

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Environmental Assessment

**Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District Water
Delivery Contract Amendment - Yuma Area Office
Lower Colorado River Region**



**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Yuma Area Office
Yuma, Arizona**

January 2008

Mission Statements

The mission of the Department of the Interior is to protect and provide access to our Nation's natural and cultural heritage and honor our trust responsibilities to Indian Tribes and our commitments to island communities.

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.

Environmental Assessment

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Delivery Contract Amendment – Yuma Area Office
Lower Colorado River Region**

prepared by

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**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Yuma Area Office
Yuma, Arizona**

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1.0 Introduction

Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District (District) is located in Southwestern Arizona, along the Gila River within the Wellton-Mohawk Valley. The valley begins eight miles east of the confluence of the Gila and Colorado rivers and extends eastward approximately 47 miles. Comprised of about 260,000 acres, the valley is bounded by Yuma Proving Ground to the north and Barry M. Goldwater Range to the south.

The District is a political subdivision approximately 45 miles long with a maximum width of 7 miles. The District’s water delivery contract, with the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), provides an annual entitlement of Colorado River water of up to 278,000 acre-feet of Consumptive Use (*Consumptive Use is defined as the difference between the amounts diverted from and returned to the Colorado River*). Of the 130,000 acres of private, state, federal, and District-owned lands more than 62,000 acres are classified irrigable and receive a majority of the annual entitlement. Within the overall entitlement of 278,000 acre-feet, up to 5,000 acre-feet/year may be used for domestic (or municipal and industrial) purposes within the District boundaries.

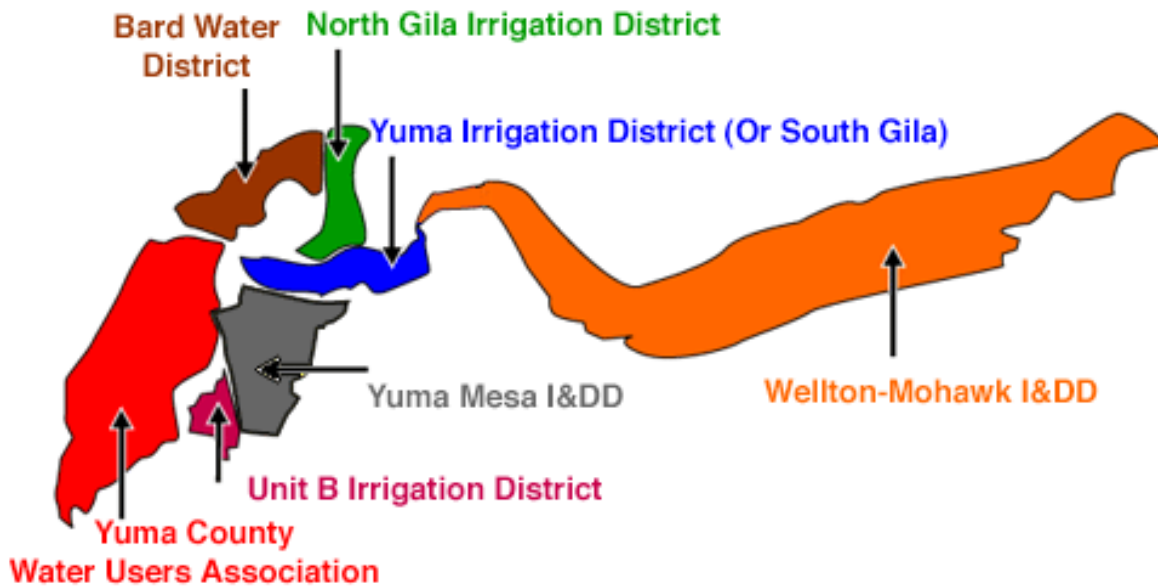


Figure 1. Irrigation districts

1.1 Background

The District receives Colorado River water by diversion through the Gila Headworks at Imperial Dam into the Gila Gravity Main Canal at the western end of the District. From this point, water is carried approximately 18.5 miles eastward and parallel to the Gila River through the Wellton-Mohawk Canal, from which it is diverted into the Dome, Wellton, and Mohawk canals. From these three canals, the water is released to distribution laterals and disseminated to farms and other water users.

