UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
MID-PACIFIC REGION
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

South San Joaquin Irrigation District Irrigation Enhancement Project (WaterSMART Grant)

FONSI 11-06-MP

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RECLAMATION
Managing Water in the West

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BACKGROUND

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) and South San Joaquin Irrigation District (District) have prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the *South San Joaquin Irrigation District Irrigation Enhancement Project*, dated June 2011.

The Department of the Interior's (DOI) WaterSMART (*Sustain and Manage America's Resources for Tomorrow*) program establishes a framework to provide Federal leadership and assistance on the efficient use of water, integrating water and energy policies to support the sustainable use of all natural resources, and coordinating the water conservation activities of various DOI bureaus and offices. Through the program, DOI is working to achieve a sustainable water strategy to meet the Nation's water needs. With WaterSMART Grants, Reclamation provides cost-shared funding on a competitive basis for on-the-ground water conservation and energy efficiency projects. The WaterSMART Grant Program is under the authority of Section 9504(a) of the Secure Water Act, Subtitle F of Title IX of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, P.L. 111-11 (42 USC 10364).

Under the Proposed Action, Reclamation would provide WaterSMART Grant funds to the District for the construction and operation of a new pressurized irrigation water system within the District's Division 9. The proposed water system would consist of a network of pressurized pipeline and two water storage basins, each of which would be individually equipped with a pump station and groundwater well. Inflow to Division 9 would be redirected into a proposed eastern storage basin (totaling 6.7 acres), with a proposed maximum capacity of 50 acre-feet. The proposed western storage basin (totaling 5.9 acres) would be supplied by capture of agricultural runoff generated during the irrigation season and storm runoff and would have a proposed maximum capacity of 30 AF. The proposed system would distribute water to Division 9 users through 12.6 miles of 18- and 24-inch diameter pressure pipeline, located primarily within existing District easements, adjacent to existing District gravity lines. Existing District rights-of-way follow existing public and farm roads.

FINDINGS

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the Mid-Pacific Regional Office of Reclamation has found that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Consequently, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding of no significant impact is based on the following:

1. Surface Water and Groundwater Resources

The Proposed Action would have no potential for direct adverse effects on surface waters. All elements of the proposed project would be located in upland areas where no surface waters are present. The Proposed Action would not result in any adverse change in stormwater runoff, as it would not add impervious surfaces. Proposed storage basins would capture precipitation, reducing whatever existing runoff may be generated from these undeveloped sites. A Stormwater Pollution

Prevention Plan (SWPPP), which includes an Erosion Control Plan, will be prepared and implementation of this measure would avoid or minimize potential project construction impacts on surface water quality.

The Proposed Action would involve no direct adverse effect on the groundwater system and is expected to reduce existing groundwater withdrawals for agricultural lands served by the proposed project. The Proposed Action would provide all Division 9 lands access to pressurized irrigation waters from the District's existing surface water sources at a much lower unit cost than is currently available, which in turn is expected to result in less usage of individual groundwater wells in the area. There would be some groundwater withdrawal by the two proposed wells at the storage basins; however, this withdrawal would occur only during years when the District has inadequate surface water to supply its users. Groundwater withdrawal by the basin wells would be more than balanced by the reductions in groundwater use by properties connecting to the proposed project, resulting in a net overall reduction of groundwater withdrawal within Division 9.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on surface water or groundwater resources.

2. Biological Resources

The proposed pipeline alignments are located within existing access roads and disturbed areas that do not have any substantial special-status species habitat. Adjacent lands provide dispersed foraging habitat for special-status species, suitable nesting trees for Swainson's hawk, potential nesting sites for burrowing owls, and an area of potential habitat for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle.

Mitigation measures will be implemented to minimize or avoid potential impacts on Swainson's hawk and burrowing owl, including conducting pre-construction surveys for nests and burrows. In addition, if active nests of any bird species are found in trees identified for trimming or removal, such actions would be delayed until the young have fledged.

Construction of the proposed pipeline segment north of Melton Road would occur in the vicinity of a group of blue elderberry shrubs, which is considered potential habitat for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle. The proposed pipeline would be located on the opposite side of the existing SSJID gravity line, resulting in the required minimum 20-foot setback. The shrubs, surrounded by farmland and not in a riparian setting, are also less likely to support the beetle. An existing fence separates the proposed construction area from the elderberry shrubs, preventing inadvertent damage during construction. As a result, the proposed project would not affect valley elderberry longhorn beetle.
A drainage ditch was identified adjacent to a portion of the proposed pipeline alignment north of the western storage basin. The alignment would be located on uplands adjacent to the subject drainage, and would have a minimum setback of 10 feet from the ditch. As a result, the project would not be expected to have an effect on this ditch. Due to the potential for inadvertent construction impacts, however, fencing of the drainage ditch with highly visible fencing material will be implemented during the construction period, in order to prevent the potential for construction encroachment into this ditch.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on biological resources.

3. Cultural Resources

As there are no known cultural resources in the project APE, the Proposed Action would result in no historic properties affected pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.4(d)(1).

