

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT, FONSI AND DECISION RECORD

**BLM, Bishop Field Office
351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100
Bishop, CA 93514**

EA Number: CA-170-07-42

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: CACA 046217 (Amendment)

Proposed Action Title/Type: Conway Ranch Water Pipeline

Location of Proposed Action: MDM, California, T. 2 N., R. 25 E.,
Section 1, NE1/4SE1/4SE1/4.

Applicant (if any): County of Mono

Plan Conformance: The proposed action is subject to the Bishop Resource Management Plan, approved March 25 1993. The proposed action has been reviewed and is in conformance with the plan.

Need for Proposed Action:

In 2000, Mono County purchased Conway Ranch for wildlife habitat preservation and open space. The purchase included water rights on Wilson Creek which are diverted into various channels providing water for Conway Ranch irrigation and a fish rearing operation which was in place at the time of acquisition. The fish operation raises large trout which are used to plant in a number of streams in the county. The fish rearing operation is conducted year-round and obtains water through a channel connected to Wilson Creek. See map at Target 2.

During winter months, the channel supplying fresh water to the fish operation will freeze and drastically reduce flows through the channel. This results in reduced water flows through the fish rearing operation and increased maintenance costs.

The county has proposed to install a subsurface bypass pipe alongside the channel. This pipe would not freeze and would allow fresh water to the fish operation during those months when the existing channel freezes. The pipe line will only be used during the winter months. The water is returned to the main channel for the remaining portions of the year. The County has the water rights for this water.

Description of Proposed Action:

The proposed action would be to bury 600 feet of pipe. The pipe would be 18" in diameter with associated air vents and would transport 15 cubic feet per second of

water during November through May each year. See Map at Target 2. Target 1 is the existing access road which would not be disturbed.

The pipe trench would be 600 feet long, 3 feet wide and 4 feet deep. The excavated trench would be parallel and adjacent to the existing channel. Excavation would be by backhoe and the dirt would be piled alongside the ditch and later returned for pipe burial. The excavation would take 10 days and would take place sometime between the end of July through September. Uprooted vegetation would be placed back on the trench after pipe burial is completed. Willows located within a 9 foot wide area along the pipeline trench would be removed or partially buried during pipe burial.

Affected Environment/ Impacts:

The proposed action is not within a Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, Area of Critical Environmental Concern, nor Wild and Scenic River corridor, and there would be no effects on any lands so designated.

Air quality would not be affected. The proposed action is within the Mono Basin federal nonattainment area. The action would not result in the emission of PM₁₀. The excavation would be within the water channel wetting zone. The dirt excavated would be moist and would not result in PM₁₀ emission due to the moist condition of the excavated dirt.

There would be no impact to listed species. There are no known listed species or habitats within the proposed action area.

There would be no impacts to prime farm lands, flood plains, nor water quality (including ground or surface waters).

There would be no disproportionate impacts to low income or minority groups, per Executive Order 12898 (2/11/94).

Cultural resources

There would be no impact to cultural resources. A cultural inventory was conducted in November 2006. No cultural resources were located, but any subsurface artifacts discovered during excavation would negatively impact cultural resources at that location.

Visual resources

The proposed action area has a VRM Class II rating. The proposed pipe location is within the proximity of Hwy 395 to the west and Hwy 167 to the south. Both of these highways would be key observation points where casual observers may be most likely to view the proposed action area. The proposed action area is a quarter of a mile from Hwy 395 and a half mile from Hwy 167.

Due to the distance from both highways, the subsurface location, and the location of the trench along a willow edged water channel, the proposed action disturbance would not be seen from either highway. The action meets VRM Class II rating.

Vegetation

The proposed action would be along a willow covered water channel with a mature stand of willows. The channel has over a half mile length of riparian vegetation consisting mainly of salix (willows), carex, and juncus species. The edge of the channel is dominated with sage brush and perennial grasses. It is expected that vegetation along the trench excavation would be uprooted or covered with dirt for a 10 day period. All vegetation would be returned to the excavation area after pipe burial. Willows located on the edge of the channel and within a 9 foot wide area along the pipeline trench would be removed, damaged, or partially buried during pipe burial.

It is expected that that there would be no net loss of riparian, the impacts to the willow stand would be temporary. Within a month, new willow shoots would be growing where willow were damaged or buried. Some perennial grasses would be restored upon project completion as dirt and remnant plant root crowns are returned to the trench. Natural vegetation re-establishment would be completed within 3-5 years.

Invasive, non-native species

The proposed action area does not have any invasive or non-native species in the plant communities. Invasive plant establishment is possible from dirt or weed seeds being carried to the site on equipment or trucks.

Wildlife / Sensitive Species

The proposed action area is spring and fall mule deer habitat and a migration corridor. There may be some resident mule deer using the area. Due to the timing of the project there would be no impact to these use areas. There would be temporary displacement of any resident mule deer during construction.