1.2 Purpose of the Proposed Action

The purpose for the Proposed Action is to provide an adequate supply of water for current and future municipal and industrial development within the District boundaries.

1.3 Need for the Proposed Action

Current domestic water allocations need to be augmented due to increased development within the District boundaries. The Proposed Action will enable the District to have municipal & industrial water available to meet the water demands associated with the increased rate of residential, commercial, and industrial growth that is occurring, and projected to occur within its boundaries.

2.0 Description of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

The Proposed Action is to increase the District's water allocation for domestic use while remaining within the District's annual Colorado River water entitlement of 278,000 acre-feet of consumptive use.

2.1 No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative is to continue the District's current contract authority to deliver 5,000 acre-feet per year of water for domestic use. There will be no changes to the existing water delivery contract or the District's annual entitlement for consumptive use.

2.2 Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

The Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative is for Reclamation to amend the water delivery contract with the District to authorize delivery of 12,000 acre-feet per year of its annual Colorado

River water entitlement for domestic use. This amendment will increase the current annual allocation of 5,000 acre-feet by converting 7,000 acre-feet of irrigation water for domestic use.

The District has acquired over 2000 acres, within its boundaries, to offset the change in use of water from irrigation to domestic. The land acquired includes farmland either damaged or isolated by the 1993 flood, and abandoned citrus orchards planned for development and incorporation into the Town of Wellton. Water that would have been available to irrigate these lands will be the source for the increase in domestic water use. The District has submitted formal letter(s) to Reclamation requesting the change in allocation of water domestic use.

2.3 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

Reclamation did not identify any other reasonable alternatives that met the purpose and need for the project.

3.0 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Commitments

Reclamation evaluated the resource elements listed below in relation to the Proposed Action to determine the potential for both adverse and beneficial effects.

Table 1. Evaluated Resources

Resource Element	Affected	Resource Element	Affected
Land Use	Yes	Indian Sacred Sites	No
Farmlands, Prime/Unique	Yes	Indian Trust Assets	No
Cultural/Historical Resources	Yes	T&E Species	No
Socioeconomics	Yes	Wetlands/Riparian Zones	No
Floodplains	No	Environmental Justice	No
Water Quality	No	Hazardous Materials	No
Wild & Scenic Rivers	No	Air Quality	No

Due to the geographic scope of this project, the resource elements likely to be affected by the Proposed Action are Land Use, Prime and Unique Farmlands, Cultural and Historical Resources, and Socioeconomics. The remaining resource elements are not included in the following sections, as no affect is likely to occur as the result of Reclamation's Proposed Action. Further information on the affected environment is provided in the *Wellton-Mohawk Title Transfer Environmental Impact Statement* (Wellton-Mohawk Title Transfer, 2006).

3.1 Land Use

With the exception of the Town of Wellton the District is rural and land use is predominantly agriculture and cattle ranching. The terrain consists of the valley, where most of the agriculture occurs, and the desert mesa land, where existing development has occurred. Land owners include private, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, State of Arizona, the District and Reclamation. For further details on land use and planning in the area refer to the Yuma County 2010 Comprehensive Plan.

3.1.1 No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative to continue the contract authority to deliver 5,000 acre-feet per year of water for domestic use will limit land development. Additional ground-water wells may be drilled as a result of the No Action Alternative.

3.1.2 Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

The Proposed Action to increase the domestic water use to 12,000 acre-feet will sustain planned development within the District boundaries. However, more urbanization may lead to unplanned development and/or further requests for water delivery contract amendments (see sections 4.1 and 4.2 of this environmental assessment). Currently, land plans such as the Yuma County 2010 Comprehensive Plan support “Extensions of the necessary infrastructure...from the Town of Wellton and/or the Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation & Drainage District” (Yuma County DDS, 2001).

3.2 Farmlands, Prime and/or Unique

Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses. (7 CFR 657.5a) The District is characterized by prime and unique farmlands.

3.2.1 No Action Alternative

Implementation of the No Action Alternative would not impact prime and unique farmlands.

3.2.2 Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

Implementation of the Proposed Action would not directly impact prime and unique farmlands due to the fact that the acreage acquired by the District to offset the change in water usage includes damaged or isolated farmland and abandoned citrus orchards. However, indirect impacts (see section 4.1) and cumulative impacts (see section 4.2) to prime and unique farmlands could occur from implementation of the Proposed Action.

