

Notice of Preparation

To: Agencies and Interested Parties

From: Friant Water Authority

Date: May 29, 2024

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Friant-Kern Canal Pump-Back Project

A Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is being prepared by the Friant Water Authority (FWA). FWA will be the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Lead Agency for the proposed project.

Purpose of the Notice of Preparation

The purpose of a Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to notify responsible and trustee agencies, Federal agencies involved in approving or funding a project, and interested parties that an EIR will be prepared. (State CEQA Guidelines, 14 CCR Section 15082[a][1] and 15083).

The location, description, and potential environmental impacts of the proposed project are presented below. The EIR will also identify potentially feasible mitigation measures, where appropriate and available, and describe and consider a reasonable range of alternatives to avoid or substantially reduce the proposed project's significant adverse environmental impacts.

The purposes of this NOP are to:

1. Notify the appropriate parties that an EIR will be prepared for the proposed project;
2. Briefly describe the proposed project and alternatives and the anticipated content of the EIR;
3. Provide notice of the public scoping meeting to be held to facilitate public input; and
4. Solicit input by June 27, 2024, from Federal, State, regional, and local agencies, and from interested organizations and individuals, about the content and scope of the EIR, including the alternatives to be addressed and the potentially significant environmental impacts.

Project Background

The San Joaquin River Restoration Program (SJRRP) was established in late 2006 to implement a Stipulation of Settlement in *Natural Resource Defense Council et al., v. Kirk Rodgers, et al.* (Settlement) which established two primary goals: Restoration Goal and Water Management Goal. To achieve the Restoration Goal, the Settlement calls for releases of water from Friant Dam to the confluence of the Merced River (referred to as Interim and Restoration Flows), a combination of channel and structural modifications along the San Joaquin River below Friant Dam, and reintroduction of Chinook salmon. To achieve the Water Management Goal, Paragraph 16 of the Settlement and Part III of the San Joaquin River Restoration Settlement Act (Settlement Act) provide for certain activities to be developed and implemented to reduce or avoid adverse water supply impacts on Friant Contractors (Section 10201 of the Settlement Act).

Section 10201 (a)(2) of the Settlement Act directs the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) to explore the feasibility of reverse flow pump-back facilities on the Friant-Kern Canal (FKC), with reverse flow capacity of approximately 500 cubic feet per second (cfs) at the Poso and Shafter check structures and approximately 300 cfs at the Woollomes check structure. Water supply and economic analyses were performed for this option in 2011 and show that much of the pump-back capacity described in this section of the Settlement Act would be unused owing to limited conveyance capacity, availability of recaptured restoration flows, demands, and downstream pump-back capacities.

In 2015, FWA proposed an alternative that would revise the proposed pumping capacities to 200 cfs at the Shafter Check Structure and 75 cfs at the Lake Woollomes and Deer Creek check structures and support access to water banks or other water supplies available via the Cross Valley Canal (e.g., Kern River, local Kern banking projects, California Aqueduct) during times of drought. This revision of the potential capacity of the pump-back facility would allow for its use to support the pump-back of recaptured and recirculated Restoration Flows, delivery of Cross Valley contractors' supplies, return of banked water, and the delivery of additional supplies purchased from the open market. FWA (in coordination with Reclamation) has continued to evaluate the potential benefits of increasing pumping capacities beyond those levels identified in 2015.

Proposed Project

Project Description

FWA seeks to facilitate the recirculation of recaptured Restoration Flows released from Millerton Lake for the SJRRP and other waters obtained by Friant Contractors to increase operational flexibility and long-term reliability of the water supplies conveyed through the FKC. FWA proposes to increase operational flexibility and long-term reliability by constructing three new permanent pump-back facilities along the FKC with a 500 cubic feet per second (cfs) facility at the Shafter-Wasco check structure, a 250 cfs facility at the Lake Woollomes check structure, and a 250 cfs facility at the Deer Creek check structure.

Project Location

The project location includes the FKC and related water infrastructure near the Shafter-Wasco, Lake Woollomes, and Deer Creek check structures (between Mileposts 101.3 to 101.6, 120.2 to 120.3, and 135.8 to 135.9, respectively) where construction impacts under the proposed project and alternatives could occur. (Figure 1). The project location also includes other Friant Contractors' facilities and related water conveyance infrastructure, including the Cross Valley Canal, Kern River, and California Aqueduct.

