

# RECLAMATION

*Managing Water in the West*

**Draft FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

## **Widren Water District's Water Quality, Supply, and Drainage Enhancement Pilot Project**

**FONSI-16-035**



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

**October 2017**

## **Mission Statements**

The 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, 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.

**BUREAU OF RECLAMATION**  
**South-Central California Area Office, Fresno, California**

**FONSI-16-035**

**Widren Water District's Water Quality,  
Supply, and Drainage Enhancement Pilot  
Project**

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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 an environmental impact statement is not required for the one-year Exchange Agreement and/or one-year Warren Act contract and land use authorization to Widren Water District to access the Delta-Mendota Canal in order to implement their Pilot Project. This draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA)-16-035, *Widren Water District's Water Quality, Supply, and Drainage Enhancement Pilot Project*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

No final decision shall be made on the FONSI until public review has been completed and comments, if any, considered.

## Background

Widren Water District has recently constructed a reverse osmosis (RO) Treatment Plant to extract and treat their in-district shallow groundwater, consistent with the Westside Regional Drainage Plan. It has been shown in the region that the removal of shallow groundwater can assist in reducing drainage impacts by lowering poor-quality drain water below the crop root zone. Widren Water District will make this treated water available to others for irrigation purposes outside of federal facilities.

Widren Water District initially requested authorization from Reclamation to use the Delta-Mendota Canal for their proposed long-term (10-year) project to deliver their treated groundwater to South-of-Delta CVP contractors. Treatment of shallow groundwater would occur through Widren Water District's existing RO Treatment Plant. Widren Water District anticipates their RO treated groundwater would meet Reclamation's water quality standards required for introduction of non-Project water into federal facilities.

In order for Widren Water District to move forward with their long-term project, they have requested approval from Reclamation to conduct a one-year Pilot Project in order to collect data on water quality and potential groundwater level impacts. This data would be used to evaluate the potential impacts to water quality, groundwater levels, and federal facilities from a longer-term project.

## Proposed Action

Reclamation proposes to issue a one-year Exchange Agreement and/or one-year Warren Act contract to Widren Water District for the introduction and conveyance of up to 1,000 acre-feet (AF) of treated groundwater into the Delta-Mendota Canal as well as potential storage in San Luis Reservoir. The non-Project water would then be provided to willing buyers along the Delta-Mendota Canal. Reclamation would also issue a land use authorization to Widren Water

District for the proposed connection of a new water pipeline to an existing turnout at milepost (MP) 102.04R on the Delta-Mendota Canal. Specific details regarding Widren Water District's the Pilot Project are included in Section 2.2 of EA-16-035.

### **Permitting**

Widren Water District currently operates under the State Water Resources Control Board's Waste Discharge Requirements General Order (Order R5-2015-0095) for growers in the Grassland Drainage Area. This Order is part of the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program and regulates discharge to groundwater.

### **Environmental Commitments**

Widren Water District shall implement the environmental protection measures listed in Table 2 of EA-16-035 to reduce environmental consequences associated with the Proposed Action. Environmental consequences for resource areas assume the measures specified would be fully implemented.

### **Findings**

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:

#### **Resources Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

As described in Table 3 of EA-16-035, Reclamation analyzed the affected environment and determined that the Proposed Action does not have the potential to cause direct, indirect, or cumulative adverse effects to the following resources: air quality, environmental justice, global climate change, Indian Sacred Sites, or Indian Trust Assets.

#### **Biological Resources**

There would be no changes in Delta pumping, and water would only be used to support existing land uses. The trench lines would result in temporary disturbance of land that could potentially be used by the San Joaquin kit fox and Western Burrowing Owl. The measures included in the Environmental Commitments Section 2.2.2 of EA-16-035 would prevent any take of owls, and any impacts to the San Joaquin kit fox. Water pumped into the Delta-Mendota Canal would be of a quality that would not present an issue for species living in habitat that also receives water conveyed through the Delta-Mendota Canal (such as the Mendota Wildlife Area, which is used by the giant garter snake). Mercury levels would be so low as to be undetectable, and selenium levels in the water would remain well below two parts per billion. Critical habitat in the Proposed Action Area would not be subject to land use change as a result of the Proposed Action. The San Joaquin kit fox and any migrating birds could continue to use the Proposed Action Area as under the No Action alternative.

