

Finding of No Significant Impact

Stanfield Irrigation District Conjunctive Use Contract

Umatilla Basin Project, Oregon

U.S. Department of the Interior

Bureau of Reclamation

Columbia-Pacific Northwest Region

Columbia-Cascades Area Office

CPN FONSI #19-02

Introduction

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has prepared the Stanfield Irrigation District (SID) Conjunctive Use Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. The EA evaluated a request from SID to enter into a Conjunctive Use Contract with Reclamation.

The federal action is to enter into a Conjunctive Use Contract between Reclamation and SID that would allow additional pumping of water to SID through Reclamation facilities to offset the effects of drought and low soil moisture.

Background

SID has applied for a new water right through the State of Oregon. This water would be pumped from the Columbia River Pumping Plant and used for irrigation, in addition to water used per the current exchange agreement. Reclamation and SID propose to use up to an additional 3,000 acre-feet of water during years when certain precipitation-based triggers are met.

This additional water would be used to pre-saturate irrigated lands from February 15 to February 28 in years with little snowpack or exceptionally low soil moisture content. This is further defined as years when November, December, and January each receive less than 1.18 inches of precipitation — an approximate 5-year return period. Other factors to consider for conjunctive use would be freezing temperatures and days without snow cover; however, these factors are not easily quantified without easily available historical data to define a trigger point.

Water is expected to be pumped at 60 cubic feet per second (cfs) for approximately 13 days, resulting in the use of approximately 1,550 acre-feet.

Alternatives

The EA analyzed the No Action alternative and the Proposed Action. These alternatives are described below.

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action alternative, Reclamation would not enter in a Conjunctive Use Contract with SID. There would be no change to SID's current operations.

Proposed Action/Selected Alternative

Under the Proposed Action, Reclamation will enter into a Conjunctive Use Contract with SID. This will allow SID to mitigate the effects of drought and low soil moisture within the boundaries of the districts. It will allow SID to pump conjunctive use water in the late fall and late winter in given years when precipitation is lacking. SID will use existing facilities to pump the conjunctive use water; this water use is permissible during the time when the State of Oregon allows for additional withdrawal of water from the Columbia River without the need to mitigate the water withdrawals.

Decision and Finding of No Significant Impact

Reclamation, based upon a review and evaluation of the information contained in the EA, as well as other documents and action for record affiliated with this proposal, has determined that the Proposed Action — to enter into a Conjunctive Use Contract with SID — does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the Council on Environmental Quality's revised NEPA regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508, 2020).

Potentially Affected Environment

In considering the potentially affected environment (per 40 CFR Part 1501.3(b)(1)), Reclamation considered, as appropriate to the Proposed Action, the affected area and its resources (see also Table 1, below). The Proposed Action is entering into a Conjunctive Use Contract with SID to allow the pumping of water from Reclamation facilities to offset the effects of drought and low soil moisture.

Degree of Effect of the Action

In considering the degree of the effects (per 40 CFR Part 1501.3(b)(2)), Reclamation considered the factors listed below as they are appropriate to the Proposed Action.

Short and Long Term Effects

The selection of the Proposed Action shows no short- or long-term effects. Table 1 presents a summary of impacts to resources. Once SID and Reclamation enter into a Conjunctive Use Contract, SID will be able to better mitigate the effects of drought and low soil moisture.

Table 1. Summary of impacts to resources

Resource	Summary of Impacts
Land use	The Proposed Action would not change the existing land use.
Floodplains	The Proposed Action would not modify or impact any floodplains.
Wildlife	The Proposed Action would have no impacts to wildlife.
Threatened and endangered species	The Proposed Action will have “No Effect” on 15 threatened and endangered species and is likely to adversely affect Columbia River chum salmon and its critical habitat. These impacts are addressed above in the text of the FONSI.
Hydrology and water quality	The Proposed Action may have minor impacts to water quantity in the Columbia River downstream of the points of diversion. These impacts are unmeasurable.
Indian Trust Assets	The Proposed Action is not anticipated to have any negative impacts to Indian Trust Assets.
Indian sacred sites	The Proposed Action would have no impacts to Indian sacred sites.
Environmental justice and socioeconomics	The Proposed Action would not disproportionately affect any low income or minority communities at the county level.
Visual resources	The Proposed Action would not modify or impact visual resources, such as any modification in landforms, water bodies, vegetation, or any introduction of structures or other human-made visual elements that could provide visual contrasts in the basic elements of form, line, color, or texture.
Paleontology	No known paleontological resources exist within the SID lands.
Cultural resources	The Proposed Action would not have any impacts to cultural resources. All facilities are existing and were installed in the year 2000 or later. The Proposed Action is a Conjunctive Use Contract to allow pumping of water in October and/or February and March as allowed by the 1988 Umatilla Basin Project Act. Water will be placed on existing agricultural fields and the Proposed Action will not result in a change of land use (e.g., non-farmland to farmland).
Public health and safety	The Proposed Action would not modify or impact public safety, access, and transportation.
Recreation	Recreational use is not an authorization of the proposed facilities.
Topography, geology, and soils	The Proposed Action would not modify or impact topography, geology, or soils.
Noise	The Proposed Action would not modify current noise levels.

