition, groundwater levels could experience beneficial cumulative impacts over the course of this project because users of the transferred water would need to rely less on groundwater pumping during years with surface water shortages. Application of better quality CVP water from the FKC over the course of the project (including other similar existing and/or foreseeable projects) for recharge would result in a beneficial cumulative impact to groundwater quality in the Kern County Groundwater Sub-basin. The Proposed Action, when added to other similar existing and proposed actions, may result in beneficial cumulative impacts to overall groundwater resources in the project area on a small scale.

No native or previously untilled lands would be put into production. The Proposed Action would maintain existing land uses and would not contribute to cumulative changes or impacts to land uses or planning. Land use trends around the action area in recent years have resulted in urbanization of agricultural lands. This trend is typically caused by economic pressures and is likely to continue with our without these water service actions. Therefore, there would be no cumulative effects to land use as a result of the Proposed Action.

The proposed project would not have adverse impacts that are less than significant individually but significant cumulatively.