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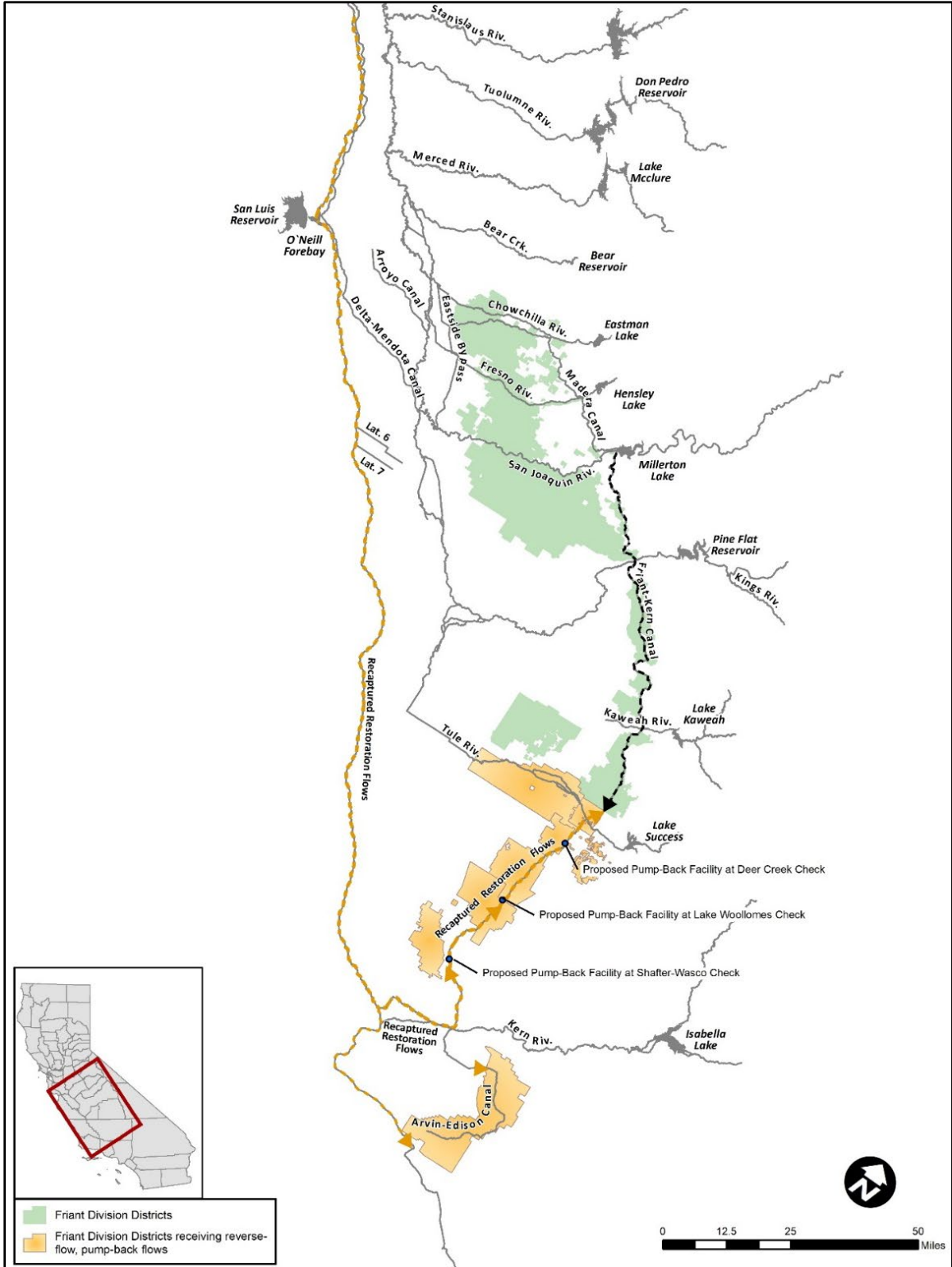