The area also is sage grouse nesting habitat which is protected during April through July 1 (Bishop RMP, Pg 17). The sage grouse is a California BLM sensitive species. It is BLM policy under Manual Section 6840.06 (E) to provide sensitive species with the same level of protection prescribed for candidate species. BLM Manual Section 6840.06 (C) defines that level of protection as "the BLM shall carry out management consistent with the principles of multiple use ... and ensure that actions authorized, funded, or carried out do not contribute to the need to list any of these species as threatened or endangered".

Sage Grouse are also known to regularly utilize the habitat along the Wilson Creek drainage and the adjacent meadow year-round. Groups of sage grouse are regularly

encountered on the public and county lands with up to 30+ grouse observed at one time (Pelachowski, personal communication). The construction activity would be outside of the grouse nesting time period. The activity involved with pipe installation would temporarily displace sage grouse up to approximately one quarter mile in a 360 degree direction for the 10 day work period. Sage Grouse would reoccupy the area after work completion. There would be no impact to sage grouse nesting habitat.

The area also provides habitat for various avian species for nesting during spring and early summer. There should be no nesting disturbance if the project begins in the end of July. There would be temporary displacement of any avian species utilizing the specific area where the 10 day construction takes place.

The area provides habitat for various mammals which forage in the area and species which establish burrows. These species would be temporarily displaced during construction. Some burrows may be lost.

Minerals

There would be no impact to minerals. There are no known mining claims, mineral leases, or mineral material of value in the area.

Economic Impacts

Viability of the Proposed Development

Mono County's primary economic foundation is outdoor recreation related tourism. The proposed pipe line would allow adequate water flows to the fish rearing operation during winter freezing periods. This would allow fish stocks to prosper during these periods, continuing to support Mono County's tourism infrastructure.

Environmental Justice

There would be no impact to minority groups or any other group where environmental justice would apply. There is no group that relies on or uses the area for economic reasons or special uses.

Hazardous Materials

There would be no impact to hazmat. The project does not have any hazmat associated with it.

Consistency with County Planning

The proposed pipe line is part of the long-term management of the Conway Ranch.

Impacts to County Infrastructure

The impacts to county infrastructure would be limited to the improvement of the fish rearing operation due to the improved water flows during winter freezing periods. The fish operation is supported by the county due to the associated fish rearing and subsequent fish planting in streams located within the county. This fish planting enhances the fishing resources and recreation in the county.

Impacts to Local Community

See the above County infrastructure.

Adherence to Local, State and Federal Environmental Ordinances / Laws

The county has the water rights associated with the proposed action. There would be no impact to local state and federal ordinances or laws

Land Uses / Realty / Rights-of-way

The county has the water rights for the project and the water channel associated with the project is considered a Ditches and Canal Act ROW held by the County.

Cumulative effects

Cumulative effects of the proposed action are largely confined to the Mono County area where the east-central Sierra is a popular and heavily visited fishing destination. Past and present actions are largely consistent with fish rearing along the east slope of the Sierra where other operations routinely provide fish (i.e. Alpers Trout, etc) for mountain stream stocking. In the foreseeable future, it is expected the region would continue to play a major role in continuing to provide outdoor recreation opportunities and associated infrastructural needs, like the fish rearing operation, which is consistent with past and present operations.

This project is expected to contribute to cumulative effects because the nature of this proposal and its impacts are such that it would benefit the economy and improve county operational efficiency. This project does not have significant negative or positive impacts upon the human environment.

Description of Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts:

1. Wash all trucks and equipment to remove any dirt or weed seeds prior to entering public land.
2. Apply standard ROW cultural mitigation to the construction project.

Implementation Monitoring:

Not required.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/DECISION RECORD

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation measures described below will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required.

There will be no effect on threatened or endangered species as a result of the action.

I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the Bishop Resource Management Plan, which was approved March 25, 1993. This plan has been reviewed, and the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

It is my decision to amend the existing ROW CACA 046217 issued to Mono County and allow for the installation (600') of a buried water pipe line. The project would be implemented with the mitigation measures identified below.

Some riparian willow vegetation will be removed during the pipe installation. It is expected that the mature willow stand and nearby water channel will result in prolific willow sprouting. There will be no net loss of riparian vegetation. There will no impact to avian species nesting habitat due to the construction activity since the majority of nesting season has already taken place. Some displacement of avian species and sage grouse might occur during construction.

It is in the public interest to allow Mono County to install the by-pass pipe line. The pipe will provide uninterrupted water flows to the fish rearing operation during the winter months. The increased water flows will enhance the operation and increase fish growth during the winter. The fish production, which is used to plant streams in Mono County, is an asset to the overall county recreation opportunities within the Eastern Sierra area.

Mitigation Measures/Remarks:

1. Wash all trucks and equipment to remove any dirt or weed seeds prior to entering public land.
2. Apply standard ROW cultural mitigation to the construction project.

Authorized Official: _____
Field Manager, Bishop Field Office

Date: _____