3.3 Cultural & Historical Resources

The *Wellton-Mohawk Title Transfer Environmental Impact Statement* describes cultural resources surveys in the District area. Surveys indicate that there are 19 National Register of Historic Places eligible sites in the vicinity (Wellton-Mohawk Title Transfer, 2006).

No Action Alternative

Implementation of the No Action Alternative would not impact cultural and historical resources.

Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

Due to the administrative nature of the Proposed Action there is limited potential for direct impact to cultural & historical resources. Direct impact would occur to cultural resources if the lands acquired to offset the change in water use contain historic properties. Implementation of the Proposed Action could have indirect and/or cumulative impacts to cultural resources. Prior to any land development the District should conduct site-specific surveys and consultations to identify any cultural resources that may be affected.

3.4 Socioeconomics

The District is located in Yuma County, Arizona. The U.S. Census Bureau 2006 population estimates are described in Table 1 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007).

Table 2. 2006 Population Estimates

	2006 Population Estimates
Yuma County	187,555
City of Yuma	87,423
City of San Luis	22,634
City of Somerton	10,806
City of Wellton	1,891
Tacna	555

Other communities include: Citrus City, Dome Valley, Antelope Hills, Wellton Hills, Ligurta, and Pratt Acres (Yuma County DDS, 2001). Principal industries in Wellton and the Yuma County area include agriculture, retail trade, tourism, military and government; with agriculture and agriculture support services being the main economic industry.

No Action Alternative

Implementation of the No Action Alternative would prevent socioeconomic growth within the District.

Proposed Action/Preferred Alternative

The Proposed Action will support community growth by encouraging municipal and industrial development. However, there may be indirect impacts to agricultural lands if additional domestic water allocations are requested to augment expansion.

4.0 Other Effects

4.1 Indirect Effects

Direct effects are caused by the action and occur at the same time and place; indirect effects are caused by the action and are later time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable.

Indirect impacts to land use, prime and unique farmlands, cultural and historical resources, and socioeconomics may occur from implementation of the Proposed Action. Amending the water delivery contract to increase domestic water use will bring about residential, commercial, and industrial developments that would not be constructed without this source of water. Further, the initiation of development will likely result in additional requests to amend the water delivery contract for increased domestic use. Without planning, the cycle of increasing domestic water use, re-designating agricultural (irrigable) lands to offset water use, and uncontrolled development could have considerable impacts to the natural and human environment.

4.2 Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impact is defined as “the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonable foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.” 40 CFR § 1508.7.

Development of municipal and industrial facilities will increase the workforce in the area. Homes, schools, and supply and service oriented infrastructure will need to be constructed to support the workforce. Utilities will also need to be adapted to meet requirements of the community. These actions combined with the Proposed Action to amend the water delivery contract to increase domestic use will cumulatively impact the natural and human environment. Development pressure is a major threat to prime and unique farmlands, land use designations will be altered, and cultural and historical resources will be impacted. Both the local and surrounding economy and population will be impacted.

4.3 Irreversible and Irretrievable Resource Commitments

Irreversible commitments of resources occur as a result of the use or destruction of a specific resource which cannot be replaced or restored. Irretrievable commitments of resources refer to actions resulting in the loss of production or use of natural resources. Amending the water delivery contract to increase domestic use will not cause any direct physical impacts to existing resources. Implementing the Proposed Action will not result in irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

5.0 Resources and References

Title 7, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 657a, *Prime and Unique Farmlands*. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register national Archives and Records Administration.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2007. *Population Finder*. Retrieved August 1, 2007 from <http://factfinder.census.gov/>

Wellton-Mohawk Title Transfer. 2006. Final Environmental Impact Statement: *Transfer of Title to Facilities, Works, and Lands of the Gila Project, Wellton-Mohawk Division to Wellton-Mohawk Irrigation and Drainage District, Yuma County, Arizona*. Prepared for the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Lower Colorado Regional Office, Boulder City, Nevada, December 2006.

Yuma County Department of Development Services (DDS). 2001. *Yuma County 2010 Comprehensive Plan*. Retrieved July 24, 2007 from <http://www.co.yuma.az.us/dds/plans.htm>