Figure 1. Project Location

Environmental Impacts

The EIR will describe the potentially significant direct and reasonably foreseeable indirect environmental impacts of the proposed project. The EIR will also evaluate the cumulative impacts of the proposed project when considered in conjunction with other related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. In addition to the proposed project, the EIR will also comparatively evaluate a low flow project alternative, which consists of constructing three new permanent pump-back facilities along the FKC with a 250 cfs facility at the Shafter-Wasco check structure, a 75 cfs facility at the Lake Woollomes check structure, and a 75 cfs facility at the Deer Creek check structure. A seasonal project alternative will also be evaluated, which would install and operate seasonal pump-back facilities at Shafter-Wasco check structure (up to a 200 cfs) and Lake Woollomes check structure (up to a 75 cfs), replacing the existing temporary pump-back facilities present at these two sites.

The EIR will include a detailed hydrologic analysis and will focus on the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project and alternatives, including:

- **Hydrology and Water Resources – Surface Water:** The exposure of bare soils, soil and material stockpiles, and the presence of fuels, lubricants, and solid and liquid wastes during construction could cause short-term water quality impacts. Soil disturbance could result in localized surface erosion, minor changes in drainage patterns and changes in erosion rates. Operation of the proposed project and alternatives could also result in changes to water quality in the FKC.
- **Hydrology and Water Resources - Groundwater:** Construction and operation could result in groundwater water quality impacts. Operation could result in changes to available groundwater supply.
- **Geology and Soils:** Construction could impact known or previously undiscovered paleontological resources or unique geologic features.
- **Air Quality:** Construction could cause temporary, short-term increases in emissions of criteria pollutants or their precursors.
- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** Construction could cause temporary, short-term increases in greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. Construction and operation could also conflict with an applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of GHGs.
- **Visual Resources:** Construction could create a new source of substantial light or glare, which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.
- **Noise:** Noise generated by construction could expose sensitive receptors to noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance. Construction could also cause an increase in ambient noise levels in the project vicinity above levels existing without the project.

- **Traffic and Transportation:** Traffic during construction could increase traffic hazards and result in inadequate emergency access.
- **Hazards and Hazardous Materials:** Construction could increase the risk of exposure from hazardous materials to the public and construction workers, interfere with an active remediation site, conflict with activities and operations at airports, interfere with an emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan, and increase the risk of wildfire within the vicinity of the project area.
- **Biological Resources:** Construction could affect special-status species, riparian habitat or other habitats, or sensitive natural communities, and Federally or State protected wetlands.
- **Recreation:** Construction and operation could reduce access to or close recreation areas.
- **Cultural Resources:** Construction could result in adverse effects to historic properties, and/or substantial adverse changes to historical resources, unique archaeological resources, or tribal cultural resources, or result in the disturbance of human remains.

These issue areas will be discussed, and potential impacts analyzed in the EIR, and potentially feasible mitigation measures and project alternatives will be explored to avoid or substantially reduce potentially significant impacts.

Opportunities for Public Participation

Scoping Meeting

A public scoping meeting will be held to inform interested parties about the proposed project and to solicit agency and public input on the scope and content of the EIR:

- June 12, 2024, 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

The public scoping meeting will be conducted virtually utilizing Microsoft Teams. If special assistance is required to participate in the public scoping meeting, please contact Katie Duncan (contact information is provided below) as far in advance as possible, and no less than five days in advance, to enable FWA to secure the needed services. If a request cannot be honored, the requestor will be notified.

Comments

This NOP is being circulated for a 30-day public comment period, beginning on May 29, 2024, and ending on June 27, 2024. Written comments on the proposed content and scope of the EIR can be submitted via mail or email directly to FWA. Comments must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on June 27, 2024. When submitting comments, agencies that will need to use the EIR when considering permits or other approvals for the proposed project should:

1. State if they are a responsible or trustee agency for the project, and if so, explain why, and note the specific project elements that are subject to their regulatory authority.

2. Identify any significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and mitigation measures they believe should be explored in the EIR.

3. Provide the name, email address, and phone number of a contact person.

Please send all written comments to Katie Duncan, Friant Water Authority, 854 N. Harvard Avenue, Lindsay, CA 93247; or e-mail at fkcpumpback@friantwater.org.

Before including your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, please be aware that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can request in your comment that your personal identifying information be withheld from public review, FWA cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

All comments received during the public comment period will be considered and addressed in the EIR as appropriate.