With the environmental commitments listed in Table 2 of EA-16-035 and based upon the nature of this Action, Reclamation has determined there would be No Effect to proposed or listed species or critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. §1531 et seq.), and there would be no take of birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 U.S.C. §703 et seq.).

## **Cultural Resources**

The proposed action of connecting a new pipeline to an existing Delta-Mendota Canal turnout would not alter any physical characteristics of the canal or its berm. Since there would be no alterations to the Delta-Mendota Canal, the CVP would also be unaffected. Reclamation determined that there would be no adverse effects to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.5(b); therefore, no cultural resources would be affected as a result of implementing the Proposed Action.

## **Land Use**

The Proposed Action would provide for supplemental non-CVP water to South-of-Delta CVP contractors to irrigate existing agricultural lands in production and minimize the potential for fallowing agricultural lands. No untilled land (fallow for three years or more) would be brought into production. The Proposed Action would only occur for one year and would not be used for development.

Under the Proposed Action, up to 337 acres of dry farmland within Widren Water District could receive blended effluent for salt tolerant crops. This land would most likely receive blended effluent from Widren Water District's RO Treatment Plant regardless of whether the project was implemented or not, to improve drainage impacted lands within Widren Water District.

## **Water Resources**

Under the Proposed Action, Widren Water District would pump up to 1,200 AF of groundwater to be treated by their proposed RO Treatment Plant over a one-year Pilot Project. Reclamation would allow up to 1,000 AF of non-Project water to be introduced, conveyed, and/or stored in CVP facilities, when excess capacity is available. This would allow the treated water to be delivered to participating South-of-Delta CVP Contractors' service areas to supplement their CVP water supplies. There would be no construction or modification to the Delta-Mendota Canal and the capacity of the facility would remain the same. The Proposed Action would not interfere with the normal operations of the Delta-Mendota Canal nor would it impede CVP obligations to deliver water to its contractors. Therefore, there would be no impact to water quality or operations of CVP facilities.

The total quantity of groundwater that would be pumped into the Delta-Mendota Canal under the Proposed Action would be limited to 1,000 AF over the one-year period. Widren Water District would pump from above the Corcoran Clay, which has the potential to lower a perched saline water table, thus improving local water quality and the otherwise drainage impaired lands in this area.

Widren Water District estimates that up to 200 AF of effluent would be generated from treatment or backflush at the RO Treatment Plant. This effluent would be blended with up to 400 AF of groundwater and then used to irrigate salt tolerant crops on Widren Water District's proposed reuse area. In addition, Widren Water District would follow the Regional Board's Waste Discharge Requirements General Order for discharge to groundwater. No effluent or RO treatment backflush water would leave Widren Water District. Therefore, there would be no impact to local water supplies.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

Cumulative impacts result from incremental impacts of the Proposed Action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment.

### **Biological Resources**

As the Proposed Action would not impact any federally listed species or migratory birds, it would not contribute cumulatively to any impacts to those resources.

### **Cultural Resources**

Reclamation determined that there would be no adverse effects to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.5(b); therefore, there would be no cumulative impacts to cultural resources as a result of implementing the Proposed Action.

### **Land Use**

As the Proposed Action would not change current land use, there would be no cumulative impacts.

### **Water Resources**

Under the Proposed Action, there would be no construction or modification to Reclamation facilities or interference with CVP operations. In addition, groundwater quality would be monitored to insure no impacts occur to the water quality of the Delta-Mendota Canal. Therefore, there would be no adverse cumulative impacts to existing facilities or other contractors.

In addition to the Proposed Action, other actions in the area which could affect water resources include the Grassland Bypass Project, San Joaquin River Water Quality Improvement Program reuse area, and the Delta-Mendota Canal Groundwater Pump-in Program. All of these projects, in addition to the Proposed Action, are consistent with the Westside Regional Drainage Plan. This plan was designed to reduce subsurface drainage in the Grassland Drainage Area. However, the project is only a one-year Pilot Project, and therefore, is not expected to cumulatively impact local drainage.