UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Residential Wastewater Collection System Expansion and Sanitary Sewer Main Replacement for the City of Holtville, California, United States

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 9 is considering authorizing the award of a Border Environment Infrastructure Fund (BEIF) grant to the City of Holtville, California, for the expansion of the City's residential wastewater collection system and for the replacement of the City sanitary sewer main. EPA Region 9's award of a grant for the proposed project is a federal action requiring compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 USC §§4321-4370f. In accordance with NEPA, Council of Environmental Quality Regulations at 40 CFR §§1500.1–1508.28, and EPA NEPA regulations at 40 CFR Part 6, EPA Region 9 has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) describing the potential environmental impacts associated with, and the alternatives to, the proposed project. This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documents EPA Region 9's decision that the proposed project will not have a significant effect on the environment.

Project Location and Description

The City of Holtville is located approximately 15 miles (24.1 km) north of the U.S./Mexico border and 12 miles (19.3 km) to the east of the City of El Centro. The proposed project is located within the northern portion of the City of Holtville, California and unincorporated areas of Imperial County located adjacent to the City.

The proposed project relocates the City's sanitary sewer outfall pipeline to a new alignment spanning southeasterly approximately 3.2 miles from the City of Holtville's Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) to the existing wastewater collection system. The pipeline would be expanded from the existing 15-inch and 18-inch diameter segments to a consistent pipe diameter of 18-inches. In addition, two 650 linear foot wastewater collection lines and associated laterals would be replaced and 23 parcels would be connected to the wastewater collection system.

Purpose and Need for Proposed Project

The purpose of the proposed project addresses the environmental and public health risks associated with the City's deficient residential wastewater collection system. In addition, the proposed project would connect 23 parcels to the City's wastewater collection system. Currently, 77 residents rely on substandard collection and septic systems.

Environmental Consequences

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), EPA has prepared an EA that analyzes the environmental impacts of the proposed action. After considering a wide range of regulatory, environmental (both natural and human) and socio-economic factors, the EA did not identify any significant impacts to the environment that would result from the implementation of the proposed project. However, mitigation measures were established in the EA for the proposed project and are enforceable under this FONSI. A copy of the mitigation measures is attached to this FONSI. After carefully considering the regulatory, environmental (both natural and human) and socio-economic factors as described in the EA, EPA Region 9 has not identified any significant impacts to the environment that would result from implementation of the proposed project.

Public Review

EPA made the EA and the unsigned FONSI available for public review at http://www.epa.gov/usmexicoborder/infrastructure/holtville and at the office of EPA Region 9 (75 Hawthorne Street, San Francisco, California, 94105-3901). Notice of the proposed project and the public comment period was published in the Imperial Valley Press. EPA did not receive any public comments on the EA or the unsigned FONSI prior to the close of the public comment period on December 21, 2010.

Finding

Based upon the information contained in the EA, and after an opportunity for public comment, EPA has determined the proposed project will not result in significant impacts to the environment and an environmental impact statement is not required. This FONSI is final upon signature. EPA will not recirculate this FONSI for public review, but will make it available to any individual upon request.

Alexis Strauss
Director, Water Division

19 January 2011
Date

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MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigation Measure 1: Threatened and Endangered Species

The Imperial Valley has a majority of the burrowing owl population found in Southern California. The burrowing owl is a California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) Species of Special Concern, a federal Species of Concern, and is listed on the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Irrigation canals and drains are commonly used by the burrowing owl as nesting sites within the project area and vicinity. A Biological Study conducted on June 1st, 3rd and 4th of 2010 identified three active burrows and one possible sheltering burrow on site or within the 250-foot area of influence of the project. Nests were observed in a tree at the corner of Kamm Road and SR-115. Disturbance within this area during the nesting season (February 1 – August 31) could result in an impact to burrowing owls or nesting birds within trees located within vicinity. If construction occurs outside of nesting season (September through January) impacts to nesting would likely be avoided. The Biological Study further determined that there are foraging fields suitable for mountain plover in or near the project which could potentially be impacted.

To reduce impacts to burrowing owls, their habitat, or other sensitive species in the project area and vicinity, the following mitigation measures shall be implemented before and during construction to mitigate the impacts to migratory birds and burrowing owls:

- If construction is planned between September 1 and January 31, a new burrowing owl survey will be required under CDFG guidelines (Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation 1995) within 30 days prior to construction activities. Surveys shall be phased or performed in segments such that no more than 30 days elapses between survey completion and commencement of construction along a given segment between September 1 and January 31.

- If an active burrow is in the zone of construction, it will be passively relocated, following guidelines found within CDFG guidelines (Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation 1995) with consultation with CDFG Bermuda Dunes office. Prior to relocation, two artificial burrows per active burrow to be closed will be installed in the vicinity of the WWTP. Active burrows found along Kamm Road will be sheltered in place to protect during construction.

- If construction is planned between the dates of February 1 through August 31, a nesting bird survey 7 days prior to construction is required to prevent violation of the MBTA and any nesting birds on site found will be protected with a 50 to 100 foot offset where

construction will not proceed until fledglings leave nest. Surveys shall be phased or performed in segments such that no more than 7 days elapses between survey completion and commencement of construction along a given segment between the dates of February 1 through August 31, If an active burrow is identified during a nesting bird survey, it wil not be disturbed during the nesting season (February 1 through August 31) unless a qualified biologist approved by CDFG verifies through non-invasive methods that either: (1) the birds have not begun egg-laying and incubation; or (2) that juveniles from the occupied burrows are foraging independently and are capable of independent survival.

- Burrowing owl and mountain plover worker training will be be given to construction workers prior to start of work by a qualified biologist, which would include the following information:
    - Species Distribution,
    - General bird behavior and ecology,
    - Sensitivity to human activities,
    - Legal protection,
    - Penalties for violations of State or Federal laws,
    - Reporting requirements,
    - Project protective mitigation measures, and
    - A wallet card containing pertinent information on the bird species potentially occurring on the project site will be given to each worker.
- Alfalfa and Bermuda fields shall be mapped prior to construction so that workers are aware of potential disturbance to mountain plover. If alfalfa or bermuda fields are present adjacent to construction, work will stop if mountain plover are forging in the area. Work can resume when foraging birds leave the area.
- Native mesquite trees should be avoided or relocated.
- Areas outside the project footprint will be designated as an "Environmentally Sensitive Area" (ESA) on project plans. No project-related activities shall take place there.

With implementation of these mitigation measures short-term construction-related impacts to burrowing owls, and other sensitive species would be reduced to less than significant.

Mitigation Measure 2: Water Resources

To ensure no impacts to an artesian well present at the project site, the following mitigation measure shall be implemented during project design:

- The exact location of the well will be determined by a topographic survey. All appropriate measures to protect the well will be required for implementation of the proposed action (City of Holtville 2010).

Mitigation Measure 3: Waste Management

The proposed construction activities under all project alternatives would be located within the vicinity of three former leaking underground fuel tank sites, which have been remediated and closed. However, there is the potential of disturbing these closed sites with construction activities. To ensure protection of human health and the environment, the following mitigation measure shall be implemented.

- To reduce potential human health risk exposure, available site closure documentation for the previous contamination sites in the vicinity of the project area shall be reviewed during final design. If the potential for human health and/or environmental risk exposure is identified, appropriate protective measures shall be implemented.

Once operational, no further ground disturbance would be required and no long-term impacts related to contamination sites would occur.