

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Draft FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Hilton Creek Gravel Augmentation Project

FONSI-17-048



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

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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-17-048

**Hilton Creek Gravel Augmentation
Project**

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Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), determined that the proposed Hilton Creek Gravel Augmentation Project is not a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an environmental impact statement is not required. This draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is supported by Reclamation's Environmental Assessment (EA)-17-048, *Hilton Creek Gravel Augmentation Project*, 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

Cachuma Project water is continuously released into Hilton Creek through the Hilton Creek Watering System (HCWS) pursuant to the Cachuma Project Biological Opinion (NMFS 2000). Since activation of the HCWS in 2000, these additional flows have provided rearing opportunities for *Oncorhynchus mykiss* inhabiting Hilton Creek. However, continuous streamflow from the initiation of the HCWS has resulted in rapid growth of riparian vegetation which has stabilized the creek bed and banks, and locked in the bed load. Boulder and cobble material now dominate the substrate with little intermediate to small sized sediments, such as gravels and sands, resulting in limited adequate spawning locations in Hilton Creek for *O. mykiss*.

On August 30, 2017, at the request of National Marine Fisheries Service, Reclamation organized a site visit to Hilton Creek and the Lower Santa Ynez River downstream of Bradbury Dam on Reclamation property to examine streambed conditions and discuss possible gravel augmentation. Based on the site visit, it was determined that gravel augmentation within certain identified sites in Hilton Creek should occur as soon as possible in order to optimize habitat for the upcoming spawning season and to gather data on the benefits that could be gained in Hilton Creek for the species.

Alternatives Considered

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, Reclamation would not implement a short-term gravel augmentation project in Hilton Creek. Reclamation would not be able to gather data on the benefits that could be gained in Hilton Creek for the species. *O. mykiss* spawning habitat in Hilton Creek would be unchanged. Reclamation would continue to comply with existing requirements under the Cachuma Project Biological Opinion.

Proposed Action

Reclamation proposes to conduct a short-term (1-2 month) and one-time per year gravel augmentation project in Hilton Creek as described in Section 2.2 of EA-17-048. The project would occur in late fall or early winter of 2017-2018 and summer or fall of 2018-2019. The project would consist of manual placement of gravel at specific locations (spot placement) known for *O. mykiss* spawning (i.e., the tail-out of pool habitats). Monitoring of the project would be conducted over the course of the two years to gather data on the benefits that could be gained in Hilton Creek for the species. The project would be implemented and monitored on Reclamation's behalf by the Fisheries Division of the Cachuma Operation and Maintenance Board (COMB).

Environmental Commitments

Reclamation and COMB shall implement the environmental protection measures listed in Table 1 of EA-17-048 to reduce environmental consequences associated with the Proposed Action. Environmental consequences for resource areas assume the measures specified would be fully implemented.

Findings

In accordance with NEPA, Reclamation's South-Central California Area Office determined that the approval of the Proposed Action is not a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment; consequently, an environmental impact statement is not required.

The following reasons are why the impacts from the proposed action are not significant:

1. The proposed action will not significantly affect public health or safety (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)).
2. The proposed action will not significantly affect natural resources and unique geographical characteristics such as proximity to historic or cultural resources; parks, recreation, and refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order (EO) 11990); flood plains (EO 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(3) and 43 CFR 46.215(b)).
3. There is no potential for the effects to be considered highly controversial (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)).
4. The proposed action will not have possible effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)).
5. The proposed action will neither establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)).

6. The proposed action will not have cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)).
7. The proposed action will not significantly affect historic properties (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(8)).
8. The proposed action will not significantly affect listed or proposed threatened or endangered species, or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(9)).
9. The proposed action will not threaten a violation of Federal, State, tribal or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(10)).
10. The proposed action will not affect any Indian Trust Assets (512 DM 2, Policy Memorandum dated December 15, 1993).
11. Implementing the proposed action will not disproportionately affect minorities or low-income populations and communities (EO 12898).
12. The proposed action will not limit access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007 and 512 DM 3).