Resource	Summary of Impacts
Vegetation	The Proposed Action would not modify existing vegetation. The Proposed Action would not contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native species known to occur in the area or involve actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order (EO) 13112).
Wetlands	EO 11990 requires each agency to “avoid to the extent possible the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands” and to “take action to minimize the destruction, loss or degradation of wetlands.” The Proposed Action would not be constructing, modifying, or adversely affecting wetlands within any lands proposed for transfer.
Air quality	The Proposed Action would not result in an alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns, nor would it create objectionable odors on a local or regional level.
Climate change	The Proposed Action would not result in new weather patterns that would remain in place for an extended period of time. The Proposed Action would increase SID’s climate change resiliency by allowing them to withdraw water for crop use, outside of their current contracted use window, to assist farmers during before and during the growing season.
Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions	The Proposed Action would not result in new or increased GHG emissions by SID. The primary GHGs emitted through human activities are carbon dioxide (CO ₂), methane, and nitrous oxide. These three are the GHGs produced through fuel combustion in on-road and off-road vehicles and equipment. The operation, maintenance, and replacement of the facilities will not change as a result of the Conjunctive Use Contract.
Migratory birds	The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 in conjunction with EO 13186 requires agencies to ensure that NEPA analyses include an evaluation of potential effects on migratory birds. Many bird species migrate through north central Oregon. Some nest in the area using trees or other habitat during the period from March 1 through August 31. The Proposed Action would not involve any relevant change from current operations. Therefore, Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action would have no effect on migratory birds.
National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)	It has been determined by the Columbia-Cascades Area Office Archaeologist that NHPA is not applicable to this action. The Phase II Facilities that will deliver the additional water were completed in the year 2000 and do not meet the requirements of historical properties. The scope of the project is to deliver water to SID during the shoulder seasons of spring and fall. There will be no modifications to any facilities to accomplish the water delivery.

Beneficial and Adverse Effects

The Proposed Action will allow SID to mitigate for drought and low soil moisture content, which will ensure that the farm community will be able to grow crops with an improved water supply during drought conditions. Pre saturation of soil will also prevent the soil from wind erosion and give seeds a better chance to germinate in the spring.

NOAA Fisheries has determined the Proposed Action is likely to adversely affect the Columbia River chum salmon and the associated critical habitat. However, with further analysis, looking at the timing of water withdrawals in both the fall and late winter, NOAA Fisheries determined the effects would be negligible as long as the Terms and Conditions of the Biological Opinion were followed. The proposed pumping of up to 60 cfs from the Columbia River during the post-irrigation season would take place for approximately 12 days in early to mid-October and is expected to occur on average about once in every 5 years. The total volume of water, if fully used, would be approximately 1,428 acre-feet. NOAA Fisheries evaluated daily average discharges at Bonneville Dam (about 2 miles upstream from Ives Island) from 2001 through 2019 for October 1-15, the time period when conjunctive use for the post-irrigation season is proposed to occur. The lowest daily average flow during this period occurred on October 12, 2002, and was 70,900 cfs. A withdrawal of 60 cfs would have reduced flow at the Ives Island complex by about 0.085 percent. Additionally, the 10-year (2010-2019) average discharge from Bonneville Dam for the first 15 days in October is about 98,388 cfs; the conjunctive use withdrawal would reduce this average by roughly 0.061 percent.

The pre-irrigation season, which again would occur about one out of every 5 years, on average, is proposed to occur during the last 2 weeks of February. Daily average flows were analyzed for the period 2001-2019 in the Columbia River below Bonneville Dam for the pre-irrigation conjunctive use period of February 15-28. The lowest daily average for this period occurred on February 28, 2010, and was 110,167 cfs. A 60-cfs withdrawal on that day would have reduced flow by about 0.05 percent. The most recent 10-year (2010-2019) average for this period was 193,097 cfs, and a 60-cfs withdrawal would have resulted in a 0.03 percent reduction in flow volume. Also, the 10-year lowest daily average occurs on February 28 and was 182,710 cfs with the 60-cfs withdrawal, resulting in a 0.033 percent loss of flow volume around the Ives Island complex for that day. Based on the most recent 10-year average, flow volumes below Bonneville Dam during pre-irrigation conjunctive use (February 15-28) are 96 percent higher than flows during the post-irrigation conjunctive use period. When conjunctive use occurs, the change in stage below Bonneville Dam in the last 2 weeks of February is likely insignificant and probably cannot be measured.

Effects to Columbia River chum salmon critical habitat would be negligible in October and unmeasurable in late February and spring (NOAA 2020).

Effects on Public Health and Safety

Selection of the Proposed Action will not modify or impact public safety, access, or transportation. Minority or low-income populations would not be affected as a result of Reclamation entering into a Conjunctive Use Contract with SID.

Effects that would Violate Federal, State, Tribal, or Local Law Protecting the Environment

Selection of the Proposed Action would not violate any federal, state, local, or Tribal law, regulation, or policy for the protection of the environment. The conjunctive use would be water withdrawal from the Columbia River near the traditional territory of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and the Spokane Tribe of Indians. All these Tribes were contacted and they did not identify any Indian Trust Assets that will be affected by selection of the Proposed Action.

Cumulative Effects

Additional unmitigated water withdrawals from the Columbia River will continue to reduce flows in the Columbia River that could have effects to threatened and endangered species. The State of Oregon and NOAA Fisheries have specific rules and timelines that may allow for additional withdrawals of water from the Columbia River, along with mitigation that could be required. The Proposed Action includes very specific guidelines as to when and how much water could be used by SID under the Conjunctive Use Contract.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts presented in the attached EA, Reclamation has determined that the Preferred Alternative (Proposed Action) will have no significant effect on the human environment or natural and cultural resources. Reclamation therefore concludes that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and that this EA and FONSI satisfy the requirements of NEPA.

Decision

It is my decision to authorize the Preferred Alternative, Conjunctive Use Contract, CPN-EA-19-02.

Approved:

WYLIE DUKE Digitally signed by WYLIE DUKE
Date: 2024.01.23 09:34:59 -07'00'

Wylie C. Duke
Columbia-Cascades Area Manager
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Date