No cultural resources would be impacted as a result of the Proposed Action.

4. Air Quality

Operation of the proposed project would not involve any substantial air emissions. Pumping operations would be electrically powered and served from the existing electrical distribution system in the project area. Proposed project operations are expected to result in a substantial reduction of existing diesel exhaust emissions associated with the operation of individual pumping equipment and associated electrical generators.

The Proposed Action would involve construction activity that would generate fugitive dust emissions. Grading, excavation and travel on unpaved surfaces can generate substantial amounts of dust, and can lead to elevated concentrations of particulate matter for nearby sensitive receptors, mainly residences. Particulate matter emissions from construction activities would not be significant due to the implementation of dust control measures.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on air quality.

5. Noise

Operation of the proposed pipeline network would not generate any noise, as the pipelines would be underground. All proposed pumps associated with the two storage basins would be electrically operated and enclosed in cement structures, and the nearest sensitive receptor is a minimum of 300 feet and 600 feet from the eastern and western storage basins, respectively. There would be no impacts to noise as a result of operation of the project.

Project construction would involve locally significant short-term noise during the construction of the project. Noise would also be generated by construction truck traffic on project area roadways, including trucks transporting materials and equipment to and from the construction sites. Construction activities would be temporary in nature and are anticipated to occur during normal daytime working hours. Mitigation measures limiting the operational hours of noise-generating equipment near residences to 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and to 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday will be implemented resulting in no construction noise impacts from the proposed project.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on noise.

6. Hazardous Materials

Project operations would not require the use of hazardous materials. Project construction would involve the temporary use of hazardous materials, with the potential for hazardous material spills. The contractor will prepare and implement a hazardous materials spill plan. Implementation of this measure would reduce potential hazardous material impacts related to project construction.

The proposed project would involve excavation of pipeline trenches and the storage basins within agricultural lands. Agricultural lands in the project area may have been used for storage, dispensing and/or application of fuel, fertilizers and pesticides, and may include past spill areas. Although project construction is anticipated to proceed quickly and construction worker exposure times would be low, there remains a risk of exposure for construction workers or environmental release. The contractor shall contact a qualified environmental professional to evaluate the situation and take or dictate action as required by applicable regulations. Implementation of this measure would reduce potential hazardous material exposure impacts.

No hazardous materials impacts would occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

7. Land Use and Farmland

Construction of most of the proposed 12.6-mile pipeline alignment would occur along existing SSJID easements and farm access roads. This would have no effect on adjoining agricultural operations or require any encroachment on adjoining lands. Construction of all pipeline segments would involve no impact on agricultural resources, as these pipelines would be located in existing farm access roads. The proposed storage basins would require the conversion of existing active, agricultural land to agricultural irrigation utility use, which would remain agricultural in character and would improve irrigation service in Division 9. Although the proposed pipeline alignment would pass through several properties under Williamson Act contracts, the project would not involve a conflict with the terms of these contracts. Irrigation systems are integral to agricultural use.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on land use or farmland.

8. Transportation

Under the Proposed Action, project construction could involve potential short-term effects on traffic and circulation where the project parallels roads and where pipelines would cross these roads. Construction at the crossings can be expected to require temporary closure of one lane, requiring traffic control. In addition, construction would involve temporary interruption of access to individual agricultural and residential properties along portions of the proposed pipeline alignments. A Traffic Control Plan would be prepared by the contractor to address potential conflicts associated with project construction. In addition, construction contractors would be required to notify residents 48 hours in advance of any driveway closure, and driveway access would be restored at the end of each workday. Due to the anticipated pace of pipeline construction, access interruptions would be of short duration. Once project construction is completed, there would be no interruptions of traffic, nor any increase in traffic generated by the project, other than occasional visits by maintenance vehicles.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on transportation.

9. Indian Trust Assets

The nearest ITA is Chicken Ranch Rancheria approximately 40 miles northeast of the project location.

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

10. Environmental Justice

No significant changes in agricultural communities or practices would result from the Proposed Action. These changes are not likely to affect agricultural employment. In fact, the use of more sprinkler or drip irrigation systems may ensure the continued viability of agriculture in the area, which would sustain agricultural employment.

The Proposed Action would not have any impacts on low-income or minority individuals within the project area.

11. Climate Change

The Proposed Action would generate Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions from construction activities, mainly through the combustion of fuels by construction equipment and vehicles. These emissions would be temporary, and would cease once construction work is completed. The Proposed Action would provide long-term beneficial impacts to global climate change through potential reductions in existing GHG emissions associated with agricultural use in Division 9. Overall, project construction and operations are not expected to generate a significant amount of GHGs, and therefore would not have a significant impact on global climate change.

The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts on climate change.

12. Cumulative Impacts

The Proposed Action would involve no significant new long-term environmental considerations or potential cumulative impacts. There are no other known foreseeable development projects located in the vicinity of the proposed project. Project operations would not contribute to any long-term effects on issues such as air quality and noise. The proposed project would involve a less than considerable contribution to cumulative global climate change effects.

The Proposed Action would not result in cumulative impacts to any of those resources described within the Final EA.