

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Interior Region 8: Lower Colorado Basin
Phoenix Area Office

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Gila River Indian Community Reclaimed Water Pipeline Project
Gila River Indian Reservation, Arizona

Approved: _____

Date: _____

Acting
For

Alexander B. Smith, Area Manager
Phoenix Area Office
Bureau of Reclamation

FONSI No.: PXAO 23-01

Introduction

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) has issued a Final Environmental Assessment (EA) that analyzed the environmental impacts of, and potential alternatives to, Reclamation's proposed funding for the Gila River Indian Community (Community) to construct and operate approximately 19.2 miles of pipeline to transport reclaimed water to agricultural lands within the Gila River Indian Reservation (Reservation) in northwestern Pinal County, Arizona. The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) – Pima Agency and Western Region offices were invited to be cooperating agencies in preparation of this EA due to their jurisdiction by law and special expertise, in accordance with 40 CFR § 1501.8. The Pima Agency office accepted the cooperating agency invitation and the Western Region office declined.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Reclamation's proposed action is to provide funding assistance to the Community for construction of the Reclaimed Water Pipeline Project (RWPP or Proposed Action). The need for the RWPP is to deliver up to 15,700 acre-feet (af) of Chandler's reclaimed water to be pumped upstream and 29,400 af of Mesa's reclaimed water to be gravity-fed and pumped upstream and south of the Gila River to provide irrigation water to existing agricultural land. The Proposed Action would help the Community to alleviate critical water shortages associated with continued and prolonged drought in the southwestern United States. The Secretary of the Interior has issued a Tier 2a shortage declaration on the Colorado River for 2023, reducing Central Arizona Project (CAP) deliveries in Central Arizona. With the possibility of future shortage declarations, Community growers could face critical water shortages.

Additional information is provided in the Final EA, which is incorporated by reference.

Public Involvement

Reclamation solicited input from the public on the proposed RWPP to assist in identifying key issues and defining the scope of the project and environmental analysis. Reclamation conducted scoping via email and traditional mail and a 15-day comment period was initiated on April 13, 2023 and closed on April 28, 2023. Within the 15-day scoping period, Reclamation received two comments.

Proposed Action

Reclamation's Federal action is to provide funding to the Community for the proposed RWPP, which would include the construction of approximately 19.2 miles of underground pipeline and two lift pump stations.

The proposed RWPP includes two phases: Phase I and Phase II. Phase I includes the construction of the Mesa Reclaimed Water Pipeline and Phase II is the construction of the Chandler Reclaimed Water Pipeline. In total, the RWPP would be capable of distributing approximately 45,100 af of reclaimed water to support 77,000 acres of land for agricultural production. Construction is anticipated to begin in July 2023 and last approximately 18 to 24 months. The major components of each phase are summarized below, and detailed descriptions of each phase are provided in the Final EA.

Phase I, Mesa Reclaimed Water Pipeline, Segment A

- Installation of approximately 2.5 miles of new 30-inch-, 42-inch-, and 48-inch-diameter pipeline
- Installation of the Spur Drop Pump Station with three vertical turbine pumps
- Installation of two Rubicon SlipMeter gates
- Coordination with the BIA to acquire a use right for approximately 63,883 square feet (1.46 acres) of Community trust land for crossing the East Maricopa Floodway (EMF)
- Directional drilling underneath the EMF

Phase I, Mesa Reclaimed Water Pipeline, Segment B

- Installation of approximately 8.1 miles of 48-inch-diameter pipeline
- Directional drilling under the following features: State Route (SR) 87 and Casa Blanca Inlet Structure
- Open cut the following road crossings: Saint Road, Sacaton Road, River Road, Olberg Road, Sacaton Flats Road, and Akimel Road

Phase II, Chandler Reclaimed Water Pipeline

- Installation of approximately 8.6 miles of 36-inch-diameter pipeline
- Installation of the Memorial Pump Station with two vertical turbine pumps
- Directional drilling underneath SR 587
- Open cut the following road crossings: Stotonic Road, Santan Road, Lower Santan Road, and Santan Day School Road

Summary of Impacts

Reclamation's analysis in the Final EA determined that there would be limited impacts resulting from the Proposed Action. The following issues were addressed in the Final EA and have been taken into consideration in Reclamation's determination of whether a Finding of No Significant Impact is appropriate, or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should be prepared.

- 1) Air Quality, Including Climate Change – Construction of the Proposed Action could result in potential effects to local and regional air quality from fugitive dust emissions and vehicle exhaust emissions. The effects of fugitive dust produced during construction of the

Proposed Action on air quality would be reduced with implementation of the Best Management Practices (BMPs) found in section 3.3.3 of the Final EA.

Construction of the Proposed Action could result in short-term, localized, and minor increases in vehicle emissions. Once construction is completed, operation of the Proposed Action is not expected to contribute to measurable or detectable impacts to air quality. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions generated during construction of the Proposed Action would be short-term, highly localized, and not substantial enough to cause a violation or exceedance of the existing National Ambient Air Quality Standards or GHG emission thresholds or cause a significant impact on air quality or worldwide climate change.

- 2) Water Resources (Floodplains, Surface Water, and Groundwater) – The Proposed Action would not result in impacts to floodplains, loss of or discharges of fill into wetlands or other Waters of the United States or impacts to groundwater quality or quantity.
- 3) Soils – The Proposed Action would be constructed primarily within existing rights-of-way (ROW) for irrigation canals associated with the Pima-Maricopa Irrigation Project (P-MIP) which are already heavily disturbed. Construction of the Proposed Action could result in minor, short-term impacts to soil resources along the construction ROW, in temporary work areas, and on existing access roads.
- 4) Biological Resources (Vegetation and Wildlife) – The Proposed Action would be constructed primarily within existing ROW for irrigation canals associated with the P-MIP which are already heavily disturbed. BMPs listed in Section 3.6.3 of the Final EA would be implemented during construction to minimize impacts on vegetation and prevent the spread of invasive plant species to off-site locations. Potential direct adverse impacts to general wildlife individuals from vegetation removal and noise and human presence would be short term, minor, and localized.
- 5) Indian Trust Assets – Construction of the Proposed Action would not result in the loss of the Community’s water rights to the Gila River or CAP water supplies.
- 6) Cultural Resources – The Proposed Action would result in ground disturbance from construction vehicles and equipment that could adversely affect several National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-Eligible or potentially NRHP-Eligible cultural resources that fall within the Area of Potential Effect. Therefore, the Community’s Cultural Resources Management Program would implement a Monitoring and Discovery Plan, which includes avoidance and monitoring measures to prevent adverse effects to cultural resources from the construction of the Proposed Action. Additionally, the strategies outlined in the Final EA Section 3.8.3 would be implemented to prevent adverse effects to cultural resources.

The following resource issues were evaluated and determined to either be not affected or minimally affected with implementation of BMPs and were therefore not analyzed in further detail in the EA:

visual resources, recreation, socioeconomics, noise, environmental justice, land use, hazardous materials, public health and safety, topography and geology, traffic and transportation. The resources eliminated and the rationale for elimination are presented in Table 3 of the Final EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon the analysis presented in the Final EA, Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is not warranted.