

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**South Valley Water Banking Authority
Modified Pixley Groundwater Banking Project**

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Mid-Pacific Region
Sacramento, California

Recommended: Rebecca Victorine 12/20/17
Rebecca Victorine
Natural Resource Specialist Date

Concurred: Kellye Kennedy 12/21/17
Kellye Kennedy
Project Manager Date

Concurred: Adam Nickels 12/21/17
Adam Nickels
Water Management Goal Supervisor Date

Approved: Alicia Forsythe 12/21/17
Alicia Forsythe
Program Manager Date

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

BACKGROUND

In 1988, a coalition of environmental groups, led by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), filed a lawsuit challenging the renewal of long-term water service contracts between the United States and Central Valley Project Friant Division. After more than 18 years of litigation, *NRDC, et al., v. Kirk Rodgers, et al.*, a settlement was reached (Settlement). On September 31, 2006, the Settling Parties, including NRDC, Friant Water Users Authority (now represented by the Friant Water Authority), and the U.S. Departments of the Interior and Commerce, agreed on the terms and conditions of the Settlement, which was subsequently approved by the U.S. Eastern District Court of California on October 23, 2006. The Settlement establishes two primary goals:

- Restoration Goal – To restore and maintain fish populations in “good condition” in the main stem of the San Joaquin River below Friant Dam to the confluence of the Merced River, including naturally reproducing and self-sustaining populations of salmon and other fish.
- Water Management Goal – To reduce or avoid adverse water supply impacts on all of the Friant Contractors that may result from the Interim Flows and Restoration Flows provided for in the Settlement.

The Secretary of the Interior is authorized and directed to implement the terms and conditions of the Settlement in the San Joaquin River Settlement Act (Act), included in Public Law 111-11. Part III of Title X, Subtitle A of Public Law 111-11 (Part III) authorizes the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), to provide financial assistance to local agencies within the Central Valley Project (CVP) of California for the planning, design, environmental compliance, and construction of local facilities to bank water underground or to recharge groundwater to reduce, avoid, or offset the quantity of expected water supply impacts to Friant Division long-term contractors caused by Restoration flows authorized by Public Law 111-11.

The South Valley Water Banking Authority (Authority) is proposing to finance, manage, construct, operate, and maintain a 30,000 acre-feet per year (AFY) dry-year return water bank facility, with total groundwater storage availability of 90,000 acre-feet (AF). The Project, as modified, includes an additional 480 acres of potential recharge basins for a total of approximately 1,012 acres included in the study area, within which up to 800 acres (likely within a range of 500-800 acres) of recharge basins would be constructed, with a total of 16 recovery wells distributed within the boundaries of the recharge basin areas. Water will be conveyed to these new recharge basin facilities via new turnout and pipelines from the Friant-Kern Canal (FKC). Alternatively, up to five (5) of the sixteen (16) recovery wells could end up being developed in the 3,500-acre in-lieu area if beneficial and consistent with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), along with appurtenant grower turnouts, related control facilities, and connecting pipeline to the mainline along Avenue 80 to facilitate return of banked groundwater to the FKC.

This finding of no significant impact is based on the following, as further described in the attached EA/IS:

- The proposed action will have no impacts to aesthetics, transportation, hazards or hazardous materials, mineral resources, recreation, utilities, land use, or population growth.
- The proposed action will have no impact on Indian Trust Assets or Indian sacred sites.
- The proposed action will not adversely impact socioeconomic resources and will not disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations.
- The Project will not alter existing CVP water supply contracts or existing exchange and water bank agreements. Rather, it will provide a mechanism to improve the reliability of water provided under these existing contracts and other arrangements and allow for the capture/redirection of CVP water from the FKC to a new groundwater bank with a capacity of 90,000 AF. Up to 30,000 AFY of the banked water will be put to beneficial use by banking partners. Local benefits within the PID service area and the Tule Subbasin include a 10-percent leave-behind fraction of each volume of recharged water resulting in improved groundwater conditions during recharge periods. Project operations in which water will be banked in wet years and recovered in normal and dry years will reduce the losses in firm water supply from SJRRP Restoration Flows. The storage of various types of CVP water supplies as well as other local and non-federal water supplies that may be available that would otherwise leave the Friant Division service area as unusable flood water will have a beneficial effect on water supply for participating districts. The proposed action will result in an incremental benefit of increased aquifer storage and higher groundwater levels at the end of the 40-year simulation period compared to a baseline scenario representing the No Action alternative. The proposed action will not substantially deplete groundwater supplies, interfere with groundwater recharge, or result in a net deficit to groundwater levels.
- Surface water applied to the recharge basins and in-lieu lands will be delivered via the FKC. The water quality of these deliveries, because of their similar tributary origins, would be comparable to sources that naturally recharge the underlying groundwater system. Hence, no long-term negative effect or impact on groundwater quality is expected. However, residual concentrations of nitrates and other agricultural related chemicals, if present, could be mobilized beneath the recharge basins with initial water applications. This may result in short-term and temporary impacts to groundwater quality during initial recharge operations. However, water quality sampling before Project implementation and during the first year of bank operation will detect the impacts, if any, of increased chemical concentrations and the effects of dilution by applied water, and the environmental

commitments described in Section 2.3 of the attached EA/IS, including implementation of the technical committee and operation and monitoring program, will be implemented as appropriate to avoid the potential for significant impacts to groundwater quality. The Project could potentially result in temporary adverse effects to groundwater quality and the quality of the extracted water that will be introduced into the FKC (surface water) and used subsequently in the Bank Partners' service areas. However, groundwater returned to the FKC will be required to meet then current Reclamation water quality standards, thereby avoiding the potential for significant water quality impacts of returning previously banked water.

- Operation of recovery wells for dry-year return has the potential to induce drawdown in groundwater levels in wells owned by other groundwater users in the immediate vicinity of the Project. Operation of a recovery well, or wells, induces direct pumping drawdown, or interference, as a function of distance, pumping rate and duration, and aquifer properties. Direct pumping interference is a temporary effect that will only occur when recovery wells are running, and the environmental commitments described in Section 2.3 of the attached EA/IS, including implementation of the Technical Committee, will be implemented as appropriate to avoid the potential for significant impacts to local groundwater users.
- Construction and operation of the proposed project will not have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any special status species with implementation of the environmental commitments described in Section 2.3 of the attached EA/IS. Reclamation completed informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the proposed action's potential effects on San Joaquin kit fox on September 19, 2017. The proposed action would have no effect on fish species.
- Reclamation determined that there will be no adverse effect to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.5(b); therefore, no cultural resources would be affected as a result of implementing the proposed action. Additional consultation may be needed for the additional 160-acre portion of the Project modification for recharge that was not surveyed, should the property be acquired for the Project. Reclamation received concurrence with this determination from the State Office of Historic Preservation on May 12, 2017.
- The proposed action, including implementation of the environmental commitments described in Section 2.3 of the attached EA/IS, would result in emissions that are less than the de minimis levels, and thus will have a less than significant impact on air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and climate change. Project recharge operations will be beneficial in increasing groundwater storage capability and flexibility related to climate change.

- While the proposed action will remove approximately 800 acres out of agricultural production, the adverse effect of this is offset by the beneficial effect of increasing ability for groundwater storage, and ability to make beneficial use of excess surface water flows and irrigation during wet periods that might otherwise leave the basin area.
- Construction of the recharge basins would require minor grading and compaction of soils on the relatively flat ground surface. Surface erosion and loss of topsoil can follow disturbances caused by grading, which could loosen soil and activate or hasten the loss of soils. Erosion and sediment control measures, including developing and implementing a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) in accordance with the Clean Water Act, will reduce erosion rates during and after construction. Proper implementation of the required SWPPP will ensure no adverse effects of soil erosion occur.
- Potential adverse effects of subsidence will be minimized by the proposed action's increase in groundwater storage capability and increase in groundwater levels.
- Noise from construction activities will exceed the Tulare County General Plan Noise Element "normally acceptable" noise standards of 75 dBA at the exterior of nearby residences. However, noise from construction activities will be temporary. Further, construction activities will most likely occur during the daytime hours of 7 am to 7 pm, Monday through Friday and best practices guidelines will be implemented as appropriate and feasible in accordance with Tulare County General Plan policies. Therefore, the proposed action will not result in significant adverse effects to the ambient noise quality of the site and surrounding area.
- The proposed action will not significantly contribute to cumulative adverse effects to any resource category when considered with other past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions in the region.