

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Albuquerque Area Office
Albuquerque, New Mexico

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

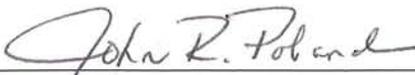
City of Eunice
Drought Emergency Water Well
Lea County, New Mexico



Manager, Environment Division

7-8-08

Date



Area Manager, Albuquerque, New Mexico

7/11/08

Date

FONSI Number: AAO-08-009

Summary of the Proposed Action

Reclamation will provide funding to drill an approximately 220-foot deep water well into the Ogallala Formation to tap into the subsurface aquifer of the Lea County Underground Water Basin. The well would be drilled on a site prepared by the City of Eunice, located approximately 20 miles north of the town. A supplemental water supply source would help the City of Eunice maintain a reliable municipal water supply during drought. The city will obtain a permit for a supplemental well from the Office of New Mexico State Engineer.

Water produced by the well would be pumped into the existing city water system pipeline and transported to the existing water treatment facility. The municipal water storage and distribution lines are already established near the proposed well site at the City's Hobbs North Water Station, and would require an approximate 1.2-mile long pipeline to connect them to the proposed well.

Background

Record drought in the southwestern United States continues to threaten municipal water supplies with severe shortages. The City of Eunice, New Mexico, is dependent on groundwater wells for its municipal water. Nearly all of the City's water is supplied by groundwater pumped from 6 existing municipal water wells. These wells range in depth from 130 to 200 feet and pull water from the Ogallala Formation. Two of the wells have low pumping rates and are seldom used. Five of the six wells range in age from 37 to 45 years and are considered to be in the later part of their useful lifecycle, which spans from 30 to 70 years on average (JSAI 2007). The proposed well is needed to supplement the City's municipal water supply.

Precipitation in the area averages 14 inches per year, but may vary from less than 9 inches for several consecutive years to over 25 inches. The seasonality of the precipitation and the lack of surface water sources in the area make a reliable ground water source extremely important (JSAI 2007). Long, prolonged periods of drought such as the current event have a negative impact on groundwater levels, often requiring the need for deeper and more expensive wells. The drought is forecast to continue and may be very long, based on the historic record. Support for drought emergency well drilling was authorized by the U.S. Congress in Title 1 of the Reclamation States Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1991.

Environmental Impacts

The following resources and socioeconomic factors were evaluated in detail in the Environmental Assessment for anticipated impacts from implementation of the drought emergency water well and associated water pipeline: water resources, Federal and state-listed species, vegetation and wildlife, noxious weeds, soil erosion, air quality, cultural and archaeological resources, Indian trusts assets, socioeconomic, environmental justice, and visual resources. The following resources are discussed further in the Environmental Assessment document.

Water Resources

There is no information available that indicates the proposed well would impact any wells in the surrounding area. Information provided by the City of Eunice indicates the existing city wells (two of which are seldom used) and the currently proposed well tap into the same water source. New impacts would be less likely since a new groundwater source would not be developed and because no additional water beyond Eunice's existing water rights would be removed. No significant impacts to surface water, water quality, or ground water from this action are expected.

Federal and State Listed Species

No impact would occur to endangered, threatened, or sensitive plant or animal species on the well site.

Vegetation and Wildlife

Soils and vegetation disturbance would be kept to a minimum, vegetation cover would be left undisturbed whenever possible, and disturbed areas would be reseeded with native species. Temporary displacement of wildlife species due to increased human presence and noise from the construction activities would occur in the immediate area. Wildlife would temporarily leave the area but should return in a short period of time. No significant impact to vegetation or wildlife is expected.

Noxious Weeds

Implementation of the proposed action has the potential to result in the introduction and establishment of State-listed and other noxious weed species. However, an aggressive revegetation plan, combined with thorough cleaning of all equipment before arriving on site, would minimize that potential.

Soil Erosion

Soils and vegetation disturbance would be kept to a minimum, vegetation cover would be left undisturbed whenever possible, and disturbed areas would be reseeded with native species.

Air Quality

During construction, there would be temporary increases in suspended dust (sediment transfer), resulting from activities such as vehicle traffic. No equipment or facilities requiring permitting through the New Mexico Environment Department Air Quality Bureau (NMAQB) are proposed for the action.

Cultural and Archaeological Resources

There are no known structures or sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) that would be affected by the Proposed Action. In addition, no sacred sites or

traditional cultural properties are known to exist in the project area. If cultural or archaeological resources are encountered during site construction or drilling activities, work will stop and the Reclamation Area Archaeologist will be notified immediately. Should consultation with Tribes result in the identification of any such sites or properties, Reclamation would then consult with the Tribes concerned to ensure no adverse effects result from the Proposed Action Alternative.

Indian Trust Assets

No Indian Trust Assets have been documented in the project area. Therefore, Reclamation anticipates no impact to Indian Trust Assets resulting from the proposed action.

Socioeconomics

The proposed action would result in the creation of a small number of jobs for site preparation and drilling contractors during the construction and drilling phases of the project.

Environmental Justice

Implementation of the proposed action would not disproportionately (unequally) affect any low-income or minority communities within the project area.

Visual Resources

Visual quality impacts of the proposed action would result from temporary construction activities such as the generation of fugitive dust, increased traffic at the site, and the visual effects of the drill rig and construction equipment. None of these temporary visual quality impacts are significant on a local or regional scale.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts as a result of the Proposed Action Alternative are expected to be minimal. This project, in combination with other planned projects in the area (e.g., 1.2 mile of 8-inch collector pipeline construction), would not be expected to result in any long-term adverse cumulative effects to identified resources. The short-term cumulative effects of construction activities would be small in the overall regional context and would be temporary in nature.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis presented in the EA, Reclamation's assessment of Indian Trust Assets and Environmental Justice, and agency and public comment on the Draft EA, Reclamation finds that there would be no significant impacts associated with the proposed action. Reclamation makes this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.) and the Council on Environmental Quality implementing regulations (40 CFR 1500). Reclamation has determined that the proposed action does not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the human environment. Therefore, no environmental impact statement would be prepared